

Propaganda and Surveillance in George Orwell's *Nineteen
Eighty-Four*: Two Sides of the Same Coin

Michael Yeo

Laurentian University, Canada

Abstract:

Propaganda and surveillance are pervasive in contemporary society. Extensive literatures have developed around each. George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is an important point of reference in both literatures. Orwell takes both propaganda and surveillance to extreme limits: *total* surveillance and *total* propaganda. Writing them large he brings important aspects of each into sharp relief, which is why his novel has the iconic status that it does for theorists in both literatures. However *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is of interest not just for its potential contribution to theorizing about propaganda *or* about surveillance. Propaganda and surveillance in the novel are not just accidentally related but essentially linked. I show how they work not just individually but in tandem in Orwell's text, playing complementary roles in an absurd project of total social control directed not just at behaviour but also thought. Relating propaganda and surveillance in a sustained and systematic reading of the novel reveals it to be an even richer resource for theorizing about either surveillance or propaganda than it is when read, as it typically is, with an emphasis on one or the other. Additionally, from a literary perspective this reading opens up what I believe is a fresh perspective on the novel and makes it more inviting for a thoughtful and rewarding reread.

Keywords: Bentham; Big Brother; Orwell; Panopticon; Propaganda; Social Control; Spying; Surveillance

Résumé:

La propagande et la surveillance sont omniprésentes dans la société contemporaine. De la littérature approfondie a été développée autour de chacun des thèmes. Le livre *Nineteen Eighty-Four* de George Orwell, est un important point de référence pour les deux littératures. Orwell pousse les deux notions à l'extrême soit propagande totale et surveillance totale. En écrivant sur ces thèmes au sens large, il met en relief les aspects importants de chacun, ce qui explique pourquoi son roman a obtenu le statut d'icône pour les théoriciens de chacune des littératures. Cependant, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* n'est pas seulement d'intérêt pour sa contribution potentielle à la théorisation de la propagande ou de la surveillance. Dans le roman, la propagande et la surveillance ne sont pas accidentellement reliées, mais essentiellement liées. Cet article démontre comment elles fonctionnent non seulement individuellement, mais aussi en tandem dans le texte d'Orwell en jouant des rôles complémentaires dans un projet absurde de contrôle social total, réalisé non seulement sur le comportement, mais aussi la pensée. Lier la propagande et la surveillance dans une lecture soutenue et systématique se révèle être une source plus riche pour la théorisation des deux notions plutôt que lorsque la lecture est faite en mettant l'accent sur l'une ou l'autre. Du point de vue littéraire, ce type de lecture offre une nouvelle perspective du roman et le rend plus attrayant pour une relecture réfléchie et enrichissante.

Mots-clés: Bentham; Big Brother; Contrôle Social; Espionnage; Orwell; Panoptique; Propagande; Surveillance

Ours has been called an “Age of Propaganda” and a “Surveillance Society”, as if each gets at something fundamental about our time.¹ George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is an important point of reference for both points of view. The reason for its centrality is obvious: the novel takes propaganda and surveillance to extreme limits, thus bringing essential aspects of each into sharp relief. However, in addition to being a rich resource for thinking about each of these important dimensions of social reality, by relating them in an essential way the novel also challenges us to think the two together.²

In this paper I give a reading of Orwell’s novel based on a careful examination not just of how propaganda and surveillance work in its world but also how they work in tandem. In the first section I distinguish two main forms of propaganda, which I call the propaganda of fact and the propaganda of fiction. In the second I analyze surveillance, distinguishing panoptical and surreptitious surveillance. In the third section, I relate propaganda and surveillance as they work hand-in-hand in a project of control not just of behaviour but of thought. In the fourth section, I show that this ambitious and absurd project fails in the world of the novel. In addition to revealing the tendency, if not the dream, of propaganda and surveillance, this failure exposes the limitations of each in view of the reflective capacity of human beings. In concluding, I offer some programmatic comments about the relevance of Orwell’s novel to life in societies of pervasive propaganda and surveillance.

Propaganda in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

As the term is used loosely today, propaganda pervades the full range of communication genres. Any medium that can propagate messages can be used for propaganda. So too can every communication genre, from news to novels and from social marketing to social networking.

Numerous studies have attempted to define and distinguish different types of propaganda.³ Definitions can be compared with respect to several defining variables and range from specific or narrow to broad and inclusive. Lasswell's (1927: 627) seminal definition of propaganda as "the control of opinion by significant symbols" including "stories, rumours, reports, pictures, and other forms of social communication" seems broad enough to capture virtually any communication.⁴ Ross (2002: 24) defines propaganda much more narrowly as "an epistemically defective message used with the intention to persuade a socially significant group of people on behalf of a political institution, organization or cause". The concept of epistemic defectiveness, which bears the burden of work in this definition, narrows the ambit of the concept significantly.

Marlin (2002: 18-21) distinguishes negative, neutral, and favourable definitions. Lasswell's definition would be counted neutral since it does not specify that a communication must somehow be objectionable for it to qualify as propaganda. This is what gives it its broad sweep, since it can capture instances in all three of Marlin's categories. Ross's is clearly a negative definition, deliberately fashioned in acceptance of the pejorative sense the term usually carries, and intended to exclude communications that are not "defective".

Nineteen Eighty-Four displays all manner of propaganda, with distinguishing features of several definitions sharply accented. The Party takes propaganda to totalizing limits in its project of political control over not just everything that people do or say but everything they think or believe. The persuasive power of every medium, technique and genre of communication is exploited to its maximum potential and single-mindedly put to work. Virtually every communication is calculated to propagate politically charged messages. No holds are barred, and there is no respite from the intrusive messaging.

The novel is a rich source of examples for thinking about propaganda, which could be analyzed with reference to any number of theoretical issues in the literature. However, propaganda in the novel divides revealingly and essentially into two main forms, which I call the propaganda of fact and the propaganda of fiction.

The Propaganda of Fact

Propaganda is under the Ministry of Truth. This is where Winston Smith works, in the Records Department, destroying the records of the past as they become inconsistent with always changing policy and substituting falsified records in their place. In addition to being subject to censorship and propaganda, he is himself a censor and a propagandist. As he erases records of the past, he knows that what he is censoring and falsifying was probably not true either: "Statistics were just as much a fantasy in their original version as in their rectified version" (Orwell, 2003: 48). In producing propaganda, he is himself censored, or censors himself, as he follows "lines of policy" laid down anonymously and his "estimate of what the party wanted" him to say (Ibid: 50-51).

We get insight into Winston's propaganda work as he writes a news story to replace a story in the *Times* he has been instructed to rectify. He had gathered that the "order of the day" for the objectionable *Times* article was about "praising the work of an organization known as

FFCC”, which it had done under the guise of the factual reporting of news (Orwell, 2003: 51). Winston’s fabricated replacement story about the fictitious Comrade Ogilvy is likewise calculated from the outset with the intent to propagate a values message. For example, he “reports” that Ogilvy “denounced his uncle to the Thought Police after overhearing a conversation which appeared to him to have criminal tendencies” (Ibid: 54). His story thereby exemplifies, without mentioning, Party virtues such as loyalty to Party above family and zealousness in rooting out criminals. Lest the moral of the story not be clear enough, Winston appends some editorial remarks that he attributes to Big Brother praising Ogilvy for abstinence and other virtues (Ibid: 55).

Winston’s news story exemplifies a kind of propaganda that is pervasive in the novel: the propagation of lies as facts. Statistics, reports about the war, historical records, and so on, are not simply false; they are lies because they are known to be false. However, the object is not just to propagate facts (or lies) but to propagate values, or value judgments, which the propaganda of fact does indirectly. The trusting reader of the *Times* would be persuaded to opinions not just about facts but also values. That people believe certain lies to be facts is not what really matters to the Party; what matters is the beliefs they form about matters of political concern to which these facts persuade them. For example, facts (or lies passed off as facts) are used to “prove” that, notwithstanding significant deprivation, people are better off than they were before the Party came to power (Orwell, 2003: 85). Even this message, which recurs throughout the novel, is subordinate to the more general message that Big Brother is good and worthy of admiration, if not love.

Winston’s department “was itself only a single branch of the Ministry of Truth” (Orwell, 2003: 50). The Ministry’s primary job was “to supply the citizens of Oceania with newspapers, films, textbooks, telescreen programmes, plays, novels—with every conceivable kind of information, instruction or entertainment, from a statue to a slogan, from a lyric poem to a biological treatise” (Ibid). “Newspapers”, “biological treatises” and “textbooks” purport to be factual. The kind of propaganda they are used for propagates lies as facts, and indirectly propagates values. However, the Ministry produces works in other genres that propagate values without pretending to be factual and that have to do not with falsehood or lies but with fiction, or more generally art.

The Propaganda of Fiction

Julia represents the propaganda of fiction. She works in the Fiction Department in a “mechanical job on one of the novel-writing machines” (Orwell, 2003: 12). She is not a writer like Winston, but one wonders in what sense any one could be a writer on a “novel-writing machine”.

The fiction produced in the Fiction Department may serve any number of purposes. However, if the purpose is to entertain, other propagandistic purposes piggy-back on its ostensible purpose. Winston’s news story, which is fictional but pretends not to be, shows us how this can be done. If fictional stories purporting to be factual can promote values, stories that do not pretend to be anything but fictional can also do the job. As if to underscore the interchangeability of fact and fiction for propaganda purposes, Orwell has Winston and Julia’s jobs crisscross. Winston, who deals in facts, writes fiction. Julia’s unit in the Fiction Department, normally concerned with the production of novels, retools to write atrocity pamphlets (Orwell, 2003: 170). These will be presented not as fiction but as fact. Nonetheless, the purportedly

factual stories they recount will work in the same way as the novels it produces, and as does Winston's fictitious story about Ogilvy, to propagate values.

The most obvious thing that can make news and textbooks propagandistic is something "epistemically defective" about the facts they present, as when purported facts are false, misleading or even lies. Art, and fiction in particular, does not purport to be fact or pass itself off as true in a factual sense. In what sense then is fiction propagandistic, or how could we decide the extent to which it is so?

If the mere propagation of values is enough for a communication to be counted as propaganda, clearly this applies to fiction. However, there is something about how values are propagated, in fact and in fiction that is propagandistic in a richer sense having to do with indirection or even misdirection. The propaganda of fact can be counted as propaganda not just because it passes lies for facts, but additionally because it does so *indirectly* to propagate values. Indeed, the propagation of values is its primary object. Even if the presented facts were indeed facts and not lies, the communicative context in which they are related would still be propagandistic insofar as the communication of facts was secondary and instrumental to the indirect objective of shaping values.⁵

Literature does not purport to be factual, but it does purport to entertain or provide aesthetic satisfaction. In doing so, it can also indirectly propagate values, a point that Orwell (2002a) made very forcefully in his essay on "Boy's Weeklies".⁶ Boys are drawn to these stories because they like "to read about Martians, death-rays, grizzly bears, and gangsters" (Orwell, 2003: 208). However, they get more than aesthetic pleasure in the bargain since a host of political convictions are "pumped" into them as they attend to the action. This inculcation of values is "all the better because it is done indirectly" (Ibid: 209). Commenting on this passage, Marlin (2002: 29) notes that the most effective propaganda is often indirect or oblique.

In the propaganda of fact, along with the news or facts, one gets a surreptitious dose of political messaging that may not be suspected. In the propaganda of fiction, along with entertainment or aesthetic pleasure one gets a dose of the same that can be at least as potent, and with the reader at least as unaware that it is being administered.

Surveillance in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Like propaganda, surveillance is pervasive in the novel. Instances of surveillances divide into two main kinds: panoptical and surreptitious. Panoptical surveillance is interiorised self-surveillance. In the belief that one is under surveillance, one censors oneself so as to avoid unorthodoxy, the detection of which would be detrimental. Surreptitious surveillance works on the opposite belief: believing that one is in a private space not under surveillance, one is disinhibited and acts and thinks freely, thus making it possible for an unsuspected spy to detect what one really believes.

Panoptical Surveillance

The term "panopticon" comes from Jeremy Bentham, who used it to describe a building in which from a single point a single inspector could monitor many occupants. In the belief that they were under inspection, occupants would avoid behaviour the detection of which would have a penalty. For this effect to occur, it is not necessary that occupants actually are under surveillance at any given time; only that "the persons to be inspected should always feels themselves as if under

inspection, at least as standing a great chance of being so” (Bentham, 1995: 43). Bentham calls this “the inspection principle” (1995: 94), which is different from the panopticon as a structure or system (e.g., of cameras) enabling ubiquitous surveillance. Ubiquitous surveillance would not engage the inspection principle if people under inspection were not aware that they were. Conversely, it would be engaged if people believed that they were under inspection, even if they were not.⁷

Panoptical surveillance in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 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, 2003: 5)

In this assumption, Winston self-censors and plays for the camera, pretending to believe and think what he is supposed to and hiding his true thoughts and beliefs.

The panoptical principle is more total in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* than in Bentham. Bentham is content to police only overt acts, leaving “thoughts and fancies to their proper ordinary, the court above” as he puts it (Bentham, 1995: 94). An omniscient God in “the court above” who will pass judgment in total knowledge not just of acts and speech but also thought would epitomize total panopticism. For the panoptical effect, it is not necessary that such a God exist; the belief in such a God will do.

There appears to be no God in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* but Big Brother has a similar job description. Crime extends from action and speech to thought itself—“thoughtcrime”. The belief that Big Brother’s eyes and ears can reach even into the private domain Bentham delicately leaves for the “court above” makes for total panopticism. “It was terribly dangerous to let your thoughts wander when you were in any public place or within the range of a telescreen”, the narrator tells us, since the “smallest things could give you away” (Orwell, 2003: 71). In total panopticism, it is prudent to avoid not just the signs of unorthodox thought, to the extent they can be avoided, but unorthodox thought itself, to the extent it is possible to prevent one’s mind from wandering.

Surreptitious Surveillance

Bentham distinguished panoptical surveillance from surreptitious surveillance, which he credited with being able to “pry into the secret recesses of the human heart” to detect what people were really thinking.⁸ He had no need for this kind of surveillance because he was satisfied if panoptics acted overtly in conformity with norms, whether they believed them or not.

Surreptitious surveillance works not to prevent speech or action, as panopticism does, but to detect what people really think or believe by surveilling their speech and action when they are disinhibited in the (illusory) belief that they are in a private setting. Thus it works, and can only work, if the person being surveilled has a belief opposite to the one necessary for panoptic surveillance. When Winston believes he is in range of a camera, for example, he self-censors. He disguises his beliefs and thoughts by putting on an orthodox face, and even tries to avoid unorthodox thoughts lest he give himself away involuntarily. To the extent he succeeds, it is not possible to discern what he truly believes. However, when he believes that he is not in range of a

camera, he is disinhibited and acts and thinks freely, thus revealing what he really believes in “the secret recesses of his heart”.

These opposite surveillance strategies are contradictory in the novel. On the one hand, Winston seems to believe, as he is constantly reminded by propaganda, that surveillance is ubiquitous and there is no escaping it. In this belief, he censors himself. On the other hand, he believes that at least sometimes he is not under surveillance, or at least sometimes believes this. In this belief he acts as if his actions were private and reveals himself without inhibition, thus allowing spies to detect what he is really thinking. He believes his diary is private and, believing that, allows himself to express his true thoughts in it. He believes the room he rents with Julia is private and believing that, allows himself to express his true desires and thoughts there. As it turns out, he is mistaken, and these seemingly private spaces were being surveilled, which of course he suspected all along in accordance with the contrary belief that he also held! If Winston believes that “you had to live—did live, from habit that became instinct—in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard” and “every movement was scrutinized”, he does not believe this all time, or at least does not act on it all the time (Orwell, 2003: 5). The habit has not become instinct.

Surveillance and Propaganda: Two Sides of the Same Coin

Essentially, surveillance in the novel is a monitoring or policing function. It works through self-censorship and surreptitious spying to police not just speech and action but also thought and belief. Propaganda too works upon thought and belief, but differently: propaganda instils belief, surveillance polices it.

Propaganda and Panoptic Surveillance

The phrase “Big Brother Is Watching You” tends to be associated with surveillance. However, it is also a piece of propaganda. The reader is first introduced to surveillance not as an instance of actual surveillance but of propaganda about surveillance, propagating the belief necessary for panoptic surveillance. As he enters the hallway of his apartment, Winston is confronted by a large coloured poster featuring the “ruggedly handsome” face of “a man of about forty-five (Orwell, 2003: 3). As he ascends the seven stories to his flat, on each landing he sees the same “poster with the enormous face”. It seems to gaze at him, “being so contrived” that the eyes follow him about as he moves. Under the face appears the caption “Big Brother is Watching You”. Of course, the face is not watching him, and the poster is not an instrument of surveillance, except in a metaphorical sense.

The same sort of interplay between propaganda and surveillance occurs a little later. As he looks out at three gigantic slogans, Winston takes a coin from his pocket and reflects on the pervasiveness both of surveillance and propaganda⁹:

There too, in tiny clear lettering, the same slogans were inscribed, and on the other face of the coin the head of Big Brother. Even from the coin the eyes pursued you. On coins, on stamps, on the covers of books, on banners, on posters, and on the wrapping of a cigarette package—everywhere. Always the eyes watching you and the voice enveloping you . . . there was no escape.

(Orwell, 2003: 31-32)

The “eyes watching” and the “voice enveloping” from which there “was no escape” refer, respectively, to surveillance and propaganda. However, the reference to surveillance is metaphorical. The various images of eyes cannot literally watch you, in the way that the telescreen can, for example. And the items that Winston mentions—slogans, books, banners, posters, packaging—are not instruments of surveillance but of propaganda.

Should we conceptualize these moments as instances of surveillance, propaganda or both? The messaging is certainly in the service of panopticism, instilling the essential belief necessary for it to work. The images succeed in making Winston feel that he is being watched, which is all that is required for the panoptic effect.

However, if propaganda is here in the service of surveillance it also has its own job to do. On the poster, Big Brother is depicted as being ruggedly handsome; an image we can suppose is calculated to dispose people to like if not love him, and to feel glad to know that he is looking out for them. It is not the clichéd face of evil that is displayed when enemies of the people are represented. Whether this is a true likeness, and indeed even if Big Brother does not exist, the image works in the same way to persuade not just to the belief that he is watching (which is not literally true in the present instance) but also to the belief that it is a good that he is, that the watching is comforting.

The Telescreen and the End of Private Life

Having been bombarded with propaganda on the way to his flat, Winston is immediately confronted with it once again, this time coming from the telescreen broadcasting “a list of figures which had something to do with the production of Pig Iron” (Orwell, 2003: 4). Unlike images on posters, coins, or cigarette packages, the telescreen can be used for surveillance. However, like them it can also be used for propaganda since in addition to receiving it also broadcasts.

Party members were seldom out of range of a telescreen. The telescreen could not be turned off so there was no respite from its constant propagandizing.

Day and night the telescreens bruised your ears with statistics proving that people today had more food, more clothes, better houses, better recreations—that they lived longer, worked shorter hours, were bigger, healthier, stronger, happier, more intelligent, better educated, than people of fifty years ago.

(Orwell, 2003: 85)

However, not “a word of it could be proved or disproved” because, as Winston knew from his job, documentary evidence (quite likely false to begin with) was continually being destroyed and replaced with new evidence to reinforce or prove new messaging.

In Goldstein’s book, the development of a technology with the dual capacity for broadcasting and receiving—propaganda and surveillance—is hailed as a turning point in the history of state power. The book explains that the decisive difference between the Party and “tyrannies of the past” is that the latter were content “to regard only the overt act and to be uninterested in what their subjects were thinking” (Orwell, 2003: 235). The reason given for this lack of interest is not any sense of decency, but rather that “in the past no government had the power to keep its citizens under constant surveillance” (Ibid). As the passage continues, another significant power is added having to do not with surveillance but with propaganda: “The invention of print, however, made it easier to manipulate public opinion, and the film and radio

carried the process further” (Ibid). What made it not just possible but conceivable for government to extend its reach beyond “the overt act” to “what their subjects were thinking” was the development of technologies not available to tyrannies in the past: technologies of surveillance to keep “citizens under constant surveillance” and technologies of propaganda to constantly bombard them with messaging to “manipulate public opinion”. These two discrete powers, each of which was formidable in its own right, came together in the development of the telescreen, which combines both¹⁰:

With the development of television, and the technical advance that made it possible to receive and transmit simultaneously, private life came to end. Every citizen, or at least every citizen important enough to be worth watching, could be kept for twenty-four hours a day under the eyes of the police and in the sound of official propaganda, with all other channels of communication closed.

(Orwell, 2003: 235)

Propagating and Policing Orthodoxy

The Party’s project is the total control not just of what citizens do and say, but what they think and believe. What makes this project conceivable is the development and centralized control of technologies of both surveillance and propaganda, as represented by the telescreen. The control of thought is the imposition of orthodoxy. Orthodoxy has to do with having the right beliefs, which means the beliefs that the Party wants people to have. This includes ideology but more broadly any desired belief whatsoever, in the domain of facts or values. The set of right beliefs that make up orthodoxy at any given time includes some that are relatively stable, such as the principles of IngSoc, and others more ephemeral, such as facts about how much pig iron is being produced and who is deserving of praise or blame. Orthodoxy is about having this or that belief that one is supposed to have, but more fundamentally it is about a disposition to believe, or an overarching belief that what the Party says is true is true and what it says is good is good. Not to believe, or even to have a disposition not to believe, is unorthodoxy. And unorthodoxy is a crime.

There is of course no crime in the proper sense of the term, since there are no laws. Nonetheless, there are norms, rigidly policed, the transgression of which is considered crime. Winston does not believe that he can know much of anything with any reasonable certainty—that is one of his major complaints. But if he does not know what to believe, he at least knows what he is *supposed to believe*. The overarching norm is that one must believe the orthodoxy that has been propagated. It is not enough to act overtly in conformity with orthodoxy, perhaps believing otherwise in one’s heart; one must believe it. Not to believe the orthodoxy is thoughtcrime, or even to believe it with reserve, and even if overtly one acts in conformity with it. Indeed, to have the critical distance to recognize that orthodoxy is normative, or even that there is an orthodoxy that one is “supposed to believe”, rather than merely believing it unreflectively, is thoughtcrime.

Propaganda and surveillance work together in the imposition of orthodoxy. Propaganda imparts or instills the right beliefs; surveillance polices them. Panoptic surveillance, which occurs in the belief that one is under surveillance, is preventive self-policing, whether there are police watching or not. The idea is for people to self-censor to the point that they avoid not just overt acts inconsistent with orthodoxy, but avoid even thinking unorthodox thoughts, preventing their

thought from wandering into forbidden territory. Surreptitious surveillance, which occurs in the contrary belief that one is in a private space, will detect unorthodoxy in people like Winston and Julia who are good at playing to the camera, finding them out as they reveal or confess their private thoughts or beliefs without inhibition. Both panoptic and surreptitious surveillance are under the jurisdiction of the Thought Police, whose watching is sometimes public and visible, and at other times secret and invisible or disguised. They make use of available technologies—telesccreens and microphones—and are aided by an organized auxiliary of enthusiastic child spies.

The Failure of the Party's Project

Propaganda and surveillance thus complement each other in the project of imposing orthodoxy and controlling thought. Propaganda impresses the norms that surveillance polices; panoptic self-policing prevents people from straying from these norms, and surreptitious policing weeds out those who hide their deviance in public, catching them at it in private.

Surveillance presupposes propaganda, since self-policing and surreptitious policing requires awareness of orthodoxy, and this orthodoxy must be propagated. However, propaganda does not presuppose surveillance. Indeed, the need for policing can be seen as a failure of propaganda. If propaganda did its job, and the Party could rely on everyone to believe what they were told, and not just act as if they did, there would be no need for surveillance.

The Failure of Propaganda

The Party is not altogether successful at propaganda. Certainly propaganda failed to persuade Winston to orthodoxy, or only partially succeeded. We see him struggling with orthodoxy and trying to get free of it throughout the story, vacillating between being a believer, and responding on cue, and being a doubter or unbeliever, and resisting. As he begins his private diary, believing himself free of surveillance and thus free to write what he believes rather than what he is supposed to believe, his first entry is a slavish recap of one of the crass propaganda flicks he had seen the night before. Not only does he mindlessly repropagate the gory details of fleeing refugees being shot to pieces from a helicopter but he does so in the spirit the flick (“a very good one”) was intended to be received (Orwell, 2003: 10-11). The spell of the propaganda is broken, however, as he moves on to describe a scene of a woman (“might have been a jewess”) vainly cradling her three-year old child from attack and recalls that one of the Proles in the audience objected to such scenes being shown in front of children (Ibid: 11). Winston stops writing and becomes reflective for a moment. The narrator tells us that “He did not know what made him pour out this stream of rubbish” but to the reader the explanation is obvious. Winston had succumbed to the propaganda and was writing propaganda unconsciously, without knowing that he was doing so.

Even free of the censor, writing in private, Winston is not free of propaganda, even as he struggles against it and sometimes catches himself in reflection. Indeed, Winston is freer of propaganda when he writes under orders and under the watchful eyes of the censor, as he does at work. In this case, at least he knows that he is writing propaganda. Winston's first hand knowledge of the facts about how propaganda is made is one of the things that gives him some immunizing distance from it, as it does Julia. However, Julia is involved in making a different kind of propaganda than Winston, which gives her a different perspective. The kind of

propaganda Winston is involved with trades off facts. It relies on readers' trust in its factuality to achieve its indirect values purpose. As a propagandee, Winston is primarily bothered by the falsification of facts. He knows from his job that this practice is common, and in specific instances knows something to be a falsification because it contradicts his memory. The propaganda of fiction that Julia knows does not rely on factuality to do its job, and from this perspective one can understand why the "difference between truth and falsehood did not seem to matter to her" (Orwell, 2003: 175). Whatever the facts may have been about whether the Party had invented aeroplanes and who Oceania was supposed to be at war with was not important to her. Like the news, it was "all lies anyway", not in the sense of being factually false, but in the sense of having as its aim the manipulation of public opinion concerning values (Ibid: 177).

Julia "knew when to cheer and when to boo, and that was at all one needed" (Orwell, 2003: 179). We can add to this that she knew too that, ultimately, what the Party needed or sought was for people to be conditioned to cheer or boo on cue. For this effect, it did not matter if what people were supposed to boo or cheer at were true or false, or given in the genre of fact or fiction. We are told that in "some ways she was more acute than Winston, and far less susceptible to Party propaganda". Whereas Winston was preoccupied with the true and the false of propaganda, Julia understood better than him that its primary object, in fact and fiction, is to propagate values.

The Failure of Preventive Surveillance

For those the Party had succeeded in persuading to sincere belief in orthodoxy, policing surveillance would hardly be necessary. If people had been persuaded to believe even in the secret recesses of their hearts, there would be no worry about them straying. There would be no need for people to self-censor because it would not occur to them to think otherwise than in orthodoxy, and no need for surreptitious spying to detect them if they did.¹¹

Panoptic surveillance is a backup to propaganda, premised on the possibility of its failure, and useful in those cases when it is in danger of failing. Surreptitious surveillance is likewise a backup to panoptic surveillance, premised on the possibility of its failure, and useful in those cases when it does fail.

When Julia and Winston are talking about the possibility of being found out, Julia says that "the one thing" the Party cannot do is make you believe something in your heart. "They can make you say anything—anything—but they can't make you believe it. They can't get inside of you" (Orwell, 2003: 192). This may be true for people like Julia and Winston for whom propaganda has already failed but we are given to understand that it has achieved its object with others, who have been made to believe the orthodoxy without even realizing it. If people like Winston and Julia, knowing what they are supposed to believe but not believing it, have to put on a face to boo and cheer when they are supposed to, others do the same quite spontaneously and from the heart.

We do not know the extent to which propaganda fails in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, but there is reason to believe it may be less effective than one would think judging from appearances. Julia "took it for granted that everyone, or nearly everyone, hated the Party and would secretly break the rules if they thought it safe to do so" (Orwell, 2003: 175). The pervasiveness of surveillance is an indication that the Party expects that propaganda will fail in many cases. In this event, the next best thing is self-censoring panoptical surveillance. This too fails in Winston and Julia's case. When they believe they are being surveilled, they put on a face to appear orthodox. They

are pretty good at this, but there is always a danger of giving oneself away by some involuntary sign revealing unorthodox belief, such as the “beating of your heart”, since the “telescreen was quite delicate enough to pick it up” (Ibid: 90). This would be reason for the prudent self-censor, knowing that unorthodox thought disguised by even a good show could produce involuntary signs, to try to prevent or avoid it altogether.

Prevention of thought takes discipline. The character Syme tells Winston that “there’s no reason or excuse for committing thoughtcrime”, boasting that “It’s merely a question of self-discipline” (Orwell, 2003: 61). At the time, Winston had a strong sense that Syme would end up “vaporized”, notwithstanding that “he was not unorthodox” (Ibid: 63). Winston supposes that his flaw is that he is too intelligent, but the mere fact that he has need for self-discipline is already indicative of a flaw. If one needs to discipline oneself to orthodoxy, and even if one can succeed at it, one is already on the wrong side of it.

If propaganda has failed, panoptic self-surveillance is likely to fail too. And if one does not give oneself away involuntarily in less than perfect panoptic self-surveillance, one will give oneself voluntarily, confessing one’s secret beliefs or even doubts in some space one is foolish enough to think private. The Party’s system of surveillance may not be much good for preventing unorthodoxy, but it is extremely effective at detection. Once you have committed thought crime, it is just a matter of time before you are found out. And if the Thought Police are picking up not just obvious criminals like Winston and Julia but zealous and sincere champions of orthodoxy like Syme one wonders who will remain at the end of the day to attend the Party rallies other than children, “who adored Big Brother”.

The Dream and Failure of Newspeak

If the telescreen—propaganda and surveillance working in tandem—marks the inauguration of the Party’s revolutionary project, Newspeak gives expression to its dream. Syme, who is one of the technician-scholars working on the *Eleventh Edition of the Dictionary of Newspeak*, tells Winston that “The revolution will be complete when the language is perfect” (Orwell, 2003: 61). The ideal of Newspeak is to embody orthodoxy in such a way that it would be impossible to think otherwise, to create a kind of angelic holy will not even capable of transgression. Newspeak would “narrow the range of thoughts” so that “thoughtcrime will be literally impossible”. It reveals the dream of total propaganda and total surveillance, which is not the control of thought but the elimination of it. “Orthodoxy means not thinking—not needing to think”, Syme says. “Orthodoxy is unconsciousness” (Ibid: 61).

At the time of the events related in the story, Newspeak had not been widely adopted and its bugs had not been worked out. The work ahead was massive, involving the translation of all works from Oldspeak into Newspeak and the resolution of many technical details, not to mention the challenge of switching over from the generation brought up in Oldspeak. It was not expected that all this would be completed until as late as 2050, some 76 years! This is not surprising given the ambitiousness of the project. Syme boasts that when it comes to fruition “there will be no thought, as we understand it now” (Orwell, 2003: 61). To be sure, some progress toward the goal has already been made. Writing and reading, speaking and listening, or generically broadcasting and receiving, already take place to good extent without thought, or much of it. However, there is still quite a way to go before the faithful would be able to dispense with the need to “reflect before speaking” and “if called upon to make a political or ethical judgment . . . spray forth the correct opinions as automatically as a machine-gun spraying forth bullets” (Ibid: 352).

Re(reading) *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Nineteen Eighty-Four is often read as a bleak novel. For example, Tyner (2004: 134) finds it so bleak that he has it beginning on “a bleak day in April”. In fact, the opening sentence that begins the novel reports the weather as a “bright cold day in April” (Orwell, 2003: 3). Bleak and bright are almost opposites, and if what is taken as a bleak day is in fact bright, what seems to be a bleak novel may be quite sunny, and a little funny even.

Yes, Winston does not succeed in his struggle. His story ends badly. However, far from suggesting the triumph of propaganda and surveillance, it rather attests to their failure and the capacity of human beings to resist and transcend them in some measure, even when they are taken to limits as extreme as in the novel. After all, what finally defeats Winston is neither propaganda nor surveillance, but torture, and we should hardly be surprised about how far and deep its terrible powers can reach.

Moreover, the novel does not end as Winston’s story ends. It ends rather with an appendix. This appendix is written in a future time from which the action that takes place in the novel is spoken of in the past tense. However, it is impossible to say exactly when it was supposed to have been written, and Orwell uses torturous past tense constructions that frustrate the effort even to form a chronology. But from whatever time the author of the appendix writes it is evident that Newspeak has failed because it is spoken of in the past.

This appendix—technical, scholarly and seemingly factual like Goldstein’s book—is a rather odd and even unorthodox sort of thing to include in a novel. Orwell considered these pieces sufficiently integral that, at the risk of losing a good deal of money, he refused the Book-of-the-Month Club’s demand to excise them (Shelden, 2006: 470). One effect Orwell achieves by integrating these pieces is that any simple and reassuring distinction between fact and fiction is confounded. Communication in either genre is problematized with respect to how it may figure in relation to values and value agendas. The appendix, additionally, has the effect of accenting the incommensurability of the time of the novel with historical time, as if to bring home to the reader that it is, after all, a work of fiction, and its world a fictional world.

To be sure, the novel does have an obvious reference to historical reality and it incorporates features of Russian society under Stalin that Orwell would have read about. It also incorporates what Orwell learned about propaganda from his reading of English literature, newspapers, and boys magazines, as well as from his experience at the BBC. By Orwell’s own account, the novel was a “warning” about what could happen in England if certain tendencies developed (Shelden, 2006: 474).

However, it does not do the novel justice to read it as if it were a work of social science that succeeds or fails depending on how accurately it describes some historical period. And if the novel is read as a prediction about the future, it seems evident today that its prediction has not come to pass, which makes it easy to dismiss it as a dated and largely irrelevant “period piece”, as does Epstein (2005: 69).

Certainly there are some obvious parallels between the world of the novel and contemporary society, particularly as concerns what happens by way of propaganda and surveillance in the name of peace and security. However, the differences seem no less obvious. For example, with respect to surveillance in our society, policing relies heavily on databases, as do a range of other purposes from marketing to public health. In many of these instances surveillance is not aimed directly at preventing or detecting undesired thought or behaviour, as invariably it is in the novel. Often, the point of surveillance is not to prevent thought or

behaviour but to collect information about how people are doing or what they are thinking that is accurate and reliable as possible, whether for the purpose of product marketing or designing health and social programs that are supposed to meet people's needs. The facts matter. Our archives, records departments, and statistical agencies are not as value neutral as they would have us believe, and ultimately figure in a project of social control, but they do not routinely erase the facts and substitute expedient lies, although such things may happen in extreme circumstances of war.

With respect to propaganda, there appears to be no central Ministry of Truth that controls all media, even if there are powerful agencies operating behind the scenes that aspire to this ideal in some measure, and a significant concentration of media ownership conducive to conformity of opinion about facts and values. The propaganda of fact—whether concerning the performance of the economy, trends in morbidity and mortality, or events occurring in countries with which we are in conflict—is seldom so extreme that it bears no relation to the facts. For many, if not most propaganda purposes, it is enough to fudge the facts or present them selectively with a slant persuading toward desired beliefs or value judgments.

However, if the society depicted in the novel does not accurately describe contemporary society in various respects, it is important to recognize that in many respects it would also fail as a description of Orwell's England, or even Stalin's Russia. The “smelly little orthodoxies” (Orwell, 2002b: 185) Orwell encountered in British newspapers, literature, and politics were not as widely held as the orthodoxy of the Party, even if they were propagated and policed in similar ways. And even Stalin was not so ambitious as to create a 76-year plan!

One should not let such lack of resemblance spoil the fun of reading *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. It is after all, as Posner (2005) emphasizes, a satire, and uses the genre's conceits. Satire does not describe reality so much as it illuminates, highlights and accents features of it through exaggeration, caricature or even distortion. If yesterday, today or in some tomorrow the novel has something to say about propaganda, surveillance, and the relationship between them it is because by seeing them writ large in extreme, exaggerated form in the world of the novel—archetypes as it were—we are better able to notice and watch out for them at work in smaller and sometimes murkier ways in our world. One can argue about resemblances, perhaps claiming more or less resemblance depending on whether one is prone to be a critic or apologist of the status quo. I submit that value of the novel lies not so much in how or how well it reflects our world as it does in how much light it throws upon it.

Rieff (2007) has noted a tendency for contemporary writers to enlist Orwell in support of their favourite causes. On his view, it is truer to Orwell to read him “not as a shortcut to making the points we deem important, but an example to be emulated of how to think and how to write” (Orwell, 2003: 8). Indeed, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a story about reading, writing and thinking in a time of pervasive propaganda and surveillance.

Throughout, Winston struggles both as a reader and a writer with a censoring propagandist looking over his shoulder and telling him what to think.¹² His first-hand knowledge of how propaganda and surveillance works appears to afford him some critical distance and measure of freedom from the stifling orthodoxy of the Party. Perhaps Orwell hoped that by learning how propaganda and surveillance work, as they are writ large in the novel his readers could gain some greater freedom from the “smelly little orthodoxies which are now contending for our souls” (Orwell, 2002b: 185). In view of the thematization of surveillance and propaganda in the novel, the attentive reader is led to question his or her own reading, and hopefully with greater thoroughness than Winston does. If *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is propaganda, it is not quite

like the propaganda in the novel because it leaves the reader in a condition of uncertainty about fact and fiction, and in the end about not just what one is supposed to believe but about what one ought to believe.

Notes

- 1 For example, on the former, see (Hughey, 1996) and (Pratkanis & Aronson, 2002); on the latter see (Lyon, 1994; 2001) and (Wood, 2006).
- 2 Although there are robust literatures both on propaganda and surveillance, they have developed more or less independently of one another. I am not aware of any studies that have attempted to link the two, although Lyon's (2006) study of 9/11, drawing from Mathiesen's (1997) work on synopticism and the viewer society, is suggestive.
- 3 For example, see (Bennett & O'Rourke, 2006; Black, 2001; Marlin, 2002; Ross, 2002).
- 4 Lasswell's understanding of propaganda is not as broad as it may seem thus baldly defined since he distinguishes propaganda from education and from shared deliberation that is not prejudiced at the outset toward a preferred conclusion (1927: 627).
- 5 It is noteworthy that Lasswell (1927: 628) applies "the term propaganda to the creation of value dispositions or attitudes". What is most striking about how propaganda works in Orwell's novel, whether the propaganda of fact or the propaganda of fiction, is its invariable association with the shaping of "value dispositions or attitudes".
- 6 This essay is Orwell's clearest statement about how propaganda works in literature, although he does not use the term "propaganda" in it. However, Orwell makes his famous statement that "All art is propaganda" in an essay on Dickens published on the same day (Orwell, 2002b: 173).
- 7 When I use the term "panopticism" or "panoptical surveillance", I mean surveillance operating according to the inspection principle. This usage captures Bentham's intent, since he took pains to distinguish surveillance in the panopticon according to this principle from what he called spying, which works according to the opposite belief that one is not under surveillance (Bentham, 1995: 94). Foucault, who is largely responsible for the contemporary interest in panopticism, also uses the term this way (Foucault, 1975: 195-228). It should be noted, however, that many who write about panopticism today do not limit it to surveillance under the inspection principle (e.g., Boyne, 2000; Poster, 2001).
- 8 Bentham's term for what I am calling "panoptical surveillance" is "monitoring"; his term for "surreptitious surveillance" is "spying" (Bentham, 1995: 94). This important distinction is overlooked in all of the literature on panopticism that I have seen, including Strub's (1989) otherwise excellent study comparing Bentham and Orwell.
- 9 It is worth noting here that Jowett and O'Donnell claim that "coins were the first genuine form of mass propaganda, in that they were widely circulated and clearly were intended to represent the power of the state with the symbology stamped on them" (2006: 55).

- 10 Mathiesen (1997: 223) interprets the dual capacity of the telescreen differently (and I think less faithfully to Orwell's text), contrasting panopticism (one watching many) and synopticism (many watching one). Regardless, synopticism is somewhat analogous with mass media propaganda and his observations about how synopticism developed in step with panopticism from the 1700s apply equally to propaganda.
- 11 Ellul associates the success of propaganda with the redundancy of policing: "When man . . . will end by obeying with enthusiasm, convinced of the excellence of what he is forced to do . . . the police will have nothing to do" (1973: xviii).
- 12 *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is not just fiction, but meta-fiction—fiction that draws attention to its own fictionality and relationship to its reader. McKay (1994) makes this a theme in writing about the novel as what he calls "meta-propaganda" (self-conscious about its own situation vis-à-vis propaganda).

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About the Author

Michael Yeo (Ph.D., McMaster University) is Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Philosophy at Laurentian University. His main area of specialization is ethics and public policy, with particular focus on privacy and health information. He has lectured and published extensively in this field and has prepared analytic reports on privacy for the Canadian Biotechnology Advisory Council and the Privacy Commission of Canada. A third, substantially revised edition of his book *Concepts and Cases in Nursing Ethics* was published by Broadview Press in the Fall of 2010. His current research is on the interface between science and values in public policy.

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