



Big Brother is Watching You: Panoptic Control in George Or- well's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Storebror ser Dig: Panoptic kontroll i George Orwells 1984.

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English III

15 hp

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3 February 2015

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Abstract

George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, first published in 1949, is a vision of socialism gone wrong. The setting of Oceania is a world ruled over by an oligarchical collective, "The Party," which wields absolute power through a formidable combination of surveillance technology and the operation of the principles of "panoptic control," a concept drawn from Jeremy Bentham's model prison design of the late 1700s and revived by Foucault in the mid 1970s. The combination of surveillance technology and panoptic control is central to the functioning of power in Orwell's novel, a union which has created a self-sustaining form of totalitarianism dependent on the oppression of individual identity for its automatic perpetuation. This essay offers a reading of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as an implicit critique of Bentham's Panopticon which in many ways foreshadowed the later work of Michel Foucault on the functioning of power within this specific type of physical and social architecture.

Key words: George Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four, Jeremy Bentham, Michel Foucault, panopticon, panoptic control, panopticism

Sammanfattning

George Orwells roman *1984*, vilken publicerades första gången 1949, är en framtidsvision om socialism som gått fel. Romanen utspelas i Oceania, en värld som styrs av ett oligarkiskt kollektiv, "Partiet," vilket utövar absolut makt genom en utstuderad kombination av övervakningsteknik och teorin om "panoptisk" kontroll, ett begrepp sprunget ur av Jeremy Benthams fängelsemodell från sent 1700-tal, vilket återskapades av Michel Foucault i mitten av 1970-talet. Kombinationen av övervakningsteknologi och panopticism har i Oceanien skapat en totalitarism som fungerar med automatik och förtrycker individuell identitet för att befästa statens makt. Denna uppsats närmar sig Orwells *1984* som en underförstådd kritik av Benthams arbete. Vidare identifier i romanen *1984* många av Foucault's idéer om hur makt fungerar i en panoptisk struktur.

Nyckelord: George Orwell, 1984, Jeremy Bentham, Michel Foucault, panoptisk kontroll

George Orwell's futuristic dystopia, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, published in 1949, is a vision of socialism gone wrong: a world tyrannised by an oligarchical collective, "The Party," which wields absolute power through a potent marriage of surveillance technology and the operation of the principles of panoptic control. Panoptic control is a concept drawn from Jeremy Bentham's model prison design of the late 1700s, which sought to control inmates' behaviour on the basis of their belief that they were under constant observation. As a result, inmates would act in accordance with established rules to avoid punishment. In the 1970s, Michel Foucault revived interest in Bentham's designs through an analysis of the functioning of power relationships within this "panoptic" architecture (Foucault 195-228). The coupling of technology and panoptic control is central to the functioning of power in the setting of Oceania: it is a union which has created a self-sustaining, self-perpetuating totalitarianism dependent upon the oppression of individual identity for its automatic operation. When viewed through this lens, Orwell's fictional setting of Oceania can be seen as an entire society organised in accordance with the panoptic model and whose inhabitants, the novel's characters, are, by virtue of the "architecture" of the setting, enmeshed in the power relationships specifically generated by panopticism. These power relationships have serious implications for the characters' individual thought and sovereignty, which are limited by the intrusiveness of Oceania's policing apparatus into their everyday lives.

Through an examination of the central role of panoptic control in the totalitarianism of Big Brother, this essay seeks to show that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* can be read as an implicit critique of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, foreshadowing the work of Foucault by a quarter of a century. In doing so, this essay will take Foucault's analysis of the functioning of power relationships within the panoptic structure and identify their operation in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to demonstrate the way in which panoptic control works in the novel to secure The Party's ultimate aim: the obliteration of individual sovereignty so as to bring about the automatic functioning of the Party's power and its dominance in perpetuity. But firstly, it is necessary to describe Bentham's Panopticon and the key features of its design which are present in the novel.

Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) was a British philosopher, legal scholar and social reformer who is sometimes referred to as the founder of modern utilitarianism. At the heart of utilitarianism was the belief that human behaviour is governed by the natural inclination to avoid pain and gravitate toward pleasure (Webb 124). In line with this principle, Bentham designed a model prison in the late 1700s called the Panopticon. The design was such that a guard or guards situated in a tower at the centre of a circular prison structure could see into each and every cell and observe any prisoner at any time. The guards were aided by mirrors and could hear through tubes which functioned as listening devices. The prisoners, however, could not know if they were being observed at any given moment. Given the inevitability of punishment if they did not behave appropriately, along with the assumption that human beings will avoid pain, this architectural design was thought to be capable of producing maximum obedience with minimal manpower (Strub 40). Key to Bentham's design was the *possibility* of constant surveillance, which was rendered possible by design of a central tower from which the guards could see out, but into which the prisoners could not see in. This meant that the prisoners had no way of knowing if they were being

watched at any particular moment, so in order to avoid any possible punishment would have to assume they were being watched at all times. A further feature of the Panopticon was “hierarchical surveillance,” to enable the prison’s guards to in turn be subjected to surveillance by inspectors. Bentham also planned to implement the design in the construction of poor houses to improve worker efficiency, and thought it potentially beneficial for the operation of other institutions such as schools and hospitals.

Whilst Bentham’s Panopticon was never commissioned in his time, his designs have been adopted and modified in some examples of twentieth-century prison architecture. Whilst there is considerable conjecture concerning the personal economic gains Bentham may have realised had such buildings been constructed in his time, there is also considerable agreement that Bentham believed that his designs would improve the functioning of the institutions in which they were used as well as improve the conditions of the buildings’ inmates, patients or students, depending upon the particular establishment. Rather than being an effective mechanism for the abuse of power by the state, the ability to ‘inspect the inspectors’ via the central tower (hierarchical observation) served to make their operation highly transparent. In theory, any public official, or member of the public for that matter, could observe the inspectors to ensure that the institution concerned was operating in accordance with the laws and procedural regulations of the day. Thus the Panopticon, in its best light, could be viewed as a model capable of ensuring transparency in institutions previously shrouded in mystery.

In *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison* (1975), Michel Foucault takes the concept of the Panopticon and analyses the nature of the power relationships among those existing within it, that is those who are watching and those who are being observed. He describes the Panopticon as “a machine for dissociating the seeing/being seen dyad: in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen” (202). It is this mechanism, he argues, which is particularly important because it “automatizes and disindividualizes power” (202). That is, power is not vested in a particular person, rather, it is the architecture of the Panopticon which brings about the power relationships between those who are being watched and those who are not seen, but observing. Thus the power relationships are systematised, set up to function automatically. For Bentham the Panopticon was an ideal building, a self-contained structure which could induce ideal behaviour and improve conditions for inmates and inspectors alike. Foucault, on the other hand, contends that:

[T]he Panopticon must not be viewed as an ideal building: it is the diagram of a mechanism of power reduced to its ideal form; its functioning, abstracted from any obstacle, resistance or friction, must be represented as pure architectural and optical system: it is in fact a figure of political technology that may and must be detached from any specific use (205).

Unlike Bentham, Foucault saw the Panopticon not as a “utopia,” “closed in on itself,” but as a “generalizable model of functioning” (205). Foucault is advocating here that one forget for a moment the specific use one might have for such a building (one could quite easily argue the benefits a panoptic design might provide in observing hospital patients in an understaffed ward) and instead focus on how its structure engenders power relationships. Moreover, the types of power

relationships functioning within the structure of a Panopticon can be seen functioning more generally in society (205). In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, such power relationships are not only seen to function, but Orwell seems to have created a fictional prototype of a panoptic society.

Discussion of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* with respect to its application of the principles of panopticism as expounded by Foucault has been ongoing since the publication of *Discipline and Punish* in 1975. Interestingly, although Foucault does not specifically refer to Orwell's literary work and Orwell does not refer to Bentham's prison design, they both critique the operation of panopticism along similar lines. Contributors to the discussion around Orwell and panopticism include Harry Strub, David Lyon, Kevin D. Haggerty and Richard V. Ericson. Harry Strub argues that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a "systematic realisation" of panoptic control which suggests more draconian intentions behind Jeremy Bentham's plans, despite his Utilitarianism (40). David Lyon highlights the panoptic aspects of control in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* including its combination of "transparency" and "imperceptibility" — the citizens of Oceania are aware that they *might* be observed at any time and therefore cannot "relax," a method of surveillance which "keeps those watched subordinate by means of uncertainty" (60). Haggerty and Ericson affirm the "prescience" of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, but take the discussion away from the literary focus of this essay into the more fluid and *ad hoc* "surveillance society" of the present day and examine the need to update the concept of panopticism along the lines of Gilles Deleuze's concept of the "surveillant assemblage." The focus here is instead upon the key aspects of panoptic control in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as identified by Strub and how they function in the novel, including: the specific nature of panoptic inspection; the certainty that punishment will be issued if rules are broken; the covert nature of observation; the god-like, "visible omnipresence" of the observer; and the hierarchical organisation of surveillance (42-43). This essay will now deal with these key aspects in detail, and how they function in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

One of the most important aspects of panopticism deals with *how* inspection is carried out in a Panopticon, which demands that it be both "visible" and "unverifiable" (Foucault 201). Like the central tower of the Panopticon, the buildings of INGSOC, "The Party" which rules the fictitious state of Oceania, loom large over the inhabitants of London. The Ministry of Truth, where our protagonist Winston Smith works to amend historical records in line with INGSOC's latest dictates, "towered vast and white above the grimy landscape," (8) reminding the citizens of the Party's authority. Also known as "Minitrue" the building "was startlingly different from any other object in sight. It was an enormous pyramidal structure of glittering white concrete, soaring up, terrace after terrace, 300 metres up into the air" (9). Winston is intimidated by its physicality: "His heart quailed before the enormous pyramidal shape. It was too strong, it could not be stormed" (27-28). The Ministry of Love, responsible for "law and order" (9) is an even more ominous structure:

It was a place impossible to enter except on official business, and then only by penetrating through a maze of barbed-wire entanglements, steel doors, and hidden machine-gun nests. Even the streets leading up to its outer barriers were roamed by gorilla-faced guards in black uniforms, armed with jointed truncheons (9-10).

These buildings, like the central tower of the Panopticon, form the *loci* of power in Oceania. Their architecture impresses upon those in their shadow the might of the state which observes them and punishes them should they contravene its maze of behavioural codes and expectations. They are the “central tower,” multiplied throughout the city, which “sees everything without ever being seen” (Foucault 202).

The Ministry buildings are visible and obvious, reminding the inhabitants of the Party as observer. Even more obvious are the ever-present, highly visible “telescreens,” placed in homes, shops and workplaces to simultaneously deliver state propaganda and monitor the behaviour of Oceania’s citizens. “Whichever way you turned, the telescreen faced you” (99). In line with ‘panoptic principles,’ their use as mechanisms of surveillance is visible, yet unverifiable, as it is impossible to know if you are being watched at any particular moment. A reprimand from the calisthenics leader through the telescreen during a routine morning session only serves to reinforce in Winston’s mind the assumption that he is being watched, or may be being watched, at all times (36). Another visible form of surveillance is via the helicopters of the “police patrol,” which routinely peer into people’s windows (8). Through third person narration we are made aware of Winston’s concerns about being watched, and that he is very much aware he is being watched but is never sure precisely where or when:

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. But at any rate they could plug in your wire whenever they wanted to. You had to live - did live, from habit that became instinct - in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard, and, except in darkness, every movement scrutinized (8).

Thus the surveillance in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* meets the preconditions of “panoptic inspection” as articulated by Foucault: it is both visible and unverifiable. It is not known if Orwell was aware of Bentham’s Panopticon when crafting the setting of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, but his model for society “epitomised the metaphor of society as a prison” (Strub 41). Irrespective of Orwell’s intentions, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* provides a model of panoptic inspection beyond the institutional level to one which permeates a whole society.

The visible yet unverifiable nature of panoptic inspection directly affects the character Winston and his individual sovereignty. Not only is his freedom of movement and physical behaviour curtailed by the knowledge that he is being observed and judged but he also attempts to control his thoughts, for fear that some unorthodox thought might reveal itself in a gesture or mannerism:

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. In any case, to wear an improper expression on your face (to look incredulous when a victory was announced, for example) was itself a punishable offence. There was even a word for it in Newspeak: *facecrime*, it was called (57).

The belief that he needs to assume he is under observation at all times causes Winston to restrict his own behaviours to those he believes are acceptable to the Party. The visibility of surveillance serves as a constant reminder to Winston that he may be being watched, and its unverifiable nature ensures that he assumes he is being watched continually. This reinforces the notion that he is not free to speak or act as he chooses, but must modify his own behaviour to fit the acceptable modes of behaviour as prescribed by the Party in its telescreen broadcast propaganda. In the world which Orwell has created there is no respite from surveillance. The “torture of observation” is often found in tragedy, especially when a character is experiencing punishment of a public nature (Sköldberg 220). In the Greek tragedy *Prometheus Bound*, Prometheus says “*derkou theama*” to Oceanus during his public punishment, meaning “behold the spectacle” (Rehm 297). Panoptic observation thereby facilitates this theme of *derkou theama* in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*; whereby the individual is humiliated into submission through constant surveillance by “a hostile eye” (Frye 238). In Foucauldian terms, Winston is “disciplined” by the mechanisms of panoptic control which “coerce” him through observation (201):

He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes a 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 202-203).

The very architecture of the unseen observer and observed places Winston’s character into a power relationship with his observers which functions automatically: he starts to behave in accordance with the Party’s will without the observer even needing to be present.

The metering out of punishment for a misdemeanour was an important feature of Bentham’s Panopticon to control prisoners’ behaviour (Strub 42). Punishment is a certain consequence of even the slightest infringement against the Party ruling over Oceania. Punishments in the regime include being “vaporized” and having all records of one’s existence struck from the record books (40), public hangings (24), forced labour camps (11), purges, public trials, executions (43) and torture involving “grovelling on the floor for mercy, the crack of broken bones, the smashed teeth, and bloody clots of hair” (91). Coupled with the certainty of punishment for Oceania’s transgressors is the uncertainty over the specifics of which “offences” are in fact punishable. This is a potent combination (the certainty of punishment and the uncertainty of what constitutes an offence) which not only gives the regime broad flexibility to interpret people’s actions as subversive, but also causes anxiety and stress in its subjects who are therefore required to ‘second guess’ whether their behaviour could indeed be construed as subversive. For example, Winston considers the action of writing in a diary when he believes he is out of reach of the telescreen: “This was not illegal (nothing was illegal, since there were no longer any laws), but if detected it was reasonably certain that it would be punished by death, or at least by twenty-five years in a forced-labour camp” (11). In a situation reminiscent of Kafka’s *The Trial*, Winston is convinced he will ultimately be tortured by the Thought Police, although he has not as yet been accused of any crime.

In Oceania it is not just a simple matter of avoiding prohibited behaviours and performing sanctioned ones in accordance with utilitarian principles of simultaneous pleasure seeking and pain

avoidance. Here there is a deliberate lack of clarity on the part of the rulers-observers-judges-punishers as to which behaviours are in fact allowed or banned. Whereas Bentham's Panopticon, designed in the utilitarian spirit, relied on fairly clear prescriptions of 'good' and 'bad' behaviour, Orwell's panoptic society has instead the basic underlying philosophy that anything said or done in the interests of the Party is good and anything not explicitly so is cast into the opposite realm of bad or evil. Things considered "beautiful," but apparently "useless," such as the coral paperweight, are regarded with caution, as "vaguely suspect" (85-86). Thus insecurity, uncertainty and internal stress are placed upon the citizens of Oceania who are not only sure of the inevitability of punishment if caught, but are faced with having to divine for themselves what is legal or otherwise in the absence of any codified laws or regulations. They are even afraid of bodily actions they cannot control but which may be judged as revealing some anti-party sentiment, intentionally or otherwise, such as an uncontrollable tic or what they might mutter during sleep. In Oceania, that which is being observed moves beyond specific behaviours and actions towards the attempt to interpret people's thoughts and determine whether or not they are at odds with the prevailing regime. As an implicit critique of Bentham's Panopticon, Orwell does what Bentham may well have secretly wanted to do but which would have been considered outrageous if articulated: he has moved sphere of state influence inside peoples' minds. In moving beyond the scope of the Panopticon as conceived by Bentham in this way, yet adhering fast to its principles, Orwell takes us into some very dark territory with respect to the potential reaches of panoptic control and its potential to stifle, if not annihilate, individualism.

The inevitability of punishment for Winston is so definite that it becomes a factor in leading him to rebel, irrespective of the consequences. As he becomes increasingly aware that his private thoughts and individual sovereignty are being surrendered to the objectives of the Party machine, Winston comes to view himself as possibly the last the free-thinking individual in history, with a duty, both to the past and to the future, to defy the authorities by expressing his individuality, or even just thinking individual thoughts, as a form of rebellion.

The concept of 'covert surveillance' is another aspect of panopticism. In addition to surveillance being visible and overt, the existence of covert surveillance extends the element of unverifiability to areas where surveillance mechanisms are not obvious. When Winston and Julia take a trip to the countryside, they still modify their behaviour on the basis that there may be hidden microphones nearby and the possibility that their voices could be identified (105). Indeed, the room above Mr Charrington's shop which becomes their sanctuary turns out to have a telescreen hidden behind a picture frame screwed to the wall (189).

Orwell has also turned the family unit of Oceania into a mechanism for covert surveillance. Children may or may not in fact be spying on their own parents, and are certainly encouraged to do so through a Boy Scouts-like group called the Spies (25). When visiting the home of his neighbours, the Parsons, Winston is accosted by the Parsons' children:

'You're a traitor!' yelled the boy. 'You're a thought criminal! You're a Eurasian spy! I'll shoot you, I'll vaporize you, I'll send you to the salt mines!

Suddenly they were both leaping around him, shouting 'Traitor!' and 'Thought criminal!' the little girl imitating her brother in every movement. It was somehow slightly frightening, like the gambolling of tiger cubs which will soon grow up into man-eaters (24).

Mrs Parsons excuses the children's behaviour because they have missed witnessing a hanging of Eurasian soldiers (24-25). Mr Parsons, their father, is absent on this occasion when Winston visits the flat. He is a man who is excessively active in Party affairs, and continually utters obsequious platitudes of Party loyalty. Parsons is also enthusiastic about his children being encouraged to spy, citing his daughter's use of a "toy" to help her listen in to conversations as something which "gives 'em the right idea, eh?" (58). Winston is horrified by the children and pities their mother, thinking "that wretched woman must lead a life of terror. Another year, two years, and they would be watching her night and day for symptoms of unorthodoxy" (25). Ironically, it is their party faithful father who is later denounced by his daughter as a Thought Criminal for calling out "Down with Big Brother" in his sleep (201).

God and the sense that His presence is at once unseen yet everywhere is a very powerful concept which has its own history as a means of social control. The observers (guards) in the Panopticon and Big Brother, like God, share the power to see, to judge and to punish. According to Strub, "[b]oth Bentham and Orwell envisioned that a quasi-religious perception would emerge out of the panoptical control process and that it was quite important in securing stable, obedient behaviour" (Strub 49). To be able to engineer such a perception into the architecture of the panoptic model serves to compound the intrusiveness of the surveillance mechanism and greatly extend the reach of guard and Big Brother alike:

At the apex of the pyramid comes Big Brother. Big Brother is infallible and all powerful. Every success, every achievement, every victory, every scientific discovery, all knowledge, all wisdom, all happiness, all virtue, are held to issue directly from his leadership and inspiration. Nobody has ever seen Big Brother. He is a face on the hoardings, a voice on the telescreen. We may be reasonably sure that he will never die, and there is already considerable uncertainty as to when he was born. Big Brother is the guise in which the Party chooses to exhibit itself to the world. His function is to act as a focussing point for love, fear, and reverence, emotions which are most easily felt towards an individual than towards an organisation (179).

"Big Brother" performs this "quasi-religious" function in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The image of the party's leader, "Big Brother" is impressed upon the reader from the novel's first page as Winston enters "Victory Mansions," the apartment block where he lives. Despite the name of the building hinting at the spoils of post-war glory, the atmosphere is grimy and bleak, the hallway smelling of "boiled cabbage and old rag mats" (7). Amid the grey squalor is a large colour poster: "It depicted simply an enormous face, more than a metre wide: the face of a man of about forty-five, with a heavy black moustache and ruggedly handsome features." This is "Big Brother," whose physical description is very much like that of Stalin and whose name suggests a fraternal, protectionist relationship to those in his compass. Like images of Stalin in the Soviet Union in the 1930s, Big Brother's poster is everywhere, helping to cultivate the notion of his God-like omnipresence: "On each landing, opposite the lift shaft, the poster with the enormous face gazed from the wall. It was one of those pictures so contrived that the eyes follow you about when you move. BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU, the caption beneath it ran" (7). The image of Big Brother is everywhere, as is his presence through surveillance mechanisms, yet he is "invisible" in the sense that no one has ever seen him or really knows if he exists. Orwell's representation of the figure of Big Brother as a substitute for God in a now atheistic society calls to mind post-revolutionary Russia, where Stalin's

image literally replaced religious iconography in people's homes and became the focal point for a type of worship previously reserved for God.

The portrayal of the omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient Big Brother as a god-like being reaches its apex in the Two Minutes Hate, a ritual designed to channel the repressed sexual energy of the population (sexual acts are banned unless specifically for the purpose of procreation) into a frenzy of worship. "My Saviour!" (19) cries a woman at the conclusion of the Two Minutes Hate as she reaches out her hands to the screen in an image which calls to mind the spontaneous gestures of more zealous religious services. Despite his inner thoughts of rebellion against the state and its leader, Winston is not immune to Big Brother's religious allure during the Two Minutes Hate:

...his secret loathing of Big Brother changed to adoration, and Big Brother seemed to tower up, an invincible, fearless protector, standing like a rock against the hordes of Asia, and Goldstein, in spite of his isolation, his helplessness, and the doubt that hung about his very existence, capable by the mere power of his voice of wrecking the structure of civilisation (17-18).

The god-like notion of Big Brother's and *ipso facto* the Party as ever-present, all-knowing and all-powerful comes to a head in the torturing of Winston by O'Brien, who tells Winston he has been watching over him, and will now proceed to "make him perfect" (210). O'Brien is an extension of the Party, and thus also of Big Brother. Through torture, O'Brien will successfully break Winston down and convert him into one who finally 'believes;' once the necessary internal changes are brought about within Winston he will finally come to love Big Brother (256). Like a repenting sinner, Winston will ultimately be brought into the fold. Yet again, Panoptic control within Orwell's state of Oceania is far more frightening than in Bentham's original conception as a prison. In Bentham's conception there was still scope for individual thought, even if the operation of power was effective with respect to behaviour modification. Orwell's world is frightening by virtue of the state's ability to ultimately reprogram the individual to function as a mere extension of the state apparatus, stripped of individual will.

Hierarchical panoptical organisation refers to the layers of surveillance built into Bentham's Panopticon to enable inspectors to observe the guards observing the inmates. Hierarchical observation is suggested in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. O'Brien is a member of the Inner Party, with its various privileges. It would appear that O'Brien can turn off his Telescreen temporarily. At one point of their meeting at his apartment, however, he turns to Winston and Julia and says, confidently, "It is unwise even for members of the Inner Party to turn off the telescreen for more than half an hour." It would appear that he too is subject to surveillance. O'Brien has made reference to a layer above his own which may be watching him, a member of the Inner Party, whilst he is watching Julia and Winston, who belong to the Outer Party. Thus we see a hierarchical pattern of surveillance in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

According to Foucault, Bentham saw the hierarchical nature of surveillance within the Panopticon as a way to increase the transparency of institutions. Taken to its extreme, any member of the public could come and see how a panoptic institution functioned:

[T]he arrangement of this machine is such that its enclosed nature does not preclude a permanent presence from the outside: we have seen that anyone may come and exercise in the central tower the functions of surveillance, and that, this being the case, he can gain a clear idea of the way in which the surveillance is practiced. In fact, any panoptic institution, even if it is rigorously closed as a penitentiary, may without difficulty be subjected to such irregular and constant inspections: and not only by the appointed inspectors, but also by the public; any member of society will have the right to come and see with his own eyes how the schools, hospitals, factories, prisons function (Foucault 207).

However, when exercised without democratic and open transparency it becomes an ideal model for the exercise of totalitarianism. As articulated in *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism*, supposedly authored by Emmanuel Goldstein but in fact produced by the Party, hierarchical structure is paramount: “*Who* wields power is not important, provided the hierarchical structure remains the same” (180). Here the model can be seen as ideal for the perpetuation of power, as well as enabling power to be maintained by the system itself, minimising reliance on any individual.

Hierarchical panoptical organisation secures the functioning of power automatically, ensuring the longevity of the system despite occasional individual attacks against it. Julia, having grown up after the Revolution, is a ‘child’ of this regime and has very pragmatic ideas when it comes to rebellion. By contrast, Winston has experienced life before the revolution and has conceptions of history and individualism that Julia lacks. In Julia’s mind:

Such a thing as an independent political movement was outside her imagination: and in any case the Party was invincible. It would always exist, and it would always be the same. You could only rebel against it by secret disobedience or, at most, by isolated acts of violence such as killing somebody or blowing something up (135).

Julia has a blasé approach to the Party’s lies (135). She is more ‘street wise’ than Winston in that sense. Her observation that the bombs which fall on London have probably been launched against them by their own Government “just to keep people frightened,” is an idea that Winston has not considered (135-136). Her behaviour is more akin to a rebellious schoolgirl. Familiar with the system (and without any memories of any other way of living), she is comfortable with it, and comfortable with breaking the rules. Nor is she horrified by Winston’s work altering or rewriting history to suit the party, as this seems obvious to her (136). Thus Julia’s form of rebellion is probably the type most easily withstood by the Party. Winston’s thought is more independent and questioning of the regime itself, and thus more threatening. Ultimately, both forms of rebellion are powerless against this pyramidal structure held in place by hierarchical panoptic inspection.

Panoptic control is significant in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in the way it amplifies the effectiveness of surveillance technology to provide a totalitarian regime with unprecedented control over individual freedom and sovereignty. Whilst he doesn’t refer to Bentham’s Panopticon, Orwell writes very specifically about the effectiveness of surveillance in *The Book*, the supposed manifesto of Big Brother’s (likewise unseen) opponent Emmanuel Goldstein. Whilst *The Book*, like the Brotherhood, is a creation of the Party used in its efforts to draw out those who might pose a threat to its rule, it is also a device used by Orwell in the novel to expound upon important elements of the Party’s rule. Surveillance, *The Book* contends, is the key feature which sets Oceania apart from past forms of tyranny (177). Orwell highlights that even those holding the reins of power in despotic regimes of the past were rendered vulnerable by the absence of such intimate scrutiny:

The ruling groups were always infected to some extent by liberal ideas, and were content to leave loose ends everywhere, to regard only the overt act and to be uninterested in what their subjects were thinking. Even the Catholic Church of the Middle Ages was tolerant by modern standards. Part of the reason for this was that in the past no government had the power to keep its citizens under constant surveillance (177).

The surveillance technology envisaged in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* meant that, for the first time, the state could literally reach its long arm into spheres once considered private, thereby exercising social and political control in places previously considered unreachable. Furthermore, the panoptic nature of this control, coupled with the suggestion that one's inner thoughts could be gleaned from the monitoring of physiological responses, meant that it was virtually impossible for any citizen, regardless of rank, to ever evade, either in deed or thought, this "hostile eye."

Panoptic control therefore creates an efficiency in the exercise of power beyond the oppressive practices of the past, enabling real totalitarianism through the decimation of individual will. As Orwell put it in an essay written some ten years before *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, "the despotisms of the past were not totalitarian. Their repressive apparatus was always inefficient, their ruling classes were usually either corrupt or apathetic or half-liberal in their outlook..." (Orwell, "The prevention of Literature," 167). Whilst a distinction between the novel itself and the author's writings in forums outside the literary work should be made, thoughts expressed in Orwell's earlier political essays such as this do find their expression in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in Goldstein's treatise:

All past oligarchies have fallen from power either because they ossified or because they grew soft. Either they became stupid and arrogant, failed to adjust themselves to changing circumstances, and were overthrown; or they became liberal and cowardly, made concessions when they should have used force, and were once again overthrown (183-184).

Thus freedom of expression was still possible in past tyrannies in the face of complacency or the absence of more efficient mechanisms of repression. Panoptic control, however, allows the instruments of repression to become highly invasive and weaken the self: individual freedom is sacrificed to the will of the omnipresent observer.

Panoptic control is also used to monitor the citizens and their use of language. Based on the idea that our reality is constructed through language, the Party is reducing the ability of its citizens to think about certain things by eliminating certain words. Individual thought is being reduced to a bare minimum through the shrinking of language. Syme, a character working on the next edition of the Newspeak dictionary (the official, reduced, language of Oceania) is enthusiastic about the Party's purpose in shrinking language:

How can you have a slogan like 'freedom is slavery' when the concept of freedom has been abolished? The whole climate of thought will be different. In fact there will *be* no thought, as we understand it now. Orthodoxy means not thinking — not needing to think. Orthodoxy is unconsciousness (50).

Ultimately, according to Syme, the language will be reduced to a harsh quaking sound known as "duckspeak," emanating from the larynx and, hopefully, bypassing the use of the brain in its formation altogether (51). Winston reflects, prophetically, that one day "Syme will be vaporized" (50, 51). Regardless of the fact that Syme supports the intentions of the Party, he is too

astute in his observations and displays an intelligence and a capacity for independent thought which will be observed and eradicated as treachery in its own right. He is guilty of thinking in a world where “orthodoxy is unconsciousness” (52).

In conclusion, George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* can be viewed as a society organised in line with the principles of Jeremy Bentham’s panoptic prison wherein The Party sits in the central tower as observer of its citizens, who are effectively “inmates.” Oceania is a world in which the architecture of the novel’s setting, specifically the mechanisms of surveillance in the novel (both technological and social), forces its characters into a subordinate relationship with “Big Brother.” Foucault’s explication of panopticism is helpful in a reading of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to understand the power relationships at work among the characters in this environment. The very nature of panoptic control enables the power relationship between the Party and its citizens to function automatically: any individual struggles on the part of the novel’s characters become futile. Whilst Foucault did not discuss panopticism in relation to mind control, the physical and technological architecture of the society of Oceania incorporate key elements of Foucault’s theory of panoptic control: visible yet unverifiable observation; the inevitability of punishment; an omnipresent god-like figure at the helm; covert surveillance; and hierarchical organisation. Together, these ensure the perpetuation of the regime’s hegemony irrespective of the particular actors (or characters) functioning within it. At the same time, the system ensures the minimum of possibility for the exercise by any individual character of their own free will. Indeed, the concept of the individual is one which the system aims, ultimately, to render inconceivable. Bentham claimed his Panopticon would improve conditions for those who lived within one (be it a prison or a hospital). *Nineteen Eighty-Four* not only creates a fictional society which incorporates Bentham’s ideas, but shows how the panoptic design can, in the wrong hands and with the necessary technology, become a highly effective instrument of totalitarian control. Orwell’s novel not only provides a societal model of Bentham’s design, but foreshadows Foucault’s work by some twenty-five years in a literary illustration of the darker potentialities of panopticism.

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