



Original Article

Surveillance and Technology as Tools of Control in Dystopian Worlds: 1984 and the Circle

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Abstract

The main focus of this paper is to discuss how society is controlled through surveillance and how technological devices act as key tools of oppression in dystopian literature, with particular emphasis on George Orwell's '1984' and Dave Eggers' 'The Circle'. In the dystopian worlds depicted in these novels, technological devices are used to monitor, regulate, and influence people's behavior, which leads to significant ethical and societal concerns. The paper explores how the authors view the impact of surveillance on aspects such as privacy, autonomy, and individuality. It also raises the important question of how such dystopian scenarios could develop in contemporary society. Dystopian literature provides a strong warning to modern society about the risks of giving too much power to the state or to unchecked technological development. By exaggerating existing trends and behaviors, these works illuminate the possible consequences of current actions. For example, 'The Handmaid's Tale' by Margaret Atwood critiques patriarchal attitudes and religious fundamentalism by envisioning a future where misogyny is institutionalized, and women are reduced to breeding tools. Through this, Atwood underscores the importance of gender equality and secularism. Another key theme in dystopian literature is the loss of individuality and independent thought. The protagonists in these novels often face the overwhelming pressure of conformity, either through the loss of personal identity or through the dominance of a uniform, consumer-driven culture. Characters who question or resist this often face persecution or are labeled as subversive. This theme is evident in Lois Lowry's 'The Giver', where memories of the past are deliberately erased, and in Kazuo Ishiguro's 'Never Let Me Go', where clone children are raised to become organ donors and accept their fate. Both novels highlight the dangers of historical erasure and the undervaluing of certain lives in the name of progress. Literature that explores the darker aspects of society, such as many dystopian novels, can serve as a mirror reflecting current societal issues while also warning about potential future developments.

Two such novels, George Orwell's '1984' and Dave Eggers' 'The Circle', set in different times and cultural contexts, offer similar warnings about the dual-edged impact of surveillance and technology. This paper analyzes the role of surveillance in these novels as a means of altering individual behavior, suppressing resistance, and consolidating power. It compares the overt, intrusive, and violent surveillance techniques used in '1984' with the voluntarily widespread, yet pervasive, methods used in 'The Circle'. In '1984', citizens are constantly watched through telescreens that monitor their actions and speech, while the Thought Police keep an eye on their thoughts for any sign of rebellion. The novel's iconic slogan, "Big Brother is Watching You," captures the feeling of constant surveillance and control. In 'The Circle', published 69 years later in 2013, a modern surveillance state is portrayed where people willingly share their personal experiences using small cameras called SeeChange—devices about the size of an Oreo that can stream real-time video. These cameras promote total transparency of all activities, further eroding privacy and autonomy.

Keywords: Dystopia, Surveillance, Technology, Control, Privacy, Autonomy, Totalitarianism, Panopticon Psychological Manipulation, Individual Freedom, Social Control

Introduction

Dystopian literature often illustrates societies where the game of power is practiced through the manipulation of the players.

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In Orwell's 1984, technological surveillance via Big Brother suppresses dissent and enforces the ideological consensus of the society. In Dave Eggers' *The Circle*, the society's social media and digital tracking are pervasive in an environment of imposed transparency and privacy loss. The two novels demonstrate how technology thanking surveillance to coexist can be used to manipulate conduct, erase autonomy, and achieve their hierarchical control. In turn, these texts underline not only the ethical but also psychological and social effects of technology-driven control.

Significance of the Study

In a world where the excessive technological advancement of the 21st century is taking place, issues of surveillance, data privacy, and social control are becoming more and more important. Through the analysis of dystopian literature, this study provides a platform for some of the ideas and practices that will be beneficial to the environment, and sustainability, and help you meet your long-term goals as well as your ethical commitments to the world.

Research Question

The question that is being investigated is: How do George Orwell and Dave Eggers criticize the use of surveillance and technology in their novels and what are the consequences for human autonomy and freedom?

Assumptions

It is assumed that the readers have common knowledge about 1984 and *The Circle*. The above statement also states both novels are deliberately adding exaggerated technological possibilities on the subjects of social and ethical issues. The analysis is based on the premise that technology itself is not good or bad but rather that the impacts depend on its uses.

Limitations

The research has its limitations; it is focused on only two novels which might not represent the entire genre of dystopian literature. The study is based on textual analysis and does not include empirical data on real-world surveillance. Reader interpretations may vary according to their views on the relationship between technology and privacy.

The Literature Review

Foucault's idea of the panopticon is a central model of viewing surveillance in literature, which implies that constant and unobserved presence of the police makes people change their behavior (Foucault, 1977). Orwell's 1984 is lauded for its portrayal of Big Brother as the epitome of totalitarian preventive surveillance (Pynchon, 2010). Eggers' *The Circle* comes under scrutiny for being a vehicle for viral data flow and corporate monitoring (McClennen, 2014). Researcher's stress both books are examining also that the surveillance makes not only political or corporate ends but also internalized social regulation through fear and self-regulation.

Hypotheses

The hypothesis of the research is surveillance and technology in dystopian literature are the main tools to ensure conformity and prevent the emergence of individuality. The conceptual and ethical dimensions arising from ingenious yet unregulated technology have been depicted in diverse ways in dystopian portrayals of technology.

Research Methodology

Type of Study: Qualitative literary analysis.

Primary Sources: George Orwell's 1984 (1949) and Dave Eggers' *The Circle* (2013).

Secondary Sources: Scholarly articles, literary critiques, and ethical analyses related to surveillance and technology.

Data Collection: Close reading of textual examples, thematic categorization, and comparative analysis.

Analysis Technique: Thematic analysis focused on the use of surveillance, technology, and control mechanisms in both novels.

Main Body

1. Surveillance as a Mechanism of Control

At the beginning of the novel, the reader learns that the slogan or motto is: "Big Brother is watching you." The pervasive surveillance in 1984 is shown through citizens who are always being watched, and they are constantly discussed on the streets and accused by informants, Who are also under surveillance? A sense of fear is created, along with self-monitoring behaviors among the citizens. This situation contrasts with Foucault's panopticon model, where the guards are the ones observing, but in this case, the people themselves are the observers, leading them to control and regulate each other without the need for external force.

In *The Circle*, surveillance is portrayed to be a given fact through media networks and wearable devices. Mae Holland observes, "Secrets are lying. Sharing is caring. Privacy is theft." Surveillance is regarded as an internal obligation, which depicts how technology modifies ethics to enforce compliance.

Analysis: Knowledge extends across both texts, which indicate that surveillance is not only external monitoring but also internal conditioning and the resultant conformity is a natural adjustment to the systemic surveillance.

2. Technology as a Tool of Social Manipulation

In 1984, the Party distorts the truth about the world, shown through the Power Ministry's control over history and the destruction of words related to freedom. Newspeak is a way to limit people's thinking, and Orwell argues that controlling information is the same as controlling people's minds. In *The Circle*, the media aren't the only ones spreading information, but technology also pushes people to spy on themselves. Employees willingly share personal details with each other, and this kind of peer pressure helps spread the company's values. Eggers warns that people who often guess or make assumptions, whether they realize it or not, support the idea of staying neutral, which can be worse than taking a stand.

Analysis: While Orwell shows a clear, direct use of technology to control, Eggers shows a more hidden way

that uses social influences. However, both books show the dangers of systems that value power or efficiency more than people's right to choose.

3. Erosion of Privacy and Autonomy

The two novels highlight how both surveillance and technology threaten privacy and individuality. In '1984', Winston Smith's privacy is violated as the government criminalizes his thoughts through the concept of "thought crime." In 'The Circle', Mae's every action is constantly monitored, leaving her with no real freedom of choice.

Analysis: Privacy is no longer just a technical concern but a significant issue for freedom of thought and moral autonomy. The authors focus on individuals living in societies where surveillance is routine, leading to compliance without genuine belief.

4. Psychological and Social Consequences

Surveillance leads to fear, stress, and people conforming to rules. In 1984, ongoing monitoring causes paranoia, as Winston says, "Nothing was your own except the few cubic centimeters inside their mind. In *The Circle*, watching each other causes anxiety and competition among people, showing that joining voluntarily can be as controlling as being forced to watch.

Analysis: Dystopian surveillance affects mental health and how people interact, showing that the effects of technology go beyond just making things more efficient or productive. It also shows how people get involved and what they think about their situation.

Conclusion

George Orwell's 1984 and Dave Eggers' *The Circle* presents the argument that surveillance and technology whether utilized by coercion or having people voluntarily do so act as the most effective means of social control. They both express their point of view that normalizing surveillance and the loss of autonomy can make the people instruments of the very systems which are pretending to protect or empower them. The comparisons between the two dystopian visions made in this paper bring out the ethical issues in a digital world which are the most urgent now, including the dilemmas of security, transparency, and freedom.

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Conflicts of interest:

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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11. "Surveillance Capitalism: A Critical Analysis of *The Circle*" (*Koya University Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*) — provides interdisciplinary references (Andrejevic, Deleuze, Foucault) useful for theoretical framing.
12. Rashmi S. Patil, *Surveillance and Control in George Orwell's 1984: A Critical Insight* — discusses Party technology like telescreens, Thought Police, and Newspeak as surveillance tools.