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Dossier

Exchanging Glances with Big Brother: Diffuse Surveillance in Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four and Today

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Résumé

Français / English

L'objectif de cet article est de comparer les dispositifs de surveillance décrits par G. Orwell dans son roman intitulé 1984, avec ceux mis en œuvre dans la société contemporaine. Outre l'existence de similarités flagrantes entre la fiction et la réalité, on constate que le développement des outils technologiques a contribué à l'émergence d'une surveillance « diffuse ». Celle-ci se caractérise essentiellement par sa décentralisation et par l'implication d'acteurs variés (incluant aussi bien les institutions, les entreprises que les individus) qui jouent un rôle crucial dans la régulation sociale.

This article compares the means of surveillance depicted by George Orwell in his novel Nineteen Eighty-Four with those used in contemporary society to identify similarities that exist between Orwell's fictional work and modern reality. Our analysis illustrates how technological developments have led to the emergence of a "diffuse" surveillance, which is a decentralized monitoring process that involves different sets of actors (including governments, companies and individuals) at varying degrees.

Entrées d'index

Mots clés : Surveillance, 1984, Technologies, Panoptique, Internet.

Key words : Surveillance, Nineteen Eighty-Four, Technology, Panopticon, Internet.

Texte intégral

Introduction

Exactly 70 years ago, in 1949, the British novelist George Orwell's dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was first published. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* portrays a fictional world where a totalitarian regime is equipped with advanced technological means of surveillance to suppress anyone suspected of holding oppositional views. For most of the latter half of the 20th century, the novel remained very popular as it was often viewed as a critical depiction of the authoritarian extremes of the Stalinist regime in the USSR. More recently, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has regained its popularity due to the rapidly growing digital surveillance of our online and actual lives by public and private actors in both democratic and authoritarian countries. Many would argue that Orwell's worst nightmares have come true in today's surveillance societies in which all actors practice surveillance against one another and technologically advanced states and technology companies are in an advantageous position. The main purpose of this article is to compare the main themes of surveillance in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* with the elements of surveillance in contemporary society. We seek to establish to the extent to which Orwell's predictions or prophecies have been proven correct, and to identify patterns of surveillance that are similar across the novel and today.

But what do we precisely mean by surveillance? The word surveillance has its roots in the French language; it was adopted into English from the French verb "*surveiller*" (to watch over), which itself was a combination of the Latin words *super* (over) and *vigilantia* (watchfulness) (The Vocabularist, 2015). A common understanding of the term surveillance is "the focused, systemic and routine attention for personal details for purposes of influence, management, protection or direction" (Lyon, 2007, p. 14). Two main perspectives exist about the relationship between technology and surveillance. Technophiles support the idea that technologies used in surveillance are positive, as they empower citizens: individuals can track and denounce injustice, stand for their rights, control authorities, and even become agents of social control by monitoring their surroundings; in that way, surveillance is seen as a means of protection and safety. Technophobes, however, emphasize the threat technology can pose to individual freedom, privacy and fundamental rights (Bennett et Raab, 2003). Moreover, the uploading of user-generated data such as movies or pictures that are somehow shared and made accessible through channels such as social media platforms and mobile phones can serve a complementary role in the surveillant assemblage (Haggerty et Ericson, 2000). In this sense, surveillance technologies can be used to collect information about citizens, classify them, categorize people into groups and even manipulate them. To sum up, as stated by Sewell and Barker (2001), "neither good, nor bad, but dangerous", surveillance presents an ethical paradox.

An imaginary panoptic eye, which sees everything and tries to control and regulate individuals' behavior and personal thoughts, has been the focus of science fiction novels and films. "The

Eye in the Sky" by Philip K. Dick (1957), for example, is a novel based on the story of individuals who are watched by the "Cosmic Authority" and who have to fulfill its will to avoid punishment. Stanley Kubrick's renowned "2001: A Space Odyssey" (1968), which portrays a supercomputer dictator called "HAL 9000", is just one of many similar films telling of a dystopian future centered on an imaginary panoptic eye.

By basing our analysis on G. Orwell's novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, we identify similarities and differences between fictional surveillance and its reality. We diverge, however, from a primary feature of the definition presented above by omitting "surveillance for protection" from our focus. Rather, our primary interest lies with the negative aspects of surveillance as we compare Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* with the increase in surveillance in modern times. We also consider surveillance a wider effort as it may go beyond the personal. Surveillance is not simply routine attention to personal details; it also may involve censoring language and falsification of history as part of comprehensive political surveillance.

Based on our broader understanding of surveillance, the main elements of the surveillance regime that we identify in the book are the figure of Big Brother, the Telescreens, the Spies, the Thought Police, the falsification of history, Newspeak and Doublethink. Big Brother is the eternal leader of the Ingsoc, or English Socialism, the Party in power in Oceania. The Telescreens are devices that have the features of a television, security camera and microphone at the same time. The Spies is a network of professionals and volunteers who work for the government towards suppressing dissent, and the Thought Police arrest and penalize those offending the Party or Big Brother. The falsification of history is carried out under the pretext of rectification of the records. There also is the ongoing process of creating a politically controlled language named Newspeak. Doublethink simply entails holding two contradictory views simultaneously and thus eases the process of indoctrinating Party members to propaganda.

An overarching similarity between the book and today's surveillance regimes is the extensive use of communication technologies. As modern technologies have become indispensable in our daily lives, we can speak of a technology-surveillance nexus. Modern communication technologies, particularly the Internet, enable governments and other actors to keep masses of people under surveillance. The use of advanced technology for political surveillance has recently become a pervasive phenomenon. From China to the United States, a number of states are reported to use legal and illegal means of conducting surveillance. The use of the Internet, especially social media platforms, allows technology companies to gather a lot of information. Moreover, the data gathered about individuals is usually available to governments. For example, in some cases, applicants are required to provide their social media handles as they apply for visas. Similarities between the technology-surveillance nexus in real life and in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* cannot be denied.

But, even if similarities exist in the surveillance displayed in these two contexts, the monitoring process in real life tends to be more "diffuse" than in Orwell's novel. We argue that less

centralized, subtler surveillance, referred to in this article as “diffuse surveillance”, is predominant in contemporary society. This mode of monitoring is essentially based on the existence of “intangible” others or institutions; individuals have the sensation of being perpetually surveilled at different levels and by different actors, “others or institutions to which the self has only limited access” (Sullivan, 2016, p. 96). The feeling of being watched permanently is provoked not only by the “diffuse” mode in which this surveillance is displayed, but also by the fact that, in modern society, the “role of state bureaucracy is much less clear cut” (Huysman, 2014, p. 127). Less visible monitoring makes “this watchful invisibility more performative and the control of movement more effective” (Lemos, 2011 p. 7). Having no information about *who* watches them and *when* they are submitted to an other’s gaze, individual reactions vary. It can leave people with the sensation that they will be sanctioned for their eventual misbehaviors, fear that encourages them to constrain themselves, but also can leave them with the feeling that they “have freedom to produce information and be mobile” (Firmino *et al.*, 2011, p. 140). This subtle “diffuse surveillance” is thus linked to empowerment as it can be enacted by individuals to watch their peers and even the authorities, but also can be connected to fear, consumption and alienation by technologies (Codron, 2018)

The following part outlines the technology-surveillance nexus and elaborates on the concept of “diffuse surveillance”. Subsequent sections examine the main aspects of “diffuse surveillance” in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and today. The case analysis illustrates how Orwell’s elements of surveillance in the novel resemble developments in contemporary society and politics. The examples selected are from throughout the world and are pertinent to all kinds of regimes. The main focus, however, is on phenomena resulting from the transformation of communication technologies with the advent of the Internet and more recently social media.

Technology-Surveillance Nexus: From Panopticon to “Diffuse Surveillance”

Technology has changed almost all aspects of our daily lives; it is possible to access vast amounts of information with a click. There is an incessant flow of news, instant long-distance communication and an array of entertainment opportunities for the masses. The Internet and smartphones are seen as the most practical technological innovations: they help save time and entertain at the same time. Besides these positive aspects, there also are negative consequences of such technologies. For instance, one can have a lot of “contacts” on the Internet even if the same person does not have any actual social relationships. The Internet also is full of information, though there are often issues concerning the veracity of the information available. Moreover, the “overexposure” of people’s lives through these means of communication has led to redefining the boundary between the private and the public spheres (Uhl, 2002). The increasing use of technology impacts our interactions with each other, especially in terms of the way we display ourselves (Dilmaç, 2015) and the way we look at each other. At the same time, technology appears “cold” and indifferent to human needs, as it can be unintelligibly complex and even dreadful (Mumford, 1952). In addition to these negative aspects at the micro

level emphasized by technophobes, the advancement of technology is denounced as serving political objectives and playing a major role in surveillance of the masses.

The concept of surveillance has been analyzed by scholars under the name of "surveillance studies". Castagnino (2018), for instance, identifies two distinct approaches to surveillance. First, surveillance can be exercised from "top" to "bottom". In this situation the monitoring process is political and global: the main goal is to collect, keep and analyze personal data. These are the means used in a "surveillance society" (Bigo, 2005) or in a "society of maximal security" (Marx, 1988). The second perspective considers surveillance as starting from the "bottom". Here, the monitoring process focuses on analyzing mechanisms local actors use to collect information and make categorizations based on dimensions such as gender and ethnicity (Walby, 2005), or to create databases (Clarke, 1988). Moreover, surveillance can be exercised in a "panopticon" way (i.e., the "few" watching the "many") or in a "synopticon" way (i.e., surveillance whereby "the many" watch "the few") (Mathiesen, 1997). In this sense the monitoring process can be conducted not only by authorities or formal institutions to control individuals, but also by individuals to watch each other, observation referred to as "natural surveillance" (Desyllas *et al.*, 2003). At the same time, surveillance can be considered an element of "empowerment" (Koskela, 2004) in which "democratization and a Do-It-Yourself (DIY) mentality are seen as force that drives self-surveillance via the recording and sharing of data and insights of technology use that is not necessarily commercially explored or government controlled" (Timan and Albrechtslund, 2018, p. 855). Individuals also can work in collaboration *with* authorities by being involved in the monitoring process – the "participatory surveillance" (Larsen and Piché, 2009) – or *against* them – "the sousveillance" coined by Mann *et al.* (2002). The surveillance process is then not only conducted by political or formal entities; sometimes, it can engage the "subjectivity" of actors to become a means of resistance used by the "watched" against the "watchers" (Ball, 2005). According to Deleuze (1992), technological devices might have led to the emergence of a "society of control", based on the steering of individuals, and a "society of surveillance" based on the collection of data related to the subjects (Sadin, 2009).

Technology is therefore not neutral (Ceyhan, 2009); rather, it serves political interests as it enables political surveillance. Nowadays, states easily identify, monitor and track individuals with the help of various advanced technologies such as biometric data, fingerprints, IP addresses, satellite data, X-rays, intelligent video surveillance and geolocation. Governments justify the use of these methods by pointing out certain threats, such as terrorism, cyber-crime and other issues that are common to the "global society of risk" (Beck, 2006). Although the stated objectives are anticipating catastrophes (Beck, 2006, p. 332) and protecting citizens against such potential risks, the use of such technologies has led to some ethical concerns. A prominent concern is that, with the heavy use of technology, the eye of the state, which normally should regulate public life, breaches the private sphere of individual citizens.

The ethical problem is worsened by the fact that monitoring devices are often dematerialized and hence almost impossible for individuals to notice. We are far from the panopticon as described by Bentham. At the end of the 18th century, the English utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham (1791 [2009]) proposed a purposeful architectural layout for prisons (which would be equally applicable to hospitals, schools and asylums) to enable guards to constantly observe inmates without being seen. Bentham's panopticon had a rotunda design with an observation tower at its core, leading the inmates to assume that they were under constant surveillance of the guards. This asymmetrical surveillance provided by the panoptical design produces a strong impact on behavior. Foucault (1977) notes that the inmate "(...) is seen, but he does not see; he is an object of information, never a subject in communication (...) And this invisibility is a guarantee of order" (p. 200). According to Foucault, the panopticon prison illustrates how knowledge is subservient to power; it realizes the ultimate form of a modern disciplinary institution and modern society itself as one giant panopticon.

As opposed to the centric observation envisaged by Bentham, the nature of surveillance in contemporary society is decentralized. Both panopticism and contemporary surveillance, however, rely on the invisibility of the observer and the concomitant self-control to function effectively. These two characteristics also are highlighted in the concept of "post panoptic surveillance" as outlined by Bauman (2000), Caluya (2010) and Bogard (2012). For Bauman (2000), in "liquid modernity" we experience a decentralized panopticon along with changes in the power dynamics involved in surveillance. Bauman and Lyon (2013) claim that "architecture of electronic technologies through which power is asserted in today's mutable and mobile organizations makes the architecture of walls and windows largely redundant (...) And it permits forms of control that display different faces" (p. 10). Han (2017) concurs that there is a similar logic embedded in modern day capitalism; "under neoliberalism, the technology of power takes a subtle form. It does not lay hold of individuals directly. Instead, it ensures that individuals act on themselves so that power relations are internalized- and then interpreted as freedom" (p. 28).

The fluidity and indiscernibility of surveillance in liquid modernity take advantage of the flux and affect real life as much as the virtual world. Individuals develop the sensation that they do not control their personal data or, even worse, that they are constantly tracked due to the invisibility of this new way of monitoring. Many individuals who are aware of this form of surveillance seek to oppose this intrusive and domineering "Eye" and make individual efforts to evade or resist this form of invasion by the surveillance technologies¹.

Yet, along with the rapid progress of technology, boundaries between the public and private spheres are increasingly blurred as individuals share more and more of their personal data and feelings on the Internet without realizing the consequences of doing so. In certain cases, their

¹ For instance, a popular technology website Vice offers comprehensive guidelines to prevent criminals and police hacking into your email account or Facebook and other social media accounts.

online behavior makes monitoring their lives by the panoptic eyes of the Internet giants and governments possible. Social media users particularly reveal a lot of information about their personal experiences. Platforms such as Facebook or Instagram have redefined the way of "looking" in modern society (Dilmaç, 2016a). Being ever-present and over-visible seems to be the new tendency of many in our contemporary age; and having no social media presence is often likened to "death" or "inexistence" among peers. Thus, people desperately desire to be constantly visible on social media. Compared to the surveillance state described in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, today, "confessions obtained by force have been replaced by voluntary disclosure" (Han, 2017, p. 38). The main problem is that the Internet has made it possible to access voluminous data and more is accumulated every day, leading to the formation of a vast compilation of worldwide biographies. The "visibility requirement" (Haroche, 2011, p. 80) in contemporary society has become a social norm requiring people to publicly communicate and show themselves to achieve permanent existence. Individuals are thus encouraged to "update" their personal information and by doing so submit themselves to diffuse surveillance. Everyone participates in this diffuse surveillance network, which makes partners out of governments, companies and individuals.

Another characteristic of diffuse surveillance is that it can be camouflaged by its entertainment function. A recent example is FaceApp, the smartphone application that entertains people with a mocked-up older picture of themselves once they submit their original picture. However, FaceApp could be a tool for compiling intelligence for the Russian government (Sparks, 2019). Individuals also participate in their own surveillance through self-exposure as they broadcast "live" on Facebook and YouTube. Such technologies enable easier monitoring of individuals and allow third parties to locate them in real time. Moreover, sometimes peers also are filmed or their pictures are shared without their consent. As argued by Han (2017), "Big Brother now wears a friendly face. His *friendliness* is what makes surveillance so efficient" (p. 39). The public sharing of "funny" and "cool" videos, audios and commentaries turn ordinary individuals into an active part of an international network of surveillance. In pursuit of social recognition from their peers, youngsters share their personal lives in return for receiving "likes" on social media (Dilmaç, 2015), thus playing a role in the diffuse monitoring process. There also are some applications providing information regarding who has looked at one's pictures or profile page and thus alerts them to who is following them discreetly. In short, in the "surveillance state" we live in, "everyone is his or her own panopticon" (Han, 2017, p. 40). We propose to call what Han refers to as one's own panopticon as "diffuse surveillance", a decentralized form of surveillance involving different sets of actors (including individuals) at varying degrees.

Moreover, contributing to "diffuse surveillance" is accepted and often interpreted by individuals as empowering, a way to control their environments, a means of increasing their power to denounce others' misbehavior, and a channel to substitute themselves for agents of formal social control (e.g., police). It also gives them the sensation that they are ubiquitous, monitoring their peers *in vivo* from their houses or even from another country. For instance, citizen

journalism (i.e., reporting news by individuals via social media) illustrates this aspect of the diffuse surveillance process. The participation of ordinary individuals has many advantages, including quick dissemination of news, improving vigilantism of the citizenry, a faster fact check process, bypassing gatekeepers who control information and enabling more transparency. But there also is the potential for abuse; for example, individuals may control each other or even denounce the deviant behaviors of their peers, contributing indirectly to mass surveillance.

To sum up, in the contemporary society and with the advanced technologies, we have passed from the panopticism to the "diffuse surveillance". By the term "diffuse surveillance", we mean:

- The monitoring process that involves **various actors from different levels** (i.e., formal state authorities as well as individuals). Indeed, the "diffuse" adjective employed here emphasizes the idea that the power of surveillance is in everybody's hands. Diffuse surveillance differs then from Bentham's panopticon kind of "centric" surveillance by virtue of its decentralization.
- Taking advantage of technological devices that blur boundaries between private and public, diffuse surveillance makes possible **the intrusion of "eyes" everywhere**; everybody's eyes become ubiquitous and omnipresent.
- The real purpose of such surveillance is hidden by the **"entertainment" cover**. Devices used in diffuse surveillance take the form of gadgets, for example, which make this monitoring process more acceptable.
- Finally, diffuse surveillance is based on the **"voluntary disclosure"** of information by individuals, disclosure that seems to be a prerogative for them to obtain social recognition.

The existence of "diffuse surveillance" is also implied in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* through the metaphor of the "eyes", in addition to the semantic field specific to the gaze (*Staring, looking, watching, glanced, "Behind his back he could feel everyone eyeing his blue overalls"* (Part 1 Chap. 8). Several references to "glasses" also are dropped throughout the novel. Winston, O'Brien, Mr. Harrington, the owner of the shop, Goldstein, the enemy of the state, Tillotson, Winston's co-worker and even Winston's dreamt father, are depicted as wearing "spectacles." This shows that in addition to Big Brother, the supreme eye, everybody is watching each other and has the potential to denounce traitors. The message is normalized by the song broadcast through the Telescreens:

"Under the spreading chestnut tree
I sold you and you sold me.
There lie they, and here lie we
Under the spreading chestnut tree." (Part 1, Chap. 7)

Moreover, surveillance is intrinsically related to propaganda in Orwell's fictional world. For instance, the novel's most important catch phrase "Big Brother Is Watching You" is a piece of propaganda and also a reference to the fact that there is extensive surveillance in Oceania, the totalitarian state where the protagonist Winston lives. Therefore, we suggest that surveillance includes the intentional act of watching people in order to manipulate, control or penalize them, the creation of a censored and manipulated version of language (e.g., Newspeak in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*), and the falsification of history (known as rectification in Oceania) as integral parts of maintaining a surveillance society.

In sum, it is evident that surveillance technologies have created the potential for individuals, state and technology companies to breach privacy. Although *Nineteen Eighty-Four* critiques a fictional totalitarian regime, in today's world we encounter similar developments in democratic societies. In the United States, the works of the NSA (American National Security Agency) and the *military satellites of the NIMA (National Imagery and Mapping Agency)* are legitimized as necessary for securing the US from external and internal threats. There also are companies such as Google or Facebook that are labeled modern forms of Big Brother (Saviana, 2018; Cassin, 2009).

Furthermore, we observe the need to conceptually redefine what we experience today in terms of surveillance. As illustrated above, most scholars argue that modern-day surveillance resembles Bentham's panopticon. What they fail to notice is that surveillance today also is diffuse: potential and actual surveillance are carried out by both public and private actors. In this sense, surveillance today is more decentralized than the centric surveillance of the panopticon. Diffuse surveillance is not symmetrical by virtue of its decentralized nature; instead, it is more scattered, expansive and even more threatening as there is no clear authority to blame for it. Companies, individual hackers, government agencies and even ordinary people are part of this diffuse surveillance network. Below, we show how George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* pointed to the coming of diffuse surveillance.

Surveillance in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and Today

This part of the article draws on the conceptual framework developed above to compare modern means of surveillance with those in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. We examine the relationship between the state and the Internet to show how communication technologies are used by governments for the following purposes: i) to monitor citizens; ii) to maintain control over citizens; iii) to make individuals accept and even participate in the system of surveillance. That is what we propose to call "diffuse surveillance", in which a variety of public and private actors participate to some extent. Below, the main characteristics of surveillance in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* are compared to the contemporary age to establish whether diffuse surveillance is a common feature of the novel and today's surveillance societies.

The Omnipresence of Big Brother

The most enigmatic figure of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is that of "Big Brother". A totalitarian figure *par excellence*, he oversees everything and everybody, and his picture is on the screens and walls of Oceania. Through his gaze and the fear that accompanies it, he stimulates individuals towards self-governance as a precaution against any sanctioning. Thus his "eyes" penetrate the behaviors, the bodies and also the minds of the individuals who indirectly submit to his authority. Such a relationship between government and self-restraint was depicted by Foucault with the term "governmentality". According to Foucault, the state's power does not reside only in control of territory or its institutions, but can be understood as governing individuals and the collectivity. This kind of political power is based on control techniques that encourage citizens to participate in their own governance. The ultimate goal is, then, to steer the population's conduct and make them willing to be governed (Foucault, 2004).

Examples of governmentality exist in the novel; Big Brother is an omnipresent figure in the public as well as the private sphere. His actual existence, though, remains a mystery as nobody is sure whether he is a real individual or simply a figure. Nevertheless, his pictures and the fear his gaze instills are enough to encourage people to practice self-discipline. Big Brother arouses fear but also admiration and fascination; at the end of the novel, Winston, the main character who was once a rebel, claims to even love him.

Orwell's choice of naming this tyrannical figure Big "Brother" was not a coincidence. After all, the word brother traditionally means one who feels some responsibility towards his siblings and take care of them. Big Brother is someone who knows what is best for us; we should trust and respect him. Although we may not be related to him by blood there is a "fictive kinship" created by his designation as "Big Brother", which induces a sense of affinity and eases submission of the citizenry to the authority. Accordingly, *Nineteen Eighty-Four's* Big Brother could be compared to the state which is in charge of our protection from supposed enemies and therefore entitled to regulate our individual behavior and the social order. Both Big Brother and the state claim to protect us against enemies with whom we are locked in a perpetual war. As noted by Foucault (1976), the goal of the modern government and its biopower is to protect the lives of individual subjects. This differs from pre-modern society where the sovereign had the power of life and death over the population (Birman, 2010, p. 173).

In order to protect individual lives, modern states rely on technology and securitize a vast number of issues, ranging from terrorism to financial crises, as threats to humankind. A striking example was the 9/11 attacks on the US and the subsequent American reaction. The US administration used the 9/11 context to legitimize a set of measures that violated basic human rights (e.g., indefinite detention of some terror suspects at Guantanamo Bay). In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, most Americans acquiesced to such extreme measures as they were told this was a necessary tradeoff for their security. George W. Bush, the US president at the time, even asserted that every other nation in the world had a choice as to whether they were with the US

or the terrorists (Voice of America, 2001). The US thus sought to become the figure of Big Brother, as the leading state protecting all others from terrorist threats, and established an extensive system of surveillance encompassing the whole world (Webb, 2006). The international surveillance network built by the US and its allies for waging the post 9/11 "War on Terror" carried features of both panopticon and diffuse surveillance. The technology enabled authorities to follow millions of people as they filtered their electronic communications. At the same time, the surveillance was diffused. For instance, the British citizenry were called upon to participate in surveillance and report any suspicious activity or persons in their vicinity to the police (Qurashi²⁰¹⁸).

Telescreens, Thought Police and Spies: Propaganda and Brainwashing in the Novel and Today

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the Telescreens and the Thought Police are the means used to monitor the population. They can be found in the homes of Party members as well as in most other public and private places. Citizens could turn them off but only for half an hour at a time, but this is in vain as the machines still record even when switched off. In the novel the Thought Police are in charge of collecting the information acquired by the Telescreens, which are similar to today's networked computers and smartphones in many ways. Orwell's Telescreens are part of a panopticon kind of surveillance, whereas today's surveillance network is much more diffuse in terms of the variety of actors (both private and public) involved. There are, however, many other aspects of Telescreens and the Thought Police that have commonalities with surveillance today.

In addition to their surveillance function, the Telescreens also convey propaganda about the wars (e.g., the military victories of Oceania). The state propaganda aims to manipulate citizens and achieve their full obedience. The ultimate objective is brainwashing citizens to eradicate any idea of resistance from their minds. Brainwashing could lead to dehumanization and alienation of the individual. In the novel, Winston "(...) seemed not merely to have lost the power of expressing himself, but even to have forgotten what it was that he had originally intended to say." (Part 1, Chap. 1). Demagoguery also plays a crucial role in desensitizing people towards the announcements (i.e., propaganda) shouted at them. A somewhat similar phenomenon exists today, with some psychologists arguing that continuous exposure to media violence results in desensitization in the long term (Thomas *et al.*, 1977). Desensitization is complete when audiences feel no emotion towards any message received or against a violent scene they witness in front of them. In other words, streaming live news broadcasts brings about almost the same reaction in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and today.

The constant flow of propaganda through the Telescreens in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and sharing information, news and comments on the Internet today may lead individuals to lose their critical thinking faculties and make them more amenable to manipulation. To illustrate this idea, psychologists showed, for instance, that citizens became desensitized by the countless news reports related to terrorism; the constant bombardment of the 24-hour news cycle about this

topic instills within society “a universal fear of the unknown, the what if’s, and the when” (Brown, 2017) causing irrational panic.

The novel’s storyline underlines that continuous propaganda thwarts one’s intention to resist and diminishes the capacity for self-expression, as well as eliminating the capacity to love and limiting sexuality. The omnipresence of the Telescreens in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a precursor to the prevalence of screens today. Barus-Michel (2011) refers to this phenomenon as “screen society”, in which monitors or screens are everywhere. People also carry screens with them; smartphones are the screens that make individuals detectable everywhere they go, even in the supposed privacy of restrooms. The Telescreens in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* can detect your breathing and even the beating of your heart². Following in the Telescreen’s footsteps, a mobile phone, even turned off, can emit signals that give away the user’s geographical location, enable spying on them and recording conversations (Gallagher²⁰¹³).

The motto “Big Brother Is Watching You” is expressed in present continuous tense to imply the instant and constant qualities of surveillance. People in Oceania are being watched through the “eyes” of the authority. Diffusion also is characteristic of the surveillance as the rulers of Oceania expect citizens to participate in their expansive surveillance network. Citizens, including children, are encouraged to inform authorities about any suspicious behavior of their relations, neighbors and co-workers. Children are trained as “junior spies” and turned against their parents and taught to spy on them and report their deviations: “The family has become in effect an extension of the Thought Police. It was a device by means of which everyone could be surrounded night and day by informers who knew him intimately” (Part 2, Chap. 3). Winston’s neighbor is narrated to have experienced this personally. It is revealed that he had reported, in his youth, his uncle to the Party. Winston and Julia, his lover, are betrayed by their friends, O’Brien and Mr. Charrington, who are both members of the Thought Police. The latter worked in disguise as the owner of an antique store, collecting information about people frequenting the shop.

A variety of similar techniques of mass surveillance are used in modern times. In the United States, the Patriot Act (Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act) was adopted by Congress post 9/11 to reinforce the powers of government agencies (e.g., FBI, CIA and NSA) to combat terrorism. The Patriot Act paved the way for a series of privacy breaches and many companies (e.g., Google) disclosed their users' data to the authorities³. The military response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks started a series of operations labelled the “War on Terror”, the waging of which has often entailed the suspension of civil liberties for terror suspects. National security concerns thus prevailed over individual rights as the US set up secret detention centers across the world to

² “(...) you could not control the beating of your heart, and the telescreen was quite delicate enough to pick it up.” (Part 1, Chap. 7)

³ See the Google’s Transparency Report, “US National Security” at [<https://transparencyreport.google.com/user-data/us-national-security>] (Available: 30.07.19).

interrogate suspects for long periods (BBC News, 2006). There also were extensive secret surveillance efforts undertaken by US authorities in the post 9/11 era. In 2013 Edward Snowden, a former CIA employee, leaked documents disclosing the vast network of global surveillance programs operated by the US with the cooperation of its allies and telecommunication companies.

Google could be considered a kind of "Big Brother" or, definitely, a significant tool of diffuse surveillance. The search engine regularly gathers information about individuals' preferences, habits and locations. The simple and colorful interface of Google is a means of surveillance (Cassin, 2009, p. 101); every aspect of Google is designed to make users believe that they are in charge and make them feel comfortable although they are under surveillance. Google also helps people check and collect information about other people. That is precisely the main feature of diffuse surveillance. The name Google evokes an image of "goggles" in users' minds and hence "eyes" (which could be those of the authorities or ordinary people). As previously noted, scholars compare the Internet to a panoptic machine (Uhl, 2002, p. 165) or a "digital panopticon" (Han, 2017). Modern surveillance, though, is not simply from the top to the bottom, but it is also diffuse as various parts of society are integral to it. Both in the novel and today, with plenty of information shared online, private and public aspects of our lives are increasingly watched.

Falsification of History, Newspeak and Doublethink: Manipulating the Past, the Present and the Future

There also are abstract dimensions of surveillance in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, namely the falsification of history, Newspeak and Doublethink. The three collectively enable Oceania's ruling Party to set the limits of thought regarding the past, present and future. This is a form of surveillance in disguise, based on manipulating the resources available for critical thinking. The manipulated resources are the historical records, language and thinking skills. Below, we offer a discussion of how each is manipulated in the dystopia, along with relevant examples from today.

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* Winston works at the Ministry of Truth, which is actually the ministry of propaganda. His job is to rewrite (rectify, in the novel's terminology) the news archives to change facts in order to make them fit the Party's most recent policies. Winston is specifically directed by his bosses on a daily basis, there are many people involved in the same department, and the extent of rectification of the records is such that someone reading the records would never see any indication of a mistake committed by the Party. In other words, Winston's daily tasks involve denial of facts and constant rewriting of Oceania's official history. He often knows that what he has been asked to do in terms of rectification is, in fact, a falsification of history. For instance, he saw Jones, Aaronson and Rutherford, at the Chestnut Tree Cafe as they were arrested by the authorities for treason. Even though these events took place in front of him, and even though he has a dated picture of them in his hand that proves their innocence, he is

asked to remove their names from all former issues of the Times newspaper as they are put on trial for treason; no trace of their existence should remain. In brief, Winston often faces a dilemma between the reality he personally experiences and the made-up facts and stories of the Party.

Our contemporary experiences can sometimes be likened to Winston's daily dilemma. Although there is a vast amount of data available on the Internet, concerns about its credibility also are widespread. That is mainly because non-experts play significant roles in the development of online knowledge (Cf. Wikipedia). Comments, facts and so-called alternative facts exist in the same context, complicating the identification of truth from commentaries and absolute lies. This situation leads individuals into a state of confusion regarding what to believe. The Internet, after all, is an "altogether" world where entertainment and distraction are meshed with formal knowledge and serious thinking (Dilmaç, 2016b). Authorities may find this helpful at times as they can keep citizens in a manipulated state of mind. The Internet, and particularly social media, promises "over-transparency" but, in fact, a lot information is manipulated by gatekeepers such as government press secretaries, experts and journalists.

There is also a "fake news" phenomenon. Dissemination of deliberate disinformation (e.g., news reports about a fabricated incident) or hoaxes on the Internet are major forms of fake news circulated. The spread of fake news often leads to unnecessarily doubting genuine facts because many people are perplexed about differences between genuine and fake news. In the absence of trusted institutions, individual efforts to check the news also tend to fail; Internet searches produce more contradictory information and reinforce the uncertainty. The manipulation of the past by falsifying records in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a means of surveillance in the sense that the past is constantly edited to benefit those in power.

In addition to this sort of surveillance of the past in the novel, it is narrated that there are ongoing efforts to limit future thought through the subjugation of language. Oceania authorities are at work developing a Newspeak aimed to transform the language used to a much more restrained one⁴. As of the year 1984, Newspeak is a work in progress, not yet fully enforced, except in the Party propaganda pieces in the Times newspaper. It is expected to wholly replace Oldspeak (i.e., the English language used in Oceania) by around 2050. The overall goal is to eliminate any linguistic potential for individuals to think about resisting the authority. Some words are totally eliminated. For example, all concepts relating to the term 'riot' are removed. The number of synonyms and antonyms are also reduced and possibilities for critical thinking is thus limited. The discourse of the government of Oceania already echoes the minimalist and riot-free Newspeak as it carries a uniform tone when referring to political happenings. The expression of emotions is severely impaired with this impoverished vocabulary. As noted by Han (2017, p. 37), Newspeak has one ultimate objective, that is to

⁴ Orwell explained in detail the developments concerning Newspeak in an appendix to the novel.

eliminate any room for free and critical thinking. The concepts necessary for critical thought are taken away from the lexicon, and a new concept called "thoughtcrime" is introduced.

Newspeak consists of three vocabularies: the A vocabulary refers to words needed for everyday life, the B vocabulary includes words for political purposes, and the C vocabulary only covers scientific and technical terms to be used by experts. Newspeak is a poor and often repetitive language. Words such as honor, justice, internationalism, democracy, science and religion are not found in Newspeak. Instead, such words are replaced with a single word; for instance, all concepts relating to liberty and equality are represented with a new term called "crimethink". As many words are to disappear from the language with the introduction of Newspeak, social unrest and political opposition to Ingsoc, the Party, would become almost impossible. The Party clearly seeks to control both the past and the future in addition to its total control over the present. Newspeak coupled with efforts to falsify historical records shows that the totalitarian state aims to establish control over all aspects of life, even collective memories and potential thoughts are within the scope. In this context, the diffuse quality of surveillance emanates not from the multiplicity of actors but from the expansiveness of the surveillance behavior of the state. The totalitarian state establishes diffuse surveillance controlling or manipulating different temporalities: the past, the present and the future.

Newspeak in our current reality is one of diffuse form of surveillance as opposed to Orwellian wholly state-centric surveillance of the language. Modern examples of newspeak are mainly due to the dynamics of the Internet age, clarity is sacrificed for the sake of compact appearance on mobile phone or tablet screens. Some actors manipulate language for political or economic gains as this is seen as one of the best routes to achieving surveillance. Many examples of newspeak words can be found in modern political rhetoric, examples include invasion being referred to as liberation, torture as physical persuasion, and overthrow as regime change⁵. The negative transformation of language is also evident on the Internet. The use of emoticons and emojis in online communication is one example. The use of clear and precise language is increasingly replaced with an eclectic, shortened version of language with various emoticons and emojis scattered in between (Cage, 2019). In linguistic terms, the increasing use of emoticons and emojis weakens language. Certain emojis are also misleading: an eggplant, a peach or a banana can have a "double meaning" on the Web as they sometimes carry a sexual connotation. Recently, the milk bottle emoji has been used by neo-Nazi groups in the US to symbolize "white supremacy" (Freeman, 2017).

There are also limits in terms of the number of characters or words in posts on some websites. Twitter, for instance, currently limits tweets to 280 characters. These limits also lead to a kind of Newspeak as detailed statements become impossible, possibly leading to misunderstanding. Newspeak also is evident in the use of words by some Internet giants. Wikipedia calls itself "the free online encyclopedia", though it lacks encyclopedic rigor as it is mostly edited by non-

⁵ A list of Doublespeak words is offered by Jennissen, 2018.

expert volunteers in a participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006). Meanwhile, on Facebook users can write on each other's walls (later renamed as the timeline), but, in fact, the wall in a digital world is no longer a boundary separating one from others; it has now become the place to exhibit yourself to others' gaze (Dilmaç, 2016a).

Finally, there is also the concept of "Doublethink" which, according to Newspeak, means holding two contradictory beliefs simultaneously. Some continuously repeated propaganda lines of Oceania are full of Doublethink; "War is peace; Freedom is slavery; Ignorance is strength," are among the most striking examples in the novel. The names of various institutions and their effective function in Oceania illustrate this concept as well. There is a "Ministry of Peace", actually dealing with warfare, while the so-called "Ministry of Plenty" cannot resolve the continuing lack of food necessities, and the "Ministry of Love" is where suspects are tortured (Part 2, Chap. 9).

Post-truth politics can be regarded as a current example of the concept of Doublethink in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In 2016 post-truth was chosen as the international word of the year by Oxford Dictionaries and defined as "objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief" (Coughlan, 2017). In the context of politics, post-truth became associated with holding political views that lack factual grounds (e.g., Holocaust denial). As such, Doublethink is part and parcel of post-truth politics as one can hold on to their views regardless of their contradiction with empirical facts. Holding two contradictory views at the same time symbolizes the epitome of the brainwashing in Oceania, and the surge of post-truth politics in democratic nations tells us that it may not be solely a feature of totalitarian regimes. We can identify elements of diffuse surveillance in both *Nineteen Eighty-Four's* Doublethink and today's post-truth politics; in both cases the authorities as well as individuals engage in efforts to manipulate present reality by tinkering with the past and the future.

Conclusion

Surveillance is probably as old as the emergence of the first human society; we have a natural tendency to follow and supervise other fellow beings. However, the technological advancement, especially in the last two decades, has drastically changed the dynamics of surveillance. There is no longer the need for human presence when conducting surveillance. Rather, there is a wide array of technological devices that can be used for surveillance purposes. In this study, we sought to exemplify the ongoing change in the surveillance-technology nexus and presented a discussion based on examples from fiction and reality. The choice of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was neither coincidence nor arbitrary, it was rather because this dystopian novel epitomizes how technology and other means of control (including the manipulation of the lexicon and critical thought) can be employed by ill-intentioned governments. Furthermore, the novel has guided us to see how ordinary people also can become part of a diffuse surveillance network. The concept of diffuse surveillance is adapted to highlight the multiplicity of actors involved in surveillance and how surveillance has become ordinary and mutual in

contemporary societies. We observed that the Internet and social media, in particular, have created ample room for both actual and potential surveillance involving public actors, technology companies and individuals.

Similarities between fiction and reality in terms of surveillance have been identified. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, political actors and individuals are involved in the monitoring process; they watch their peers and members of the Party, and have the opportunity to denounce their misbehaviors. Devices also contribute to the process, as Telescreens are everywhere, a fact that permits Big Brother's and its disciples' "eyes" to penetrate citizens' private sphere. Another similarity is the existence of "resistance figures": Winston and Julia's actions in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to evade the authorities' monitoring can be compared to those taken in reality by groups such as "Anonymous" (namely those who "cannot be identified" and "tracked"), the hackers on the Internet (who collect confidential information without being identified), or nowadays the protesters in Hong Kong who wear masks and hide their smart identity cards to tackle governmental surveillance.

Saying that diffuse surveillance is totally the same in fiction and reality would be an exaggeration, however. The first difference that emerged relates to the identity and role of the "watchers". In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, this figure seems to be totally legitimized and even formally designated: the "Junior Spies" mentioned by Orwell are a group of children who are socialized as members whose role is to oversee the citizens. The same applies to Big Brother and the members of the Party: their formal function and duty are clearly stated and known by individuals. In real life, the monitoring process is less personified. It is hard to distinguish the "watchers" from the "watched", to know "who is watching us" and "when" the controlling process occurs, due to the decentralization of surveillance. Rather, surveillance is more invisible, subtle, decentralized and operates in a diffuse "mode". Moreover, in real life euphemisms are used to obfuscate the real purpose of anonymous observers: instead of talking about "Spies", we prefer to call those who unofficially track our gestures and discourses "followers".

The advanced technological devices used in contemporary society that permit individuals to be permanently connected play a crucial role in spreading this insidious surveillance. The monitoring process today is exercised by actors in all areas, at any time, ubiquitously, through various devices or applications used most of the time for entertainment. These technological devices and their applications encourage the direct or indirect disclosure of personal information. In this sense, "the quantified self" phenomenon is a good example of "accepted surveillance" as it combines voluntary disclosure of data, tracking applications and gamification: using game design connected devices (e.g., watches, bracelets) individuals can share details about their health, such as how often they sneeze, hours slept and heart rate. Data are then collected, which makes the Quantified-Self a major component of "big data science". Some self-tracking technologies also organize competitions between users, reinforcing the sense of belonging but also encouraging individuals to disclose their personal information indirectly.

The use of technology (and surveillance) is then accepted by individuals as it is believed to improve their quality of life, facilitate everyday life, promote freedom and empower people: devices remove space constraints, allow people to easily report observations *in vivo* and permit posts from around the world, actions that are promoted by the "Do it Yourself" mentality. Thus, everything *seems* to depend on the individual's will. The dematerialization and gamification of devices involved in the monitoring process combined with *permanent* and *ubiquitous* surveillance increase the risk of individuals becoming desensitized towards this control, which affects their everyday lives. This situation raises a question: has this sophisticated "diffuse surveillance" given way to a more "banal", "common" (and therefore more dangerous) surveillance, accepted by individuals and not considered a problem?

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