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**George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* between  
Fiction and Reality: An Inquiry inside the  
Surveillance Society**

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a  
**Master's degree in English Language, Literature and Civilization**

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## **Abstract:**

The present dissertation explores the different aspects of surveillance as a pervasive and intensifying aspect in contemporary society using George Orwell's novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, as a point of reference where surveillance society is taken to extreme limits. The constant and ubiquitous watching in the novel is symbolized through the figure of "Big Brother" and the slogan "Big Brother is watching you" as a method of mind control and a reminder that the citizens are put under constant scrutiny. In the real world, the phrase has come to symbolize the abuse of government power in regard of civil liberties and as an instance of surveillance. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* shows how much of a visionary George Orwell was, his prophetic depictions of a distant future have come to materialize in the world we live in. People have increasingly given their personal freedoms and right to privacy, and therefore unwittingly allowed governmental surveillance to grow. While in both the book and today's society, it seems that the Government has revoked former rights to privacy, the reality is that in both cases it is the citizens that have permitted it to happen. The present study also gives an Arendtian and a Foucauldian reading of the novel, as theories to understand the implications of a surveillance society and the prescient and cautionary vision of George Orwell in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

**Keywords:** surveillance, surveillance society, Big Brother, Arendtian, Foucauldian.

## **Dedication**

*To my beloved mother and father; to my inspiring brothers and sisters.*

## **Acknowledgments:**

I must express my very profound gratitude to my beloved parents, my sisters and brothers for providing unfailing support and for their constant encouragement and guidance throughout my years of study, and through the process of writing this dissertation. This accomplishment would not have been possible without them.

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# **General Introduction**



“Visibility is a trap.”

Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (200).

My predilection for literature and English culture and societies as a whole has come as a result of much commitment and diligence. Throughout my readings of the major classics of English literature, dystopia has stood out to me as the most relevant literary genre to understand the world we live in. The recent surge of dystopian literature has gained tremendous attention during the last decades. Today, global terrorism, the return of populism and the rise of the surveillance state makes the dystopian genre a rich source of thinking about the potential loss of civil liberties, hence resulting in what is known as surveillance society.

The alarming rise of surveillance in the last decades has brought a general concern over the future of privacy and civil liberties. The recent escalation of surveillance methods especially after the revelations made by US whistleblower Edward Snowden and the WikiLeaks revelations in Vault 7 “CIA Hacking Tools Revealed” on that matter, has brought surveillance to the forefront of the media. George Orwell’s cautionary novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* depicts an extreme focusing of surveillance. Its prescience makes it transcend

the merely literary; today this gives it much relevance especially in the context of the recent breaches in privacy policy.

The present research studies surveillance society in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) in the light of Michel Foucault's Panopticism and Hannah Arendt's notion of totalitarianism. The subject of this research is of the utmost importance, as it contributes to bring awareness on the rise of surveillance society.

People have increasingly given their personal freedoms and right to privacy and, therefore, unwittingly become what Michel Foucault describes as '*docile bodies*' by allowing governmental surveillance to grow. George Orwell's ominous future society that features a watchful Big Brother has withstood the test of time. Orwell's text is a rich resource of thinking about surveillance, it depicts what is often considered a chilling picture of the use of surveillance to extreme limits. A number of striking parallels can be drawn from today's society. From the unquestioning citizens of Oceania to the novel's eerily watchful technology, strikingly similar to the satellites and the internet that track us today, governmental surveillance is becoming the ubiquitous Big Brother state. Through this study we will provide an account on surveillance society through an Arendtian and a Foucauldian reading of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Surveillance theory was not given much interest, despite the fact that James Rule's trailblazing study of *Private Lives and Public Surveillance* had appeared in the early 1970's, it was not until Michel Foucault's historical studies of surveillance and discipline had appeared that interest in surveillance theories gained impetus. Surveillance, insisted Anthony

Giddens in *The Nation-State and Violence* (1985) and others, should be viewed not merely as a sort of reflex of capitalism but as something that generates power itself.

Foucault's recent contribution to surveillance theory is highly significant and may be simply stated. Modern societies have developed rational means of ordering society that relinquished traditional methods like brutal public punishment. Speaking of Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975) Lyon says: "From army drills to school uniforms, and from social welfare casework to the closely-scrutinized factory worker's task, the processes of modern social discipline are depicted in sharp relief" (Lyon, 10). Others such as Sandra Bartky in "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power " (1988), have gone beyond Foucault's analysis, for instance into the ways women are disciplined to dress and present themselves as feminine in a male dominated society.

Power and domination brings into mind a series of sinister images. Orwell's dystopia, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, where telescreens constantly monitor all activities, is best known for its depiction of control and power to extreme limits; when we think of this in real life, insists Lyon David in *The Electronic Eye: The Rise of Surveillance Society* (1994), we think of the nation-state and with it the contrast between totalitarianism and democracy after WWII. Giddens is right to say in *The Nation-State and Violence* (1985) that: "Totalitarianism is an extreme focusing of surveillance" (303); Hannah Arendt is highly cognizant of the seeds and origins of twentieth-century totalitarianism. As Craig Calhoun reminds us in *Surveillance*

after September 11, “Arendt saw totalitarianism working directly on and within the private lives of families and individuals”<sup>1</sup> (Lyon, 164).

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell indirectly exposes frightening and undemocratic traits in societies of our time when he applies them to a fictive future in which these factors have caused horrible consequences. In the novel the Party maintains power by surveilling the population and by restricting its means of communication

### **Review of Related Literature:**

Much ink has been spilled on *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. First published in 1949, the novel follows the tradition of Yevgeny Zamyatin’s novel (1924), a forerunner of the dystopian genre. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is widely considered a prescient and prophetic commentary on the future for its depiction of methods of control over people and their freedoms. More than half a century after the publication of the novel, Orwell’s dystopian vision of the future is becoming more and more of a reality. Surveillance is a conspicuous and ubiquitous aspect in the novel. It is a policing function, and monitors not only speech or action but thought and belief as well. The phrase “Big Brother Is Watching You” tends to be associated with surveillance and, thus, slogans and figures are always reminding of its pervasiveness. George Orwell had expressed his concern about society by giving a clear depiction in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* of where it is heading and how it could potentially lose its civil liberties to the ruling elite. Orwell’s predictions are becoming less fictitious as according to the American

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Lyon, David. *Surveillance after September 11*. Oxford: Polity Press, 2003. Print.

Civil Liberties Union, (ACLU) in “Bigger Monster, Weaker Chains: The Growth of an American Surveillance Society” US government is a threat to people’s privacy from the intensifying surveillance through technology which they consider completely justified in order to ensure security.

It is important to note that the influence of Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has been felt beyond the merely literary. The metaphor of ‘Big Brother’, in particular, now expresses a profound cultural fear which is quite remote from what Orwell originally devised in his novel. James Rule refers to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as the situation of ‘total surveillance’. Sir Norman Lindop, chairman of the British Data Protection Committee, reported as early as 1978, commented that:

We did not fear that Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was just around the corner, but we did feel that some pretty frightening developments could come about quite quickly and without most people being aware of what was happening. <sup>2</sup>

It is apparent from the review that the theme of surveillance has been already studied in Orwell’s text, nevertheless, up to my humble knowledge, none of the studies reviewed has tackled the same theme in the light of Michel Foucault and Hannah Arendt’s theories. Thus, the present research attempts a study of the theme of surveillance from a different angle, relating the topic to present day proliferation of surveillance issued from high technological

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Duncan Campbell and Connor Steve, *On the Record: Surveillance, Computers and Privacy*, 1986. Print.

development and its encroachment on individual liberties. The present work reads George Orwell's novel with reference to the theme of surveillance both in real life and in the novel.

This work is divided into an introduction, two chapters, and a conclusion. The introduction leads through the theme of surveillance in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and its resurgence in contemporary society through media and technology. The first chapter attempts to explore the dimensions and implications of the surveillance society through Hannah Arendt's theory of totalitarianism, and Michel Foucault's Panopticism as he places surveillance in the context of discipline and gives a better understanding of surveillance practices. The second chapter explores the Orwellian prophesy which dives into the different aspects of surveillance in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Orwell's account of it as a surveillance society, while giving an Arendtian and Foucauldian reading of the novel, and thus, providing an overview about how prescient was Orwell's view of a Surveillance Society. The conclusion to this dissertation brings into light the findings of this research, and brings awareness on the rise of surveillance society through a careful analysis of surveillance in the aforementioned cautionary novel, as well as a sensitization on surveillance implication for our sense of identity, our human rights, our privacy and democracy.

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**Chapter one:**  
**Surveillance Society Theory**

# **Introduction**

The present chapter provides a general overview on the question of surveillance and its intensifying aspect and the consequent questions of a surveillance society. The questions of power and control are key elements in the understanding of surveillance society. Through an analysis of the masse's ethos, and such concepts as totalitarianism evoked by Hannah Arendt in her theory of totalitarianism, and Michel Foucault's Panopticism in which he places surveillance in the context of discipline, we give a better understanding of the key concepts of a surveillance society.

## Section One: Surveillance Society:

### I. The Question of Surveillance:

Surveillance has always existed and been part of human experience. It has, however, become a major issue during the last decades, its scope has amplified and reached unprecedented levels. People are increasingly aware of the extent to which governments could go regarding surveillance techniques. Cameras, phones, computers or just recently social networks made mass surveillance easier than ever for the way it serves as a watchdog for governments. According to Barth Jacobs in “Keeping Our Surveillance Society Non-Totalitarian”, Richard Thomas, the United Kingdom information commissioner, warned that we are “sleepwalking into a surveillance society”. (1)

The secretive aspect of surveillance techniques is alarming, decades ago we would never have imagined that a phone or a computer could undermine our privacy by having access to database containing personal information, the aftermath of September 11 has intensified surveillance throughout the world, 9/11 Lyon David<sup>3</sup> argues in *Surveillance after September 11* (2003) “ Surveillance is viewed as a prism for understanding social and political changes within surveillance societies”. (7)

The terror attacks of 9/11, have made more and more populations counted as suspicious and, thus, become the target of tracking systems; one proof of this, as highlighted in Jeroen Van Rest “*Deviant behaviour- Socially accepted observation of deviant behaviour for security*”, is the extremely rigorous procedures governments apply in order to watch and monitor their

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➤ <sup>3</sup> All references to David Lyon are derived from two books by that same author.

citizens. These events have eventually given US governments a reason for further surveillance procedures not only in the US but all over the world. These measures related to power and control in the first place, can have consequences whose effects could undermine democracy.

The question of control and power is thoroughly explored in Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), for Foucault surveillance is central for maintaining power, this is discussed in Discipline, the third part of the book. For him, the birth of the prison signalled a new form of social control based on surveillance.

The rise of surveillance today, and its alarming amplification carries with it the seeds of totalitarian tendencies in the sense Hannah Arendt retraced it in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1958).

## II. Inside the Surveillance Society

### II.1 Totalitarianism as an Extreme Focusing of Surveillance:

Totalitarianism constitutes a key element in the inner workings of surveillance society. Giddens evokes totalitarianism in *The Nation-State and Violence* (1985) and contends: “totalitarianism is, first of all, an extreme focusing of surveillance” (303). Hannah Arendt’s theory of totalitarianism<sup>4</sup> explored in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1958) retraces totalitarian rule and gives an understanding of the masses. Surveillance today carries with it the germs of totalitarianism; governments could go to great lengths to probe into the private lives of individuals, this could undermine civil liberties and eventually lead to an atmosphere peculiar to totalitarian societies. Arendt argues in *Totalitarianism in Power*<sup>5</sup> that:

In a system of ubiquitous spying, where everybody may be a police agent and each individual feels himself under constant surveillance; under circumstances, moreover, where careers are extremely insecure and where the most spectacular ascents and falls have become everyday occurrences, every word becomes equivocal and subject to retrospective interpretation. (431)

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<sup>4</sup> Totalitarianism: “a political concept where the state recognizes no limits to its authority and strives to regulate every aspect of public and private life wherever feasible”. (Conquest, 74)

➤ Conquest, Robert. *Reflections on a Ravaged Century*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999. Print.

<sup>5</sup> Chapter twelve of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1958).

Total domination of every aspect of everyone's life is the primary goal of totalitarian movements, Arendt affirms in *Ideology and Terror: A Novel Form of Government*<sup>6</sup> that totalitarian regimes use front organizations such as intelligence agencies, political or religious groups...etc, propaganda and esoteric doctrines as a way of hiding the radicality of their totalitarian aims from the democratic world, in this context she says: "totalitarianism differs essentially from other forms of political oppression known to us such as despotism, tyranny and dictatorship. Wherever it rose to power, it developed entirely new political institutions and destroyed all social, legal and political traditions of the country" (460).

## **II.2 Hannah Arendt: The Masses in a Total Surveillance State:**

Understanding the masses' ethos is important to get grasp of surveillance society. Totalitarianism as an extreme practice of surveillance relies on the masses, which are according to Arendt, the basic foundation for totalitarian movements. Peter Baehr argues in "The "Masses" in Hannah Arendt's Theory of Totalitarianism" that Arendt gives a negative depiction of the masses as she believes them to be "a destructive force" (Baehr,12).

In *A Classless Society*<sup>7</sup> Arendt discusses the mechanism of totalitarian movements and how the masses provide a malleable force for totalitarian movements and goes on to say that:

Totalitarian movements are possible wherever there are masses who for one reason or another have acquired the appetite for political organization. Masses are not held together by a consciousness of common interest and they lack that specific class articulateness which is expressed in determined, limited, and obtainable goals. The

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<sup>6</sup> Chapter thirteen of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1958).

<sup>7</sup> Chapter ten of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1958).

term masses applies only where we deal with people who either because of sheer numbers, or indifference, or a combination of both, cannot be integrated into any organization based on common interest, into political parties or municipal governments or professional organizations or trade unions. Potentially, they exist in every country and form the majority of those large numbers of neutral, politically indifferent people who never join a party and hardly ever go to the polls (311).

The masses, Arendt suggests, having never been experienced in politics and the fact that they were never organized by the party system and being indifferent to its rhetoric offer, thus, easy prey for totalitarian movements.

### **II.3 Loneliness, Isolation and the Masses:**

In *Ideology and Terror: A Novel Form of Government*, Arendt suggests that isolation and loneliness are preconditions for totalitarian domination, she affirms: “political contacts between men are severed in tyrannical governments and the human capacities for action and power are frustrated” (474) totalitarian governments, thus, create these conditions of isolation that are its most favourable precondition, Arendt speaks of isolation as an impasse men find themselves in when the “political sphere of their lives” where they pursue a common concern is destroyed (474). She also speaks of totalitarian terror in *Ideology and Terror*. Terror, she believes, “can rule absolutely only over men who are isolated against each other” (474).

Totalitarian governments, Arendt believes, exist by isolating men. For her loneliness, that she distinguished from isolation that is specific to the political “realm of life”, concerns human life in general. She continues:



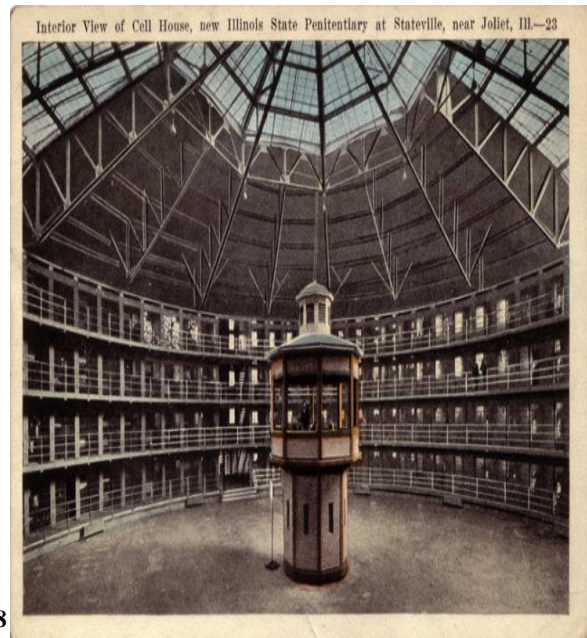
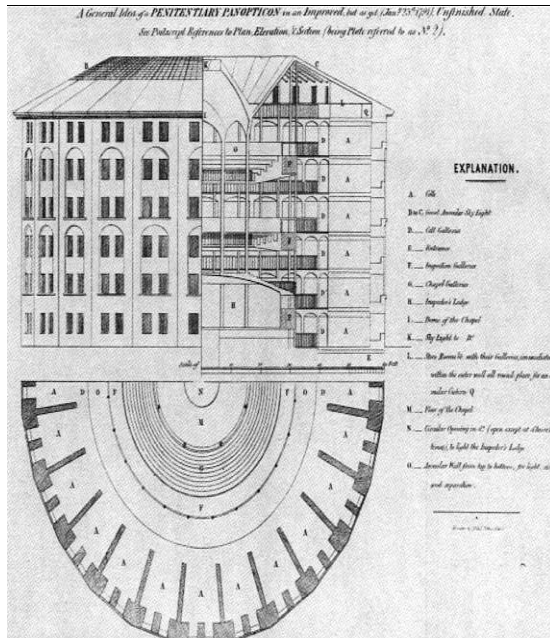
Totalitarian government, like all tyrannies, certainly could not exist without destroying the public realm of life, that is, without destroying, by isolating men, their political capacities. But totalitarian domination as a form of government is new in that it is not content with this isolation and destroys private life as well. It bases itself on loneliness, on the experience of not belonging to the world at all, which is among the most radical and desperate experiences of man. (475)

#### **II.4. Atomization of the Masses:**

Andrew Heywood in *Politics* (2013) speaks of atomization, a sociological theory that refers to "the tendency for society to be made up of a collection of self-interested and largely self-sufficient individuals, operating as separate atoms" (145). In *A Classless Society*, Hannah Arendt refers to the notion of atomization of the masses and depicts their characteristics, the truth, she argues is that the masses are incipient of a highly atomized society whose concurrent loneliness of the individual was restrained only through membership in a class. The main characteristic of the mass-man is not "brutality and backwardness, but his isolation and lack of normal social relationships" (317).

## Section two: Panopticism: Understanding Michel Foucault's Surveillance

### Theory:



### I. Foucault and the Penal System:

French philosopher and thinker Michel Foucault's theories address the questions of power and its use as a way of social control. The penal system for Foucault, as highlighted in his masterpiece *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, has changed dramatically since

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<sup>8</sup> Figure 1: Jeremy Bentham. Plan of the Panopticon (*The Works of Jeremy Bentham*, ed. Bowring, vol.IV. 1843.172-3). Retrieved Iwashita, Izumi. *On George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four Sight, Surveillance and Observation*.

<sup>9</sup> <https://seiryoinn.wordpress.com/2017/03/16/%E9%80%90%E6%AD%A5%E8%90%BD%E5%A F%A6%E9%A6%99%E6%B8%AFbig-brother/>

the 18<sup>th</sup> century. A rigid system of detention through penitentiaries was introduced changing and relinquishing the old methods of punishment that consisted of public torture or “the spectacle of the scaffold”, as Foucault terms it, already known to the Western world. As this penal system was introduced, novel forms of surveillance came with it.

## **II. Panopticism:**

In Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault provides a theory of surveillance and places it in the context of discipline and its role in society. Foucault’s studies of surveillance, according to Sharif Shawki in “Surveillance and Foucault: Examining the Validity of Foucault's Notions Concerning Surveillance through a Study of the United States and the United Kingdom” brought much attention to surveillance theories. Through Bentham’s Panopticon, Lyon argues in *The Electronic Eye* Foucault highlights the relationship between the Panopticon and modernity by showing that it is a turning point between punishment and reforming disciplinary practices (Lyon,31).

Panopticism, a theory developed by Michel Foucault, is named after the Panopticon, a prison plan originally devised by English jurist and philosopher Jeremy Bentham, makes Foucault’s surveillance theory more substantial. Societies according to Foucault have given up on the former ways of disciplining society like brutal punishment and opted for other reformatory techniques and strategies of discipline.

### **II.1. The Panopticon:**

The Panopticon is a building designed as a hypothetical prison by Jeremy Bentham in 1791 consisting of a tower surrounded by a circular structure divided into prison cells. The idea

behind this prison plan is that the few could watch the many, in that, a limited number of guards could watch a large number of prisoners. This design increases security by facilitating an efficient surveillance. If Bentham's Panopticon remained only theory, Foucault managed to bring currency to the idea. He speaks of it as a kind of "laboratory of power", he regards it as a kind of "a symbol of the disciplinary society of surveillance" (208).

## **II.2. Docile Bodies:**

Discipline in institutions such as prisons according to Foucault, in *Discipline and Punish*, produces what he calls "*docile bodies*", but in order to create those docile bodies, disciplinary institutions must put the bodies they control under constant observation and surveillance. This will, thus, create an internalized watcher within the bodies and internalize a "*disciplinary individuality*" within them. These bodies being observed thus know they are under surveillance despite being constantly alone; the ubiquitous sense of scrutiny prisoners are subject to, in the Panopticon, renders the inmate obedient, it induces in the prisoner self-monitoring as there is nowhere to escape surveillance, hence Bentham's Greek neologism the Panopticon, or "all-seeing place" (Bentham, 39) in reference to August Panoptes, the hundred-eyed giant in Greek mythology. That way, discipline is consequent of careful observation not excessive force like brutal punishment. The guards watching the inmates without being seen is what Foucault termed the 'unequal gaze', this is what caused the self-censoring of inmates and the consequent production of the docile body. Bentham, thus insists ". . . the more constantly the persons to be inspected are under the eyes of the persons who should inspect them, the more perfectly will the purpose of the establishment be attained". (Bentham,40) that is how omnipresent

observation over prisoners is induced, the mere conviction that they are under constant observation is enough for them to become these docile bodies.

Bentham's panopticon represented, Lyon argues, divine omniscience on earth, where the observer was also, like God, invisible (31). Through this omniscience and surveillance, Foucault outlines in *Discipline and Punish*, Bentham made "visibility a trap" (200). In the following quotation Foucault gives his overall understanding of the major effect of the Panopticon:

To induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. So to arrange things that the surveillance is permanent in its effects, even if it is discontinuous in its action; that the perfection of power should tend to render its actual exercise unnecessary; that this architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it; in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they themselves are the bearers. (Foucault, 201)

This induced visibility upon the prisoners makes power and control more efficient and thus facilitates the creation of docile bodies created in its turn by the 'unequal gaze'.

This chapter sheds light on surveillance by examining the long history of “surveillance society” retracing its pervasiveness in the global sphere, thus, becoming an undeniable aspect of control and power in the world we live in. Hannah Arendt’s theory of totalitarianism explores the masses ethos, the masses according to her furnish the basis for totalitarian regimes. The mass man characterized by isolation and fanaticism, furnishes the perfect vessel for totalitarian projects and, thus, is also a vital condition for a surveillance society. As for Michel Foucault’s surveillance theory, he puts surveillance in the context of discipline, modern societies have relinquished traditional methods of brutal public punishment and developed rational means of ordering society. Panopticism is one interesting theory in which Foucault provides a general understanding of surveillance relying on Bentham’s prison plan, the Panopticon.

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# **Chapter Conclusion**



**Chapter two:**

**The Orwellian Prophecy,  
*Nineteen Eighty Four* as a  
Surveillance Society**

In the present chapter, we give an understanding of George Orwell's novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in the light of an Arendtian and a Foucauldian reading whose theories are already explored in the first chapter. The ubiquitous watching in the novel symbolized mainly through the figure of Big Brother gives a chilling picture of surveillance taken to extreme limits. Orwell's dystopian novel gives a detailed portrait of surveillance, its aspects, and how it serves as a policing function that monitors the citizens of Oceania. The Orwellian prophesy which dives into the different aspects of surveillance in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* thus giving us an overview about how prescient was Orwell's view of a "Surveillance Society".

# **Introduction**

## **I. “Big Brother is Watching You”: Surveillance Through Oceania’s**

### **Ministries:**

Oceania’s ministries are described as follows in the novel:

The Ministry of Truth, which concerned itself with news, entertainment, education, and the fine arts. The Ministry of Peace, which concerned itself with war. The Ministry of Love, which maintained law and order. And the Ministry of Plenty, which was responsible for economic affairs. Their names, in Newspeak: Minitrue, Minipax, Miniluv, and Miniplenty. (Orwell, 6)

The ministries’ appellations are ironic, as each one of them fulfils the opposite role of the one supposedly assigned to it. These ministries play a major role in maintaining surveillance in Oceania, the fictional totalitarian superstate in the novel that controls and monitors every aspect of life of its society.

#### **I.1. The Ministry of Plenty:**

In Newspeak Miniplenty, is the ministry that distributes food and goods.

#### **I.2. The Ministry of Peace:**

Minipax in Newspeak is the ministry that deals with matters of war between Oceania’s superstates.

### **I.3. The Ministry of Truth:**

Minitrue in Newspeak is Oceania's mind control system. It controls information such as political literature, the telescreens and historical records altering. Winston Smith, a member of the Outer Party and the main protagonist of the novel, works for the Records Department of The Ministry of Truth, altering historical records to conform Big Brother's most recent declarations, thus reinforcing the Party's iron grip on Oceania's citizens.

### **I.4. The Ministry of Love:**

In Newspeak Miniluv, The Ministry Of Love, as ironically suggested by the appellation, nurtures all that is contrary to it. It is responsible for the arrest, torture and brainwashing of recalcitrant members of the Party whether real or imagined. Winston Smith's experience there, while tortured by O'Brien led to his eventual breakdown and sincere obedience for the Party. The Ministry of Love differs from the other ministry buildings in that it has no windows in it.

### **I.5. Big Brother:**

The omniscient god-like figure of Big Brother in Oceania is the epitome of surveillance, whether a real or fictional figure, Big Brother constantly appears on the telescreens, and the phrase "Big Brother is Watching You" (Orwell, 3) is always there to remind its citizens of his ubiquitous gaze.

## II. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as a Dystopian Vision:

*Nineteen Eighty-Four* was originally written as a vision of a dystopian nightmare-like society. In the novel, Orwell's account of electronic surveillance and sinister technology such as the telescreen can be considered as an appalling replica of the sinister and sophisticated CCTV<sup>10</sup> today. This is Orwell's description of the telescreen:

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. There was of course no way of knowing whether you were being watched at any given moment. (Orwell, 5)

*Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Lyon argues, has always been considered as an account on the power of technology and its role in maintaining social control, and also as an account about the loss of privacy as we live in an increasingly transparent society (30). The prescience of Orwell's work shows also its relevance as it tackled many issues such as "the growing centrality of information in the operations of the nation-state" (Ibid, 30), the destruction and creation of information in The Ministry of Truth is one relevant issue that shows the prescience of the work.

*Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Lyon confirms, has been used to link visibility and transparency of behaviour with the theme of privacy (30). For Orwell, as Fortner confirms in, *Physics and Metaphysics in an Information Age. Privacy, Dignity and Identity*, in: *Communication*,

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<sup>10</sup> An abbreviation for 'closed-circuit television'.

privacy was an aspect of human dignity. “Winston Smith finally caves in, betraying his girlfriend Julia and declaring his love for Big Brother, not when his privacy is invaded but when deprived of his dignity by a confrontation with rats. From that moment his identity merged with Big Brother’s. His very personhood was challenged”. (Fortner, 166)

## **I. An Arendtian Reading of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*:**

### **I.1. Totalitarianism in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: An Extreme Focusing of Surveillance:**

Hannah Arendt provides a consummate commentary on the masses’ logic and totalitarian terror in *Ideology and Terror*. Terror, she believes, “can rule absolutely only over men who are isolated against each other” (474). This atmosphere of terror is heavily present in Oceania, where isolation is induced by ‘the Party’ system. The world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a futuristic description of life in England after a socialist revolution, in a state of constant war where freedom is lost, thought control and constant surveillance are instigated by ‘the Party’. The masses in Oceania are incapable of reasoning; they are credulous and irrational and thus provide a malleable force for the Party’s totalitarian schemes.

In Oceania, Party members are fanatical, credulous and isolated individuals. Isolation is essential, but it is not limited to a place or geographic scope. It consists also of a mistrust against common sense and rejection of logic and experience:

Not merely the validity of experience, but the very existence of external reality was tacitly denied by their philosophy. The heresy of heresies was common sense. [...]

The party told you to reject the evidence of your eyes and ears.  
(Orwell, 92).

Isolation in Oceania is also from history, according to Miriam Franchella in “Logic and Totalitarianism”, so that history cannot be retraced and comparison between past and present becomes impossible (7). Isolation is essential to avoid the possibility of imagining a reality that is different from what the Party wants the citizens to believe; otherwise a rebellion would become possible. That’s why the Party slogan ran as follows: “Who controls the past, controls the future: who controls the present controls the past” (Orwell,40). This is known as Reality Control “And yet the past, though of its nature alterable, never had been altered. Whatever was true now was true from everlasting to everlasting. It was quite simple. All that was needed was an unending series of victories over your own memory. 'Reality control,' they called it: in Newspeak, doublethink.” (40). Thus, a continuous altering of historical records is necessary so as to delete any track of the past.

Newspeak is a new lexicon that is gradually introduced by the Party. It is a parody of Nazi and Soviet rhetoric, which consists of reducing the lexicon so that old meanings are slowly forgotten. The principle of Newspeak provided in the appendix of the novel works as follows: As the lexicon narrows, the domain of choice will eventually become narrow. Therefore, if a vocabulary is narrow, the mind can wander less between emotions and concepts, the production of thought will become smaller. The progressive destruction of words and collapse of logical meanings induced by Newspeak is essential to dull the mind of the citizens, who, no longer have any discernment, will blindly follow the immediate orders of the Party. The following statements makes, therefore, perfect sense: “In the end the Party would announce that two and two made five, and you would have believed it. It was



inevitable that they should make that claim sooner or later: the logic of their position demanded it.” (Orwell, 92) “For it is only by reconciling contradictions that power can be retained indefinitely”. (Orwell, 270)

Party members are subjected to Crimestop from their childhood, it works as a deterrent to any logical perceptions if they are inimical to the Party, and prevents any heretical thinking against the Party. Doublethink works also against logic and consists of believing in two contradictory beliefs.

In order to see how Doublethink works, Winston in the following passage is launched in an exercise of Crimestop:

It was not easy. It needed great powers of reasoning and improvisation. The arithmetical problems raised, for instance, by such a statement as ‘two and two make five’ were beyond his intellectual grasp. It needed also a sort of athleticism of mind, an ability at one moment to make the most delicate use of logic and at the next to be unconscious of the crudest logical errors. Stupidity was as necessary as intelligence, and as difficult to attain. (Orwell, 320)

After removing the connection to empirical reality, emotions and the richness of the lexicon, the last possible tool of rebellion would be logic and, therefore, it is disabled, too. Thus, we have the embodiment of a totalitarian and surveillance society.

The telescreen in the novel depicts an extreme focusing of surveillance in a totalitarian state. It is also a form of thought control through propaganda and censorship, lobotomizing, brainwashing, terror, and, above all, the manipulation of history. The instruments of thought

control described in the novel like the telescreen was foretelling of the extents technological advances could go for surveillance. Orwell's foreshadowing of electronic media and surveillance society was extremely prescient.

## **I.2. Orwell and Arendt:**

Arendt's account on totalitarianism fits well with Orwell's depiction of the surveillance society of Oceania. The use of a number of tools, by the Party, to disable the ability to reason, is one key characteristic of totalitarian regimes in order to keep a system of surveillance and thus create the perfect docile mass-man with no discernment. The loss of sensitivity to contradiction, the atomism and isolation of the Party members and their desensitization to the contradiction is the culmination of totalitarian terror and therefore total surveillance society.

## **II. A Foucauldian Reading of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*:**

### **II.1. Panopticism in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*:**

The notion of "*Docile Bodies*" is heavily present in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the panoptical gaze of Oceania's surveillance, achieved through her institutions, and the omnipresent observation of the telescreen, internalizes in the Party members an internalized watcher, and therefore induces a "*disciplinary individuality*". The Party members are, thus, disciplined and become obedient to the Party policies through constant surveillance.

This kind of surveillance is expressed in the following passage:

There was of course no way of knowing whether you were being watched at any given moment...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. (Orwell, 5)

The Panoptical gaze is more total in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* than in Bentham's Panopticon prison plan. Michael Yao in "Propaganda and surveillance in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: Two sides of the same coin" argues: "Bentham's Panopticon is content to police only overt acts, "leaving thoughts and fancies to their proper ordinary, the court above" (Bentham, 94) (6) "the court above" that is: an omniscient god. For the panoptical gaze to be total, it is not necessary that a god exists, only the belief in it is sufficient (6). Big Brother in Oceania, serves as an omniscient God that is aware of and is in total knowledge not just of acts and speech but also of thought, the belief in such a God is sufficient for the panoptical effect to be total.

The belief that Big Brother can probe into privacy represents the total panoptical gaze: "It was terribly dangerous to let your thoughts wander when you were in any public place or within the range of a telescreen", since the "smallest things could give you away"

(Orwell, 71).

## **II.2. Spying and the "Unequal Gaze" in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*:**

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, spying is a form of surveillance instigated by the Party. This is a kind of covert surveillance whose aim is to avoid detection, in the following passage spying appears as a form of surveillance through the telescreen: "Winston kept his back

turned to the telescreen. It was safer; though, as he well knew, even a back can be revealing” (Orwell, 5). Bentham identifies spying as being able to “pry into the secret recesses of the human heart” (94) to detect their secret thoughts.

The “unequal gaze”, as Foucault’s principle of Panopticism refers to the kind of surveillance where the watcher has the ability to observe and monitor the watched while the person being watched cannot see him in her turn; is heavily present in the novel, the Thought Police, the eyes and ears of the Party, fulfils a similar job:

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 was scrutinized” (Orwell, 5).

The unequal gaze works as spying does, it detects peoples’ actions by surveilling them when they believe that they are alone and not being watched. It is a surreptitious surveillance. To avoid this kind of surveillance, when Winston believes he is being watched by the telescreen, for example, he modifies his behaviour. He hides his beliefs and thoughts and changes the expression on his face, and even tries to avoid unorthodox thoughts unless they betray his expression.

### **III. Beyond Orwell and Foucault:**

Orwell's nightmare correctly depicts the role of information and technology in orchestrating social control. Today, Lyon argues in *The Electronic Eye*, methods of control have changed from violent to nonviolent and have come a long way since Orwell, and the advent of new technology and big data for surveillance has given *Nineteen Eighty-Four* a much greater scope (39).

George Orwell's anti-hero, Big Brother, has become a byword within surveillance theories. The Panopticon and Big Brother portray surveillance. Whether it is Bentham's Panopticon in which prisoners were under the all-seeing gaze or Orwell's ever-present gaze of Big Brother, these metaphors are constantly referenced in today's surveillance situation.

### **IV. Surveillance after 9/11:**

September 11 has triggered and intensified surveillance throughout most of the world. The panic responses consisting in these new surveillance practices, Lyon affirms in *Surveillance after 9/11*, impose restrictions on civil liberties and are likely to have long-term and irrevocable consequences. "They permit wartime measures, which include appropriating data on everyday communications such as phone calls email, the internet, while implicitly discouraging the use of these media for democratic debate" (Lyon, 34). Surveillance is being used for supposedly "strong state" purposes.

## **V. An Orwellian scenario? “Big Brother is Watching You”:**

### **Surveillance Scandals:**

#### **V.1. Leaks that Exposed US Spy Programme:**

The Guardian newspaper reported in early June 2013 that the US National Security Agency (NSA) was collecting telephone data from US citizens. It was then followed by other revelations by the Washington Post and Guardian that the NSA collected information from such internet firms such as Google, Facebook, Microsoft and Yahoo in order to keep track of online information in a surveillance programme known as Prism.

Britain's intelligence agency GCHQ was also involved in the Prism programme secretly gathering information. The CIA system analyst Edward Snowden leaked these information concerning US and UK surveillance programmes. He has been since then charged in the US with theft of government property, and leaking of classified communications intelligence.

(Greenwald, 2013).

#### **V.2. Facebook-Cambridge Analytica Scandal:**

After the surveillance scandal that has brought forth the US spy programme, surveillance seems to become more like the eerie version of Orwell’s nightmare society of Big Brother. Solon Olivia reports in “Facebook says Cambridge Analytica may have gained 37m more users’ data” that: “the recent Facebook–Cambridge Analytica data scandal, in March 2018, involves the collection of personally identifiable information of up to 87 million Facebook users” (The Guardian). The scandal has generated major public outrage,

and discussions on standards for especially social media companies. Consumer advocates called for the protection of consumers in social networks and the to privacy.

(The Guardian)

# **Chapter Conclusion**



*Nineteen Eighty-Four* gives a chilling picture of surveillance taken to extreme limits. Orwell's dystopian novel is a detailed portrait of surveillance as a policing function in which not only speech and action are monitored but thought and belief as well. The Orwellian prophesy is explored in this chapter by an Arendtian and Foucauldian reading of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The total surveillance practices in the novel give much relevance to the Foucauldian disciplinary context of surveillance, and Hannah Arendt's account of the masses in a totalitarian state to grasp the major concepts of Orwell's account of a surveillance society in the novel. Today, the Big Brother state foreshadowed by Orwell is very much palpable and undeniable given the current state of events regarding surveillance.

# Conclusion

The findings we have reached in this research contribute to enlighten the reader on the Orwellian prescient predictions and draw parallels between our modern “Surveillance Society” and the novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Throughout this dissertation, we have endeavored to give an Arendtian and a Foucauldian reading of George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. As already shown in the first chapter, surveillance is not a new phenomenon, but has always been part of human existence, the rate surveillance practices take is alarming and leads us to such surveillance society as that imagined by Orwell in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Hannah Arendt’s theory gives an understanding of the masses ethos, in it, we explore the psychological side of the masses, as they constitute the social basis for totalitarian rule by providing its sympathizers and militants. We understand totalitarianism as an extreme focusing of surveillance. Michel Foucault’s contribution to surveillance theory is also highly relevant in the understanding of surveillance society. It may; however, be simply stated, modern societies have given up on traditional methods like brutal punishment and developed rational means of ordering society. Foucault sets surveillance theory in the context of discipline in society. He sees in modern society, a disciplinary one. Through Bentham’s Panopticon, originally devised as a utopian scheme for social reform, Foucault sets the panopticon as a turning point between the old methods of disciplinary practices and the reforming contemporary ones, this in turn, is where surveillance practices have been given

much impetus. The Panopticon is viewed by Foucault as a symbol of the disciplinary society of surveillance.

*Nineteen Eighty-Four's* account of a surveillance society is very much relevant today. Originally written as a dystopia, a literary depiction of an undesirable, avoidable but conceivable future state of society, the novel makes of the current state of surveillance methods a very palpable version of what George Orwell imagined in his cautionary tale. The Panopticon, now the main alternative to Orwell's Big Brother, makes of Michel Foucault's surveillance theory an all-encompassing point of reference to understand Orwell's account of a surveillance society as well as reading of a prescient and foreboding vision of surveillance practices. In this dissertation, an Arendtian reading of the novel is a way of setting Hannah Arendt's account of the masses, the basis of totalitarian rule, in the context of totalitarian practices as an extreme focusing of surveillance. The Party in Oceania and its masses thus provide the material to understand the inner workings of the mass-man in a total surveillance state such as Oceania. Throughout this Arendtian and Foucauldian reading of the novel, we have set the novel beyond the merely literary.

The findings of this research also show that the current state of surveillance practices has given Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* much relevance. Since September 11, surveillance has been stepped up throughout most of the world. Governments and businesses monitor personal behavior and analyze a host of data that individuals are often unaware they generate. Today, the recent breaches in privacy policy from Edward Snowden's leaks that exposed US spy programme in 2013 to this year's Facebook-Cambridge Analytica data scandal (2018), make of Orwell's Big Brother a point of reference in mainstream media for the current state of surveillance, and, thus, more than a mere literary reference. Today, the world of *Nineteen*

*Eighty-Four* has very much become a representation of ours. Orwell's prescient work proves to be the perfect warning of a surveillance society in which our civil liberties are put into question, and our privacy, invaded. We are constantly being watched, tracked, listened to, investigated and scrutinized.

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