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Surveillance, Language and the Suppression of Individual Freedom in 1984

Rida Mushtaq

M. Phil Scholar, University of Central Punjab, Pakistan- ridamushtaq982@gmail.com

Abstract

There is no doubt that Nineteen Eighty-Four, (1949) by George Orwell is one of the sharpest fictional instances of exploring the totalitarian dominion of power over the state, its surveillance of individuals, and its denial of personal free will. This paper explores how the Party of Oceania stifles individual freedom by looking at three interconnected systems of control in order to establish this: pervasive surveillance, intentional manipulation of language and the psychological enslavement of citizens. Using the ideas of Michel Foucault about the disciplinary power, panopticism and the power/knowledge nexus developed in Discipline and Punish (1975), this paper, through textual analysis of Orwell as a novelist, will illustrate the use of telescreen as a panoptic machine, called to ensure self-control; the stipulation of newspeak as a mechanism of cognitive containment, by erasing the linguistic potential of dissent; and how the phenomenon of doublethink and the Thought Police internalize state ideology had the deepest or furthest-rooted foundations in the human mind. The analysis also takes into account the Ministry of Truth as an institutional means of historical revisionism and holding onto collective memory and Winston Smith as a result in his diary as a form of resistance to disciplined space. Results indicate that the dystopia that Orwell foresaw predicts the main finding of Foucault, namely that contemporary power does not solely exist in the form of overt violence. The overlap between Foucauldian theory and literary imagination of Orwell enlightens on how totalitarian governments produce consent, dissent, and ultimately kill the free subject.

Keywords: Nineteen Eighty-Four, George Orwell, Michel Foucault, panopticism, surveillance, Newspeak, disciplinary power, power/knowledge, totalitarianism, individual freedom.

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1. Introduction

Nineteen Eighty-Four, a book by George Orwell, written in 1949 has stood the test of time as a warning in canons about the excesses of totalitarian rule. The novel is situated in the superstate of Oceania and in this society, all aspects of human life are open to the absolute rule of the Party and its representative, BigBrother: thought, speech, memory, love and individuality. The processes through which this power is reproduced are neither political nor military, but more fundamentally, processes of knowledge production, discursive regulation, and the omnipresent visibility. It is specifically this assemblage of power techniques that makes Orwell such a potential target of analysis in the theoretical terms of Michel Foucault whose writing on disciplinary power, panopticism, and the nexus of power/knowledge that has reshaped the understanding of scholars of how the contemporary power operates.

In Discipline and Punish (1975), Foucault has proposed the term panopticon, a late-eighteenth-century prison design pioneered by Jeremy Bentham, as a metaphor to describe the production of docile bodies by modern institutions through the practices of visibility, normalization, and internalized discipline. Foucault views power in the contemporary age as not situated in the ability of a sovereign to punish but rather as diffused across institutional networks, as being embedded within the daily practices and as working through the management of the sayable, the known and the thinkable. These excerpts echo with the Nineteen Eighty-Four world by making telescreen face save the enforced constant presence, Newspeak limits the scope of sayable thought, and the Ministry of Truth is in charge even of the truth about history.

The relevance of introducing Foucault and Orwell to a discussion is the ability of such conjunction to expose the internal relationship of Orwellian totalitarianism as well as the larger arrangements of power that are at work now and in contemporary societies. Orwell in his images of surveillance, managing language and mind as could be conceived by scholars more and more, predicts much of the theoretical constructions of Foucault even though the two intellectuals were based on different schools of thought (Widaad, 2025), (Tyner, 2004). This document thus attempts a Foucaultian analysis of Nineteen Eighty-Four to show the way in which surveillance, language and discourse are as a set reliant on each other to perpetrate the erosion of the person.

This paper will argue as follows: Foucault defines disciplinary power, discourse power and the power/knowledge nexus in ways that are quite relevant to the Foucaultian concepts of panoptic power and advertisement: The power of the Party in Nineteen Eighty-Four is maintained not,

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firstly, by open power but, secondly, by tripartite systems of panoptic surveillance (the telescreen and the Thought Police), and thirdly, by linguistic engineering (Newspeak and the double think), and finally, by epistemic control (the manipulation of history and truth by the ministry of truth), all of which are also applicable to and elucidate the Foucaultian theories of disciplinary power, panoptic surveillance, and the power/knowledge nexus. The paper will posit that the worst-case result of Foucauldian discipline pushed into its totalitarian extreme of destruction of the free subject and making of pure ideological obedience is dramatized in the novel by Orwell. This paper has been written by analyzing the telescreen as a panoptic power, Newspeak as a means of thinking restriction, doublethink as a means of psychological colonization, the Thought Police as undisciplined discipliners, the Ministry of Truth as an agent of historical re-writing, the Winston Smith diary as a source of opposition, and the big picture relationship between Foucault power/knowledge and the Party as a government.

2. Literature Review

The intersection of Foucaultian theory and the work of the Nineteen Eighty-Four has spawned a significant literature, with scholars of literary studies, political theory, and surveillance studies all applying the conceptual apparatus of Foucault to understand the representations of totalitarian power in the novel. Instead of categorizing the research sources according to the author, this literature review is themed to group the available literature in terms of the particular claims these offer regarding the definitions of surveillance, language, disciplinary power, and resistance.

2.1 Surveillance, Power, and Language as Instruments of Control

One of the major arguments of the literature is that the Oceaniaian surveillance mechanism, especially the telescreen, is in fact directly related to the panopticon conceived by Foucault. Several authors have maintained that the telescreen imposes the principle of endless visibility whereby the citizens not knowing all the time whether they are being observed at any point in time are forced to govern themselves as though they are under constant observation. This has been promoted in a large number of works of literature, where scholars have shown that the telescreen triggers self-surveillance and internalizes coercion, making citizens monitor them themselves in a similar fashion to the logic of architecture of the panopticon (Widaad, 2025), (Orwell, 2011), (Tulgar, 2025). The telescreen will not require the recording of each citizen at all moments, it will possess the strength of the opportunity to be observed, Foucault refers to this condition as the automation and disindividualization of power. Some researchers have built this

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interpretation by asserting that the Thought Police and even other citizens become additional nodes in this surveillance system, forming a hierarchized system of surveillance where all people are both surveyors and surveyed (Sharma, 2023), (Sulaeman, 2014), (Rask, 2014).

The connection between surveillance and language as each other sources of control has also been a topic of long-standing academic discussion. Researchers have also maintained that the Newspeak and the telescreen play complementary roles in that the telescreen controls external behaviors by making behavior visible and the Newspeak controls internal thought and expression by limiting the thinking and speech materials of a person. Such a two-pronged process makes it possible to make even those thoughts which can possibly amount to dissent literally unthinkable (Freitas et al., 2018), (Widaad, 2025). Foucault has associated the linguistic aspect of control in Nineteen Eighty-Four with his generally much broader concept of discourse, where power acts not just through prohibition but through active creation of what can and cannot be said. It has been observed by scholars that the domination by the Party over language resembles Foucaults regime of truth where institutional power dictates which statements constitute knowledge and which ones are out of scope of comprehensibility (Freitas et al., 2018), (Al-Hilo, 2023).

The wider argument that surveillance and language are two elements forming an overarching system of individual-freedom suppression is proven by research that examines how the control of the Party is not tied to the body alone but to the mind, as well. Foucault might describe the disciplining process that results in the internalization of the tool of control as the production of the so-called docile bodies, but in the case of Oceania, a set of both physical control and intellectual confinement leads to the creation of the targeted tools of control. The people are not only not allowed to do anything that would endanger the Party, but they are deprived of the capacity to even think of any possible alternatives to the reality of the Party. Scholars have advanced this argument based on Foucault concept of normalization outlining the practices of disciplinary power by defining what is deemed as the normal line of thought and behavior and penalizing anything other than it (Bhatta, 2025), (Imam, 2026), (Ismail, 2026).

2.2 Foucault's Disciplinary Power and the Panopticon

Much literature has directly applied the Foucaultian theory of disciplinary power to the institutions of Orwellian Oceania. Foucault believed that contemporary power works by instilling institutions, or prisons, hospitals, schools, factories that permit minute control of the body and

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its actions and produce subjects who are both useful and obedient. In Nineteen Eighty-Four, the whole of the society is such a type of institutions and everything in the daily life (the morning Physical Jerks, the regime of working time and Two Minutes Hate) is a tool to make bodies and minds well-behaved and calm (Aydin & Doğan, 2024), (Rask, 2014). Scholars have observed that the authority of the Party is not just sovereign (the ability to punish and kill) but disciplinary in a narrower sense of Foucault, it does so by regulation of time, space, and activity meticulously so that the Party creates subjects who are police to themselves (Orwell, 2011), (Tulgar, 2025).

Both as architectural design and theoretical model, the panopticon is the centre of this literature. Foucault based an adaptation of the design of a prison by Bentham on the role of inmates arranged around an central watchtower in that design: they are always potentially watched (and can never be sure of being watched) to such an extent, it becomes a metaphoric mode of how contemporary power is exercised through the medium of visibility. Many theorists have shown that Oceania is a repetition of this panoptic logic, the telescreen being the place of the primary watchtower and all citizens being the candidate under observation (Orozco, n.d.), (State-Surveillance Nexus in George Orwells, 2025), (Baral, 2022). The most interesting lesson resulting out of this scholarship is that the reason why panoptic power is effective is that it is automatic: it does not necessarily involve actual surveillance; just the plausible presence of surveillance is enough to make people self-regulate. It is this automaticity that makes the telescreen so useful as a tool of control- and the power of the Party so pervasive (Imam, 2026), (Malik, 2025), (Berggren, 2016).

The panoptic analysis has also been extended to the urban and spatial aspects of Oceania. The workings of the physical spaces of the dystopia of Orwell, including the Victory Mansions and the offices of the Ministry of Truth, have been studied as disciplined spaces, where a visibility is created to ensure the maximum control and minimum possibility of unnoticed action (Tulgar, 2025), (Tyner, 2004). The Foucauldian reading that Tyner has given to 1984 showed that in the novel, the discipline of power is exercised as a means of regulating the daily routines of people in particular spatial formations and that the whole geography of the country was converted into a carceral landscape (Tyner, 2004).

2.3 Language, Discourse, and the Construction of Truth

The nature of the language as a tool of power in Nineteen Eighty-Four has been examined prodigally using Foucauldian and the extended linguistic viewpoint. Researchers have claimed

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that Newspeak is the most extreme conceivable form of linguistic policing: instead of simply banning some words, the Party aims at destroying even the words and grammatical constructs that could allow even dissent to exist. It extends way beyond censorship to what researchers have termed linguistic engineering, the controlled creation of language itself, to the ends of power (Shadi, 2018), (Arora and Atreya, 2026), (Hama, 2016). The relationship between Newspeak and the theory of discourse as developed by Foucault has been defined by a group of scholars holding the argument that in each of the two systems, language is not a neutral tool of giving expression to prior thoughts but a forming force that causes what can be thought. When power works with discourse, as Foucault argues, then controlling the parameters of discourse is also to control the parameters of thought itself (Freitas et al., 2018), (Iulia, 2024).

Special tools of Newspeak have been analyzed. The scholars have explored how loss of vocabulary, loss of synonyms and antonyms, narrowing of meaning and the disallusionment of some words all work together to reduce the spectrum of thought. This language impoverishment has been associated with Sapir-Whorf hypothesis of linguistic determinism - the notion that the structure of thought is determined or limited by a language structure - although some scholars have pointed to an ambiguity in how extensively the hypothesis is endorsed or dramatised in Orwell's portrayal of Newspeak (Freitas et al., 2018), (Marzi, 2021), (Dobos, n.d.). What is to be less disputed is that Newspeak is an instrument of ideological control, purposely designed to have the version of the truth that is beloved by the Party, as the only version that can be expressed, and eventually, as the only version that can be conceived (Arora and Atreya, 2026), (Lazea, 2023), (NYSHANTAIQZY et al., 2026).

The building and regulation of the truth in Nineteen Eighty-Four have also been discussed in terms of the idea of power/knowledge coined by Foucault. As it has been highlighted by scholars, the Ministry of Truth is not only involved in hiding inconvenient truths; it creates fake reality through writing historic texts over and over again, burning documents to ashes and substituting real memory with fictional accounts. These processes reflect the argument by Foucault that knowledge and power cannot be distinguished are one inseparable product that what is accepted as truth, in any particular society is always the outcome of institutional power relations (Widaad, 2025), (Al-Hilo, 2023), (Tyner, 2004). It has been interpreted that the slogan of the Party, Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the

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past, directly reflects the power/knowledge nexus, whereby the ability to determine what is known is the same as the ability to exercise power (Al-Hilo, 2023), (Drohy, n.d.).

2.4 Resistance, Subjectivity, and the Death of the Subject

The last piece of literature explores the issue of resistance in the theoretical construct of Foucault and how it can be applied to Nineteen Eighty-Four. Foucault made a notorious claim that in places of power, which outwits the power, there is power resistance implying that there is no uncontested system of domination. Researchers have used this observation on the novel by Orwell analyzing the many forms by which Winston, Smith rebels against the authority of the Party, primarily by writing his diary, engaging in sexual relations with Julia and secretly reading the book of Goldstein. All attempts at subjectivity and memory recovery, as well as the desire to remain authentic in a system designed to erase all three, have been seen as attempts to reclaim subjectivity, memory, and authentic selfhood (Bhatta, 2025), (Bibi et al., 2025), (Tyner, 2004).

However, the darker side of the meaning of what Orwell is telling is also addressed in the literature: the power of the Party is so absolute in the end that there is no chance to fight and the object is literally burned down. Foucault scholars who turned to his later work about subjectification argued that Nineteen Eighty-Four focused on the complete colonization of the self by power, which ends in what Yan calls the death of the subject in the totalitarian game (Yan, n.d.). The fact that Winston eventually capitulated--that his true attraction to Big Brother in the end after the novel is read as not a failing of the individual will but as structurally necessary in a system in which disciplinary power has penetrated the psyche so deeply, that anything live is structurally impossible (Yan, n.d.), (Ismail, 2026), (Sharma, 2023). This reading makes the meaning of Foucault that resistance is already in all the power relations more complex implying that Orwell vision is a limit case whereby the disciplinary power assumes full control (GÜNEY, n.d.), (Gerhard, 2012).

3. Method

To analyze a qualitative text, the present paper is driven by the theoretical approach of Michel Foucault, which was introduced in Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison (1975) and The Order of Discourse (1971) and analyzes George Orwell and his work Nineteen Eighty-Four. The approach of qualitative textual analysis is longstanding in the study of literature and culture where literature studies the means by which texts represent meanings, rhetorical means, and address both larger ideological and theoretical discourses. This method is especially suitable to

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the current study, as it enables the close-reading of particular textual passages in the context of a hypothetical framework, which sheds light on the actings of power, surveillance and discourse in the novel.

The Foucauldian conceptual framework of analyzing presents three main conceptual tools with the help of which the analysis is organized. The theory of panopticism, based on the panopticon prison model developed by Bentham and further analyzed by Foucault as the model of understanding how the contemporary disciplinary power works by means of visibility and interiorization of the surveillance, is projected onto the telescreen, the Thought Police and the wider machine of observation in Oceania. Second, Discourse and the power/knowledge nexus, the argument by Foucault that knowledge and power are mutually constitutive and that discursive formations are what is sayable and thinkable, and what can be known within a particular social order, are used to assess Newspeak, the idea of the doublespeak, and the alteration of historical records by the Ministry of Truth. Thirdly, disciplinary power, the definition of a form of power formulated by Foucault, the one which necessitates the ordering of bodies, activities, and spaces to create the so-called docile subjects to internalize the norms and values of the dominant order is used to refer to the overall control of the Party over the every-day life, body and mind of the Oceanian citizens.

The analysis continues by establishing particular passages, scenes, and architectural devices of Nineteen Eighty-Four that exemplify the workings of the panoptic surveillance, discursive power, and disciplinary power. These textual components are subsequently read against the Foucaultian ideas proposed above, in how the literary imagination of Orwell both predicts and develops on the theoretical proposals of Foucault. The results are thematically structured since they deal with the telescreen, Newspeak, the concept of doublethink, the Thought Police, the Ministry of Truth, the writings of Winston Smith, and the power/knowledge system in general.

The secondary literature is reviewed in Section 2 and can be seen as the critical context of the analysis and a resource of interpretation support. Through interaction with the scholars who have already implemented the Foucauldian theory in Nineteen Eighty-Four, this paper will place its results in a well-established body of interdisciplinary literature, as well as developing original arguments regarding the interrelationship between surveillance, language, and the lack of freedom in Orwellian Nineteen Eighty-Four.

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4. Findings

4.1 The Telescreen as a Panoptic Device

The most obvious surveillance tool of Nineteen Eighty-Four and the aspect of the novel that most clearly reflects Foucault halfway insight on the panopticon is the telescreen. The telescreen, which is available in all homes, workplaces, and even the streets, broadcasts Party propaganda and at the same time spies on the activities of its citizens, their facial expression and even their physiological reactions. The power that Foucault attributed to the panopticon also applies to the telescreen calculation in that it is not with the impossibility of being seen but with the impossibility of knowing when one is being observed. This means that the citizens should at all times act like they are under surveillance, having internalized the surveillant gaze, and as such become their own watchers (Widaad, 2025), (Orwell, 2011), (Malik, 2025).

The argument has been reinforced by several researchers who believe that the telescreen sets up a regime of compulsory visibility, which automatizes and disindividualizes power. The subject of Oceania, and the prisoner of the panopticon of Bentham, are both viewed, or rather perceived, but are never to be perceived as an object, but he is the object on communications, he is never subject of communication, as Foucault would say. The doubled view of the telescreen (both broadcasting and viewing) breaks down the barrier between the manufacturers and consumers of information, so that all reception is also exposure. It is this structural asymmetry of sight which is the crux of panoptic power: everything can be seen by the Party, but only as much as the Party permits citizens to see (Tulgar, 2025), (State-Surveillance Nexus in George Orwell's, 2025), (Baral, 2022).

The panoptic role of the telescreen is supported by the spatial logic of the telescreen. Orwell characterizes the telescreen in the apartment of Winston as organized in such a way that you never really knew whether at any one time you were being observed, a line directly related to Foucault and his tower of the panopticon, which has windows, but you do not necessarily see an observer in those windows. What it does, in Foucault and Orwell know, is to turn power into a self-reinforcing cycle: the citizens do not control their own behaviors since they are not punished of certain wrongs but since the bully of the all-seeing eyes has become internalized as a natural state of being. That is what Foucault refers to as the automatic operation of power and it is what makes the telescreen such a devastating powerful control mechanism (Orwell, 2011), (Imam, 2026), (Berggren, 2016).

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Moreover, the telescreen gives the panoptic gaze an extended eye in the physical scope of any particular institution to the completeness of social life. The telescreen in contrast to the panopticon, created by Bentham to work in a particular carceral setting, converts the whole of Oceania into a carceral space, within which there is not even a zone of privacy or invisibility any longer. This totalized extension of surveillance has been noted by scholars to be a radicalization of the notion of the disciplinary society elaborated by Foucault, where the methods of institutional discipline come out and diffuse to embrace all relationships in the society. In Oceania, the domestic space, work environment, and the street, even the countryside, may be all considered surveilled spaces, and the bodies of the citizen may be a subject of disciplinary scrutiny at all times (Tulgar, 2025), (Tyner, 2004), (Islam, 2025).

4.2 Newspeak and the Linguistic Reduction of Thought

Assuming that the telescreen dictates the body with visibility, Newspeak dictates the mind with language. Newspeak is the artificial language created by the Party and aimed at replacing Oldspeak (standard English) and, more literally, render heterodox thought, in the Party lingo the so-called thoughtcrime, impossible. How this is achieved is the systematic stripping down of vocabulary: by removing words representing ideas that jeopardize Party thought Newspeak gradually takes away the scope of thoughts that can be expressed and, finally, thought. The nature of the language, according to Orwell writing on the Newspeak in the appendix of the novel, is not only to offer the devotees of Ingsoc both a medium of expression of their world-view and mental habits, but to render all other forms of thought unthinkable (Arora & Atreya, 2026), (Hama, 2016).

The theory of Foucault, discourse, provides insight to understand this linguistic project. To Foucault discourse is not simply a set of statements, it is a system of rules that determine what can and cannot be said in a particular social situation. Power works at a discursive level by creating such regimes of truth--systems that say what is knowledge, what can be sensibly said, and what can be thought. Newspeak is the utmost imaginable exercise of this principle: instead of institutional barring of discourse by institutional gatekeeping, the Party restages the medium of thought to make sure that no non-Party discourse can exist. This is the object of totalization of Foucauldian discourse control, whereby the difference that exists between what is allowed and what is not is substituted with the difference that exists between that which is allowed and what is impossible to think (Freitas et al., 2018), (Iulia, 2024), (Shadi, 2018).

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Researchers have studied the linguistic techniques of the Newspeak in particular. Removing the word synonyms implies that there is no differentiation possible: good only has the definition as the Party considers good and that there is no other term that can be used to challenge this definition. Compound words like thoughtcrime, doublespeak and goodthink are invented which complex moral and political ideas are reduced to ready-made ideological building blocks that prevent critical thinking. By abolishing irregular grammar forms and frame all terms derivations as simple rules, language runs out of its historical richness, as well as its ability to be ambiguous, figurative, ironic, etc., all of which can convey dissent (Arora and Atreya, 2026), (Marzi, 2021), (Dobos, n.d.). Newspeak is a linguistic monster simply because it, as observed by one scholar, makes language, as a tool of human communication and creativity, an instrument of ideological imprisonment (Dobos, n.d.).

The association between Newspeak and denial of the individual freedom is causal. When citizens are not able to voice their dissent, they are not able to plan resistance, when they are not able to imagine an alternative to the reality of the Party, they are not able to yearn to change it. Newspeak can therefore be described as what a number of scholars termed as a cage of language- a discursive prison that in a way is more efficient than even a physical prison due to the fact that it does not in any way imprison a body, instead, it massages the mind itself (Lazea, 2023), (Hama, 2016), (NYSHANTAIQYZY et al., 2026). The fact that the Party plans to achieve the transition to the use of Newspeak by 2050 is the logical extension of Foucauldian discourse control: a world where the frontiers of language are the frontiers of the mind and the frontiers of the mind are defined solely by the needs of power (Arora & Atreya, 2026), (Batra, 2010).

4.3 Doublethink, Thought Control, and Psychological Subjugation

This is because perhaps the most psychologically disturbing control mechanism of Nineteen Eighty Four is known as double think. According to Orwell, the act of being able to believe two contrary things at the same time and to believe either at the same time, double think is a manifestation of ideological domination on the level of the subconscious. People of Oceania have to think that the Party is always correct, even when its statements do not correspond with the well-known facts, and they have to understand and also be ignorant that this process of self-deception takes place. Also double think is not hypocrisy or willful ignorantia but it represents a developed psychic phenomenon that enables the individual to ignore the presence of

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contradictory truths and accept the version of the truth presented by the Party as the only truth (Orwell, 2011), (Ilyas, 2026).

According to Foucaultian approach, the epitome of disciplinary power infiltrating the psyche is in the form of a double thought. According to Foucault, the disciplinary power does not only keep people in line by its exterior means but creates subjects, who are ready to enforce into conformity with the dictates of the dominant order as those dictates are internalized as their own value-system and values. This in Oceania is carried to its logical conclusion: it is not that the citizens blindly follow the instructions of the Party, it is not that they inwardly oppose these orders; it is actually the case that they themselves think the Party dictates, even when the dictates themselves are self-contradictory, since the ability to think critically has been systematically paralyzed. Researchers have also understood the concept of double think to be self-surveillance, which is more vile than any foreign apparatus of control since it makes the individual mind of the citizen an object of Party control (Widaad, 2025), (Orwell, 2011), (Sharma, 2023).

The Two Minutes Hate and the larger machinery of emotional manipulation is a technology of creation and renewal of double think. In the Two Minutes Hate, the citizens are made to unleash intensely high feelings of anger and disgust at clearly identified opponents, a ceremony that functions as a kind of catharsis, returning the potentially disruptive affects to an adaptably tolerated release, and training the children to a new psychological routine of blind obedience to the regulations of the Party. This conditioning of emotion works in unison with the cognitive limitation of Newspeak to produce a psychologically incapacitated subject, a so-called docile body in the words of Foucault, but one whose docility is not limited to the body, but to the whole apparatus of thought and feeling (Ismail, 2026), (Tyagi, 2024), (Ilyas, 2026).

Several theorists have claimed that doublethink is the radical form of Foucauldian normalization that could possibly be imagined. In the scheme established by Foucault, normalization is when disciplinary power establishes what is normal and punishes or corrects what is not normal. The conformity of behavior is not the only norm in Oceania but conformity of thought: it is not a simple case that the citizen has to act as though the Party was correct but he has to think that the Party is correct, even in the presence of opposing facts. This form of psychological colonization is even beyond what Foucault himself examined, to the point that what Orwell termed a dystopia is a limit case to the theory of disciplinary power, a society where

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normalization of thinking has been so successful that there is no distinction between belief and coercion anymore (Orwell, 2011), (Imam, 2026), (Batra, 2010).

4.4 The Thought Police: Invisible Enforcement and Internalized Discipline

The Thought Police is the police component of the surveillance machine in Oceania that identifies and penalizes thoughtcrime- holding of unacceptable thoughts or views. In contrast to more traditional police forces, whose work can be heavily seen, and the scope of their jurisdiction is also restricted to the behavior that can be noticed, the work of the Thought Police, their activities are shrouded in secrecy, they use informants, hidden cameras and facial expressions and body language to detect citizens whose inner lives do not conform to the orthodoxy propagated by the Party (Widaad, 2025), (Sulaeman, 2014). This secretive form of activity enhances the panoptic aspect of the telescreen: when citizens cannot know with any degree of confidence whether they are being monitored by television, they can never be sure that their neighbors, fellow-workers, or even kin and kinsfolk are also Thought Police agents.

Thought Police according to a Foucauldian point of view are the mechanism of by which hierarchized surveillance is extended to the most intimate and comprehensive level. In Foucault's hierarchized surveillance, a system where observation is diffused among many levels of a social hierarchy is characterized by a system whereby each individual is both observed and perceived by those above them, as an observer of those below them in a social hierarchy. In Oceania, this pyramidal arrangement is achieved by the system of informants in the ranks of the Thought Police, which is turning all the relationships in the social life into possible surveillance locations. Children spy on their parents, work-mates spy on each other and even lovers would turn out to be undercover state agents. The outcome is the ruin of trust and social cohesion- the social bases on which a collective resistance could be established (Sharma, 2023), (Sulaeman, 2014), (Rask, 2014).

Scholars have noted that the Thought Police do not work primarily by arresting and punishing the thoughtcriminals (although that does happen in a terrifying frequency) but by the pervasive fear that their presence creates. The fact that the crime of thoughtcrime is punishable by the process of vaporization (the annihilation of the criminal in every record and memory) creates an atmosphere of unceasing worry and makes citizens check and filter their thoughts themselves. It is the paradigmatic Foucauldian mechanism power which seeks to be exercised not by force but by internalizing the surveillance. The Thought Police do not even have to monitor all the citizens

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all the time; the presence of the monitoring possibility can itself lead to the wanted psychological result of complete self-control (Sulaeman, 2014), (Malik, 2025), (Bibi et al., 2025).

This cooperation between the Thought Police and the telescreen establishes what theorists have specified as a layered or multi- nodal type of surveillance system that overlooks not a single aspect of human life. The telescreen monitors physical behavior; verbal words are tracked by concealed microphones; facial features can tell about emotional deviance; even unconscious movements of the body when sleeping (facecrime) can be measured and reported to the telescreen. This is a full apparatus of surveillance that makes the body of the citizen constantly visible and constantly disciplined, and generates the ultimate goal of Foucauldian disciplinary authority, the unremitting obedience (Widaad, 2025), (Sharma, 2023), (Sulaeman, 2014)..

4.5 The Ministry of Truth and Historical Revisionism

The organizational representation of the power of the Party over the knowledge and the historical memory is the Ministry of Truth (Minitrue in the Newspeak). Asked to constantly update historic documents-newspapers, books, films, statistics, maps- the Ministry keeps the events that the Party is currently pronouncing in line with the historical record, despite changes in the Party. When Oceania and Eastasia are at war, any records that there was a prior alliance between Eastasia and Oceania are burned and another record written that there was no longer any enmity between the two countries. As the Party changes its economic forecasts, previous forecasts are changed to fit the new ones. The outcome is the everlasting gift where the power of the Party is never ever disputed by facts and where the very phenomenon of objective history is disappearing (Freitas et al., 2018), (Al-Hilo, 2023), (Tyner, 2004).

This ideological falsification of the past is directly related to the idea of power/knowledge nexus by Foucault. To Foucault, knowledge is not neutral, or disinterested, it is always constructed in and through power relations. Institutions - universities, hospitals, prisons, archives, etc. do not find ready-to-hand truths, but generate them, and to do so to the benefit of those who own the institutions. The Ministry of Truth dramatizes this idea in its most radicalized version: it is not truth that is found, but that which is produced, and the production of knowledge is the explicit purpose of the institution concerned with maintaining the influence of the Party. The power/knowledge dynamic of the Party is crystalline in nature with the slogan, Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past, pronouncing the relationship in crystalline detail (Widaad, 2025), (Al-Hilo, 2023), (Tyner, 2004).

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The incineration of the memory of the past by the Ministry of Truth has a serious impact on the freedom of people and on their subjectivity. Without a true historical account, citizens will be unable to make comparisons between what happened today and how it happened in the past and how they are evolving and worsening and how they can create a single narrative concerning their lives. Even memory itself is dubious, when people cannot be defiant that their memories are related in any way to some actual reality. This tarantism of collective and individual memory is some kind of epistemic violence - the annihilation of the intellectual resources, upon which critical thinking and opposition would be based. Researchers have suggested that the Ministry of Truth is therefore the institutional counterpart to Newspeak: at the same time Newspeak is used to limit the linguistic ability of dissent, the Ministry is used to limit the factual basis on which dissent can be based (Freitas et al., 2018), (Al-Hilo, 2023), (Drohy, n.d.).

Being an employee of the Ministry of Truth where he works to distort historical facts, Winston Smith is a victim and agent of this system. He finds himself engaged in the daily manufacture of manufactured truths, at the same time being aware that the truths he manufactures are made-up. This paradoxical state of awareness of the lie and involvement in it creates this mental strain, which later pushes Winston into his future defiance. The knowledge that the past is being systematically erased makes him desperate to get real memory, which is most potent in his diary and when he secretly meets Julia (Bibi et al., 2025), (Tyner, 2004), (Gerhard, 2012).

4.6 Winston's Diary as an Act of Resistance

The initial and most notable resistance act displayed in Nineteen Eighty-Four is the choice of Winston Smith to start writing into his diary. The act of the writing is itself transgressive in a number of ways: writing is technically a crime, the writing is writing that makes a record that is beyond the control of the Party, it is the exercise of a power, the power of independent thought and expression, which is the whole project of the Party apparatus of surveillance and control in turn. In Foucaultian terms, the diary is a space of resistance in what is a totally disciplined space (Tyner, 2004), (Gerhard, 2012).

The diary has been examined by scholars with respect to Foucault concept of power and resistance. Foucault developed the point that power relationships could never be unilateral; in every place of power there was a potential power of resistance. The diary is an effort by Winston to establish a counter-discourse, or a different account of reality, which goes against the specially invented facts of the Party. Winston proclaims the self that is indeed not entirely

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colonized by the Party ideology by using words, meaning remembering and noting down what is happening to him and his surroundings: Wolf writes DOWN WITH BIG BROther and by recording the memories and examination of the surroundings, he proves that there is indeed an autonomous self. This statement is in itself power, albeit quite narrow and ultimately ineffective as it questions the Party claim to the ultimate knowledge and subjectivity (Bhatta, 2025), (Bibi et al., 2025), (Tyner, 2004).

Winston is made both physically possible to write the diary because of a little fissure in his apartment not directly seen by the telescreen--what scholars have termed a spatial gap in the panoptic apparatus. This positioning of the body in the space grants Winston a momentary invisibility and thus enables him to exercise agency beyond the surveillance apparatus. This fact is important as it demonstrates that Foucault saw that disciplinary space can never be totally oppressed and that it has gaps, margins, and interstices where oppositional practices can manifest. Nevertheless, the novel shows the boundaries of such opposition as well: the invisibility space is just temporary, fragile and ultimately infiltrated by the Thought Police, who has been surveying Winston since the onset of the narrative (Bibi et al., 2025), (Tyner, 2004), (Gerhard, 2012).

The diary also serves as a tool of reconnecting to the past - a head-on clash with the eradication of historical memory by the Ministry of Truth. Winston tries to leave a record of pure experience, the original experience, which is unattainable by the archival apparatus of the Party, by writing down his memories, which are partial and unsure, as much as possible. This has been interpreted by scholars as an epistemological rebellion: Winston is declaring the authenticity of his own knowledge as opposed to that of the Party which holds the right to the truth. The diary consequently has a power/knowledge relationship in microcosm, it is both the claim of knowledge (memorial, experience, individual truth) and power (the power to narrate, the power to record, the power to resist). But the tragic end of the novel implies that such personal act of defying is not enough to against the all-embracing power of disciplinary power (Bhatta, 2025), (Tyner, 2004), (Gerhard, 2012).

4.7 Power/Knowledge and the Party: Foucault's Framework Realized

The all-embracing linkage between the Foucaultian nexus of power/knowledge and the regime of the Party over Oceania is the conceptual fibre that ties up all the results offered above. That power and knowledge are not merely connected, but mutually constitutive, i.e. power

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constitutes knowledge and vice versa, is the main thesis of Foucault, which is played out with unparalleled clarity in Nineteen Eighty-Four. Its own power is given by its monopoly on knowledge: the Party owns the information on the past, on the present, on the outside world and employs this ownership of information to justify its authority and make any opposition unthinkable. In its turn, the knowledge of the Party, which is its ability to surveille, to analyse, to predict and control human behavior, is in its turn a result of its power: it is only a regime with complete institutional power that can support the complex apparatus of telescreen work, the work of the Thought Police, the work of the Ministry that generates the knowledge on the basis of which its power relies (Widaad, 2025), (Aydin & Doğan, 2024), (GUNEY, n.d.).

Such circular interaction between power and knowledge is exactly what Foucault explains in his theoretical writings. To Foucault power is not held by people or groups but rather circulation of power in social relations, institutions and discourse. The Party is not merely in possession of power, but it is the very production and reproduction of power that takes place in the continuing processes of surveillance, linguistic control and knowledge management that form the government of the Party. The telescreen generates power by generating visibility; Newspeak by generating a limited discourse; the ministry of truth by generating a now manufacturable history. All of these mechanisms, in their turn, are not only a knowledge production technique, but also a technique of power, which explains the inseparability of the two, as Foucault states (Freitas et al., 2018), (Widaad, 2025), (Tyner, 2004).

Episteme, a concept that Foucault uses to refer to the framework of assumptions, categories and rules on which a specific historically designated body of knowledge is built, can also be applied to Orwellian Oceania. The ideology of the Party, Ingsoc, aims to serve as a totalitarian episteme, which delimits what all knowledge can possibly know. The Party is never wrong, the past never was what the Party said it was or reality what the Party said it was and the Party is always right in this episteme. Everything that cannot be called knowledge within this episteme, memory of another past, consciousness of another reality, awareness of the hypocrisies of the Party, is in reality no knowledge, but thoughtcrime. The most basic exercise of power in Nineteen Eighty-Four is the production and enforcement of this episteme, which is attained by the collective action of all the mechanisms discussed in this paper (Widaad, 2025), (Yan, n.d.), (Aydin and Doğan, 2024).

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Lastly, the way that the Party has come out and actually defined its own theory of power, especially when it comes to O'Briens interrogation of Winston, demonstrates a self conscious investigation of the processes later theorized by Foucault. Power is not an end, and that the object of power is power; O'Brien reminds Winston that the end, power, is an end, and that seeking power is the goal of the Party, which aims to have power, and has power, directed solely at itself. This statement echoes Foucault with his refusal of the repressive hypothesis-that power is simply negative force that says no- Foucault sees power as productive: as a generator of knowledge, a provider of subjects, a producer of truths, and a source of realities. The shameless recognition of power by the Party as its own source of justification, that power does not need legitimation outside itself in the form of ideology, justice, and the common good is the ultimate logical expression of an insight by Foucault that was radical about power, to realize that power is inimitable to other forms of social force (Orozco, n.d.), (Sharma, 2023), (GÜNEY, n.d.).

5. Discussion

The results of this study prove that the theoretical construct of Foucault and the literary references of Orwell meet deep in each other. In all of the aspects considered, such as surveillance, language, thought control, historical revisionism, and resistance, the machineries of power in Nineteen Eighty-Four align with and shed light on its concepts that Foucault would propose over twenty years after the book was published. It is not a coincidence that we find this convergence between the interests of intellectuals, it is also a reflection of a recognition shared of the fact that modern power does not simply proceed through methods as crude and open as preceding types of power.

Foucault, in his discussion of the telescreen as a panoptic mechanism, offers a simple example of the exercise of disciplinary power, which, according to him, is most productive when it is interiorized, i.e. when the subject becomes his or her own watchman. The people of Oceania do not require beating up on a regular basis to commit thoughtcrime, just because they know that they could be beaten; instead, the idea that they could be beaten is enough to force them to regulate themselves in a manner that would please the Party. This observation has a profound effect on now-day debates surrounding surveillance as scholars observed that contemporary monitoring technologies (CCTV, digital surveillance, etc.) recreate the problem of panoptic logic of the telescreen with new and more advanced possibilities (Imam, 2026), (State-Surveillance Nexus in George Orwells, 2025), (Sagayaselvi et al., 2026).

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The Foucauldian principle that power is achieved by the means of producing and capturing discourse is made transparent in the light of newspeak and doublethink as means of cognitive and discursive control as opposed to prohibition. The Party does not merely suppress some of the thoughts, it creates linguistic and psychological circumstances in the framework of which some of the thoughts are impossible to be created. The given observation supports the value of paying attention to the constructive, potentially productive nature of power as the ability to form subjectivity, define reality, and create truth instead of preoccupying oneself with the aspect of the latter (Freitas et al., 2018), (Iulia, 2024), (Arora and Atreya, 2026).

The step of epistemic control studied through the example of the Ministry of Truth reveals the indivisibility of power and knowledge that is the most essential theoretical statement by Foucault. The fact that the Party can revise the past, forge evidence and dictate the terms of collective memory is not an epiphenomen due to its political power but precisely how such power is supported. The pretensions of the Party to infallibility would be open to the test of facts, and the whole structure of power would be in danger, without the constant attention to historical revision by the Ministry. This discovery highlights how archives, records, and knowledge institutions are strategically important in supporting and disrupting political power (Al-Hilo, 2023), (Tyner, 2004).

The Foucauldian framework is not disproved in analyzing Winston as a site of resistance but makes it complicated. Such an assertion of Foucault that resistance is inherent in any power relations is justified by the fact that in the case of Winston, he even invents a diary- that even in the most thoroughly disciplined society one could ever imagine, there are still spaces of contention. But the ending of the novel, when Winston is decisively ruined, re-educated and made to love Big Brother, indicates that the disciplinary influence of the Party is always able to reach into and ruin the most willful opposition. This brings the question of whether Nineteen Eighty-Four is a society whose Foucaultian dictum, that there is no longer resistance, is itself a resistance of its own, or whether even the very existence of the novel as a warning text in itself is a resistance, a response (Bhatta, 2025), (Yan, n.d.), (Gerhard, 2012).

One of the shortcomings of this analysis is that this theoretical approach adopted in the 70s is applied to a 40s literature text, and it is sometimes difficult to justify the legitimacy of the reading of the Foucaultian concepts as applied to the work by Orwell. But, as other intellectuals have suggested, we do not need to say that Orwell was shaped by Foucault or to suggest that

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Foucault influenced Orwell, but to show that both of them focused on the same issue of power and each culminated or enhanced the other (Tyner, 2004). And to this is added the question whether the totalitarian government of Nineteen Eighty-Four is precisely the mode of power that Foucault discusses. The disciplinary society Foucault is creating is not the totalitarian society in the traditional meaning of the term; instead it is built on decentralized networks of institutions as opposed to the centralized sovereign power. The Party in the Orwell novel, in its turn, is a central political organization, which exercises both sovereign and punitive power at the same time. This ambivalent aspect can either be a shortcoming of the Foucauldian approach to Orwell or imply that totalitarianism can be viewed as a convergence of the sovereign and disciplinary regimes, which is the only framework able to understand (Foucault, 2009), (Younus and Shamim, 2026).

6. Conclusion

As shown in the paper, the phenomenon of Nineteen Eighty-Four by George Orwell is one of the most dramatic literary representations of disciplinary power mechanisms, panoptic surveillance mechanisms, and discursive control mechanisms which would be theorized later by Michel Foucault. This paper has demonstrated by a systematic Foucauldian textual analysis how the telescreen is a panoptic machine that produces self-regulation by instilling a sense of ubiquity; how Newspeak is a form of linguistic engineering that constrains the thinking ability to dissent; how the use of double thought produces an idealization of ideology on the unconscious plane; how the Thought Police imposes discipline by exercising fear and destroying social trust; how the Ministry of Truth dominates collective memory by constantly rewriting the past; and how the diary as a form of resistance seems a precarious gesture in the otherwise control mechanism.

The intersection between the literary outlook of Orwell and the Foucault theory provides information that neither could create independently. The described specificity of human experience and the concrete touching the abstract is what Orwell offers in the form of the narrative, totalitarian power, that Foucault lacks in its abstract theoretical language at times. It is through the tools of analysis (panopticism, disciplinary power, power/knowledge, discourse, normalization) that Foucault gives us the means to comprehend the mechanisms of the dystopian world of Orwell not so much as the imaginings of a fantasticalist, but rather as an extension of processes and activities that are already in existence within the contemporary

societies. Their joint effort shows that the despecification of individual freedom is no longer enforced with violence but with the careful crafting of the sense of visibility, language, and knowledge.

The implications of this situational analysis are more than the literary to the political, more than the contemporary. In a digitally surveilled mass society with the avaricious implementation of algorithmic content regulation and the manipulation of truth through social media, the levers of control used in Nineteen Eighty-Four are not just the overly curious artifact of the past, or the wildest imaginings ever written, but the living issue. The panoptic reason of the telescreen is reflected in modern-day digital surveillance; the discursive engineering of Newspeak is reflected in modern arguments about the manipulation of terms of political discourse; the revisionism of the Ministry of Truth is reflected in the ability of modern political relations to produce the so-called post-truth politics. What this paper adds to an account of such dynamics which is theoretically rigorous and humanistically based is that the defense of individual freedom needs to be combated not merely against overt tyranny, but also against the everyday, ubiquitous and usually covert processes by which power is exercised to generate what is visible, sayable, thinkable and knowable.

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