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**Totalitarianism through media: A comparative analysis of human relations**

The idea to consider “media as an environment” was first popularized by Marshall McLuhan in his book *Medium is the Massage”*(Mitchell and Hansen, xiii). Mitchell and Hansen explains media is “something that opens onto the notion of a form of life, of a general environment for living (xiii) Hence, we as humans are unaware that media is a part of our environment because we are so engrossed by its power. On the other hand, Gleason states through technological developments, such as “advertising, radio, films, mass education, and the press made despotic control far more total than it could ever have been in the past” (Gleason 148). He showcases the danger of using media as a mean of totalitarianism, which was shown in George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-four.* Orwell uses similar medium, such as propaganda, Newspeak, telescreen, and rectification to enforce a totalitarian method, which still haunts us in our present days (Crick, 159, 160, 189).

Furthermore, Gleason summarizes Carl J. Friedrich on totalitarian society where he states “totalitarian dictatorship consists of an ideology … a communications monopoly … and a centrally directed economy.”(Gleason, 151)***.*** Thus, this brings *The Circle* by Dave Eggers into the conversation because he predicts a communication monopolylike “The Circle” could take over the manipulation of information and total transparency of everyone on earth. (Eggers, 207) The book was published in 2013, therefore, the content is very relatable and quite similar to what Facebook is doing to us. On the contrary, Nineteen Eighty-Four was written in 1948. Therefore, the type of media used is different due to the technology available in the two time periods. However, there is similarity in how both authors uses media as a way to brainwash, educate and most importantly, spy on people.

This corresponds with Cohen’s article where she focuses on how “surveillance” through social media. Moreover, she specifically labels Facebook ads as “penetrative commodification”, merging the economic and social environment on this virtual space. She argues as a society, Facebook has broken down the “top down model” of media. Instead, we are now “prosumers” providing “free labour” to communication monopolies (5, 7, 8). They can then commodify that information by showing us advertisements in our newsfeed, which fits with the content we share (7-8). Miller and Sheperd share a similar opinion with Cohen on how social media merges different environments. Their research on blogs summarizes David Weinberger that “blogs has redrawn the line between the private and the public dimensions of our lives”(Miller and Sheperd, 1). This extends further into the emergence of “reality literature” and how it turned “celebrities into regular people” (3, 5). For example, Bill Clinton was criticized for his eligibility for presidency because of his scandal with infidelity. We can see how media is breaching into Clinton’s personal life and linking it with his public persona. Moreover, his life becomes a form of entertainment, which is a type of “reality literature” (5). Other than that, they believe we have become “neutralized” because we are so used to being “mediated voyuerists” and “mediated exhibitionists”, who gains a sense of fulfillment through sharing and looking at other’s content. These scholars both showed media has a way to change or breakdown relationships between political, economical, and social environments.

This leads me into exploring how media enables totalitarianistic control from the merging of political, economic, and social relationshipsin dystopian literature. Hence, I will conduct a comparative analysis of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *The Circle* where I will look at how “media as an environment” contributed to constructing a totalitarianistic utopian society. It is important to look at both texts in order to identify the true danger of media. The significance of this paper is to examine the invisibility of the “environment” that creates conditions for totalitarianism.The invisibility of the “environment” poses a larger threat on the existence of individuality, which is essential to our humanity.

Its important to keep in mind Nineteen Eighty-Four and The Cirlce are two very different books since they employ their own ideologies fitting to their own times. The two authors uses kairos to help them contruct a realistic narrative with the fitting ideologies, technology, and society.

Surveillance through technology was a huge theme in both texts. George Orwell introduces the use of telescreen, which can broadcast and spy on people at the same time. However, Orwell’s approach to surveillance is more towards the unknown and fear for the party. This is clear with Winston and Julia’s relationship throughout the book. In the beginning of their relationship, Julia brought Winston to a place where she thought there was no way they would be spied on. We can see this from ‘There is nothing big enough to hide a mike in. Besides, I’ve been here before.’ (Crick, 259) Later on in the book, we learned that they were being watched in an apartment they shared even though they thought it was abandoned. We can see this from “The picture had fallen to the floor, uncovering the telescreen behind it.” (Crick, 349) Their private times were being exploited because we know they were surrounded by Thought Police. They were being spied on even though they didn’t realize it, which perhaps highlights McLuhan’s “invisibility of the environment”. Although McLuhan meant it in a way that we are so immersed in media that we don’t notice it is there, I suggest that Orwell is highlighting this for us in a more literal way. Cohen’s idea of “surveillance” and “collective intelligence” shows that even in our “neo liberal capitalism” society, we as a part of the mass can still easily be controlled and watched over through technology. Cohen focuses on harnessing this “collective intelligence”, while Orwell focuses on how to force one ideology using media into everyone’s “collective intelligence”.

Furthermore, this example shows a breach between “public and private” (Miller and Sheperd) as well as social with political. Winston and Julia’s relationship were being watched and disregarded because the party doesn’t want love and emotions to foster between men and women. We can see this from “The only recognized purpose of marriage was to beget children for the service of the party”. Thus, telescreen in Nineteen Eighty-Four was used to infiltrate people’s private lives, merging one’s private and public, social and political environments together. This is, as Gleason notes “absolute decisiveness” employed on the mass through media.

On the other hand, Dave Eggers’s *The Circle* uses a similar technology known as SeeChange cameras to construct and harness “surveillance” and “ collective intelligence”. The main difference between the use of surveillance in two texts is the democratization of information in ‘SeeChange. This is ultimate transparency. No filter. See everything. Always’ (Eggers, 69). This drives Circle users to willingly participate. Hence, as a group they create “collective intelligence”, where everyone knows everything that’s happening. Eggers uses “sense of fulfillment” through participation as a mean to employ totalitarianism. It is coherent with Gleason’s ideas of “general will” and “mass democracy” because The Circle is developing a singular belief that “transparency” and “ Completion” is good by “ harnessing general intellect”. It becomes so apparent that Kalden even comments ‘We’re closing the circle around everyone – it’s a totalitarian nightmare’. (Eggers, 486)

Furthermore, SeeChange cameras also merges private and public, social, economic, and political environments together. At first, this technology was created by Eamon Bailey, one of the three wise men who owns the Circle, to observe surfing conditions (Eggers, 63). However, it soon was used for political reasons as Bailey explains how it could be used to prevent crime (67). Although this started as a personal project, it was put into commercial and political use because The Circle is selling these cameras to everyone in the world. Now the police can spy on everyone in the city, while The Circle is earning money through this technology.

Moreover, Mae’s experience of going transparent also merges these three environments together. When she was at her parent’s house for dinner, she later caught them conducting sexual activities, where thousands of her watchers saw it through her camera as well (371). This incident itself shows in a literal way how media is exploiting our private lives. The traction and views Mae is getting through her video feeds is bringing in so much more revenue for The Circle. This sort of “mediated exhibitionism” behavior uses “surveillance” to create “reality literature” which is b also being “commodified”, just as Cohen and Miller and Sheperd has shown in their work(Cohen, 8, 10; Miller and Sheperd, 5,). In addition, Mae is consistently ignorant towards the effect of these cameras on her personal life, even though her friendship with Annie and relationship with her parents has deteriorated. This breaking down of relationship is quite similar to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, that using media to employ totalitarianism prevents people from having private relations. In the end, “general intellect” of the Circle, as well as the Party in Nineteen Eighty-Four, is the only belief system left (Cohen, 10). This is exactly what “Big Brother” would want, except these ideas are not forced into Mae’s head by fear (Crick, 157). She truly believes this will be better for humankind.

Although *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was written in 1948, Orwell’s ideas are still very convincing in terms of using media to enforce totalitarianism. One of his most original ideas was using language. In Oceania, people use Newspeak to communicate, where most phrases and ideas are shortened. Just as how the four ministries of the government which are “The Ministry of Truth”, “The Ministry of Peace”, “The Ministry of Love”, and “The Ministry of Plenty” are know as “Minitrue, Minipax, Miniluv and Miniplenty” (Crick, 159 – 160). This is to prevent ideas against the party coming up in one’s conversation. Syme, a character in the book explains “Don’t you see the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? In the end we shall make thoughtcrime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it” (Crick, 201). The use of language is much more invisible than other means of totalitarian control. It amplifies McLuhan’s “media as a general environment of living”, because we cannot escape from communicating with other people (Mitchell and Hansen, xiii). As a medium, the use of language showcases “absolute decisiveness” in one’s personal life (Gleason, 148). Again, there is a breach between private and public spaces through media. This is where humans are used as vessels of media to communicate a singular set of ideology determined by the party.

Since The Circle was written quite recently, Dave Eggers focuses on use of today’s technology to employ totalitarianism. The two most controversial tools are Completion and Demoxie. The idea of Completion uses a “cradle to grave” approach, where one person will be watched over their entire life using TruYouth and SeeChange (Eggers, 486). Demoxie forces people to have a Circle account in order to vote. This merges all social, economic, and political environments together because people will be using Circle to communicate on a personal level, while they will vote with the same tool. At the same time, The Circle is the only company that benefits from all the flow of information. In this sense, there is a lot of similarity with how the Party in Nineteen Eighty-Four tracks people throughout their life and the type of “absolute decisiveness” that runs in both texts (Gleason, 148). The mass will be monitored and brainwashed from birth to death because of the extend of control from these two conglomerates.

In both texts, the invisibility of the “environment” known as media is seen through harnessing people’s “sense of fulfillment” and use of Newspeak to limit thought processes (Mitchell and Hansen, xiii, Cohen, 17). All the media used in both texts also shows an extent of totalitarianism, especially through creating “general intellect” and “absolute decisiveness” (Cohen, 17; Gleason, 148) This merges the public and private, as well as social, economic, and political environments. The biggest difference in how media was used was through fear and harnessing “fulfillment” through participation. It is clear to see how both texts is written specifically for their time period, using kairos to create the best totalitarian dystopian society possible. This research would be more insightful and applicable if I was able to compare these fictional media to similar medias in reality. There are a lot of similarities between The Circle and The Party to Facebook and our governments. It is impossible for us to predict whether these haunting novels could become a reality with the development of technology right now.

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