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The Overpowering Technology

The evolution of technology throughout time has made the following question arise in our society—are we in control of technology, or is it controlling us? In Orwell's *1984*, the citizens of Oceania are restricted from basic human rights through the means of technology, which plays a major role in the oppression of their freedom. They are deprived from any privacy and control over their own lives with technological devices such as telescreens, memory holes, and newspeak. Although *1984* illustrates an extreme dystopian world, this novel acts as a warning of what could potentially become a reality with overpowering technology.

A prime example of devices being used to control people is the telescreens. These devices keep the citizens of Oceania under surveillance every passing second; “[They] 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 3). The people of this society adapted to a world where all conversations, facial expressions, and movements are detected through the telescreen, then analyzed for any sign of rebellion against the party. Telescreens serve not only as a surveillance method, but also as a propaganda tool; they broadcast news that were manipulated in order to brainwash the citizens and keep them under control.

Similarly to how telescreens are censored to transmit only information that is favorable for the party, in modern day this can be seen with Internet censorship and surveillance in countries with oppressive governments such as Egypt, Iran, and China (Editorial Board). We have propaganda transmitted to us everyday through televisions which most closely resemble the telescreens. This instills the eerie idea that we might also be under the control of the government today through the media displayed to us.

Another technological component in this novel is the memory hole—a device used to destroy any evidence and records that could harm the image of the party. This is a major method of manipulation as the government is technically re-writing history and eliminating information they do not want to be known. The only information allowed to be out in the world of *1984* must portray Big Brother in a positive manner. Likewise, our country is under control of President Trump who has been known to have media outlets investigated simply because they portrayed him in a negative light. (Klaas). Not only this, but he has actually “scrubbed climate change from government websites as though it never existed” (Klaas). Actions such as these by our president and government lead us to question what other information is being eliminated or kept from us. We might not have this exact device existing yet, but there are other ways that the job of a memory hole is being executed today.

With the technological invention of Newspeak, words are destroyed and language is cut down to the bare minimum. The purpose of this dictionary being to “narrow range of thought...[making] thought-crime literally impossible, because there [would] be no words in which to express it” (Orwell 52). Newspeak is the official language of Oceania and is intended to control not only the way the citizens

communicate, but also the way they think. With a limited language they will not be able to have negative thoughts about the party and “Newspeak will remove all traces of individuality” (Jackson 381). This is ultimately a major example of technology usage to control people by restraining them from freedom of thought and speech. It has been proven through a study by linguist Whorf on Native American languages, that language does in fact impact our cognitive processes (Blank). Therefore, the creation of Newspeak effectively influences the citizens thoughts on Big Brother and the party.

Many might believe that Orwell’s dystopian world does not reflect in our society since “technology does not function to ‘make easier’ citizens’ lives, make more effective their work, education, [and] communication” (Przywara 33) as it does in our world. Although technology does make everyday life easier for us, unlike for the citizens in *1984*, we have become so dependent on it and fail to recognize the negative effects. Technology does not fully contribute to control us as it does in the novel, but it would be no surprise if it does in the future. With the reliance on technology, it is made easier to be manipulated.

In 1948, Orwell expressed his fears of what mankind would become if a totalitarian government along with the use of technology took over—resulting in his prophetic novel *1984*. We are warned about the dangers that can occur with overpowering technology as it continues to evolve. Telescreens and memory holes are yet to exist, but our cellphones are certainly capable of keeping us under control with the accessible media provided. We must pay close attention to Orwell’s warning, not allowing his visions to become a reality.

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