

SPECULATIVE FUTURES IN GEORGE ORWELL'S 1984: POWER, TECHNOLOGY, AND THE HUMAN CONDITION

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Abstract

George Orwell's *1984* is a powerful example of speculative futures, showing what might happen if political power and technology are left unchecked. The novel imagines a world where the ruling Party controls every part of life through surveillance, manipulation of truth, and the invention of a restricted language called Newspeak. It warns how technology can become a tool of oppression, how information can be twisted to erase truth, and how language can limit free thought. The story of Winston Smith reveals the loss of individuality and freedom when authority controls even the human mind and emotions. Though written in 1949, the novel anticipates modern issues like mass surveillance, propaganda, and restricted speech. Concepts such as Big Brother and doublethink remain relevant today, proving the book's lasting influence. *1984* stands as a warning about the dangers of absolute power and reminds us to protect truth, freedom, and human dignity.

Keywords: dystopia, human behaviour, political power, psychological control, speculative fiction.

Eric Arthur Blair was an English novelist, poet, essayist, journalist, and critic who wrote under the pen name of George Orwell. Orwell is best known for his allegorical novella *Animal Farm* and the dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The term "speculative futures" in a design context was popularized by Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby in their 2013 book

Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming. They explain that speculative design is a way of imagining possible futures by creating designs or objects. These designs are meant to start conversations and debates about how new technologies and changes in society affect lives.

Speculative design aims to address big societal problems that we are currently creating for ourselves by exploring a spectrum of possible futures. George Orwell's *1984*, first published in 1949. It stands as one of the most influential works of dystopian literature. It moves beyond ordinary storytelling to imagine a possible future in which government authority takes absolute control over individuals and society. The novel is not only a reflection of the anxieties of Orwell's own time but also a study of how the future might develop if political power, technology, and systems of control remain unchecked. In this sense, the book serves as an important example of speculative fiction, presenting a vision of what could happen rather than what already exists. Its warnings continue to hold relevance, as many of the issues that Orwell imagined in his fictional world still echo in present-day realities.

The world of *1984* is shaped by the dominance of the Party, a ruling authority that invades every aspect of human life. Citizens have no privacy, as telescreens and hidden devices monitor their daily activities and even their expressions. This detail reflects the possibility that technology, often celebrated as progress, also becomes a tool of oppression. The figure of Big Brother represents the image of complete and unchallengeable authority, symbolizing how surveillance strips away freedom. Orwell's construction of this world invites reflection on how unchecked technology shapes society in the future.

“WAR IS PEACE

FREEDOM IS SLAVERY

IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH”. (Orwell 4)

One of the most striking features of Orwell's imagined future is the Party's control over truth and information. History is constantly rewritten, records are destroyed, and facts are altered to suit the demands of the moment. Citizens are forced to accept these changing versions of reality, even when they directly contradict their own memories. The concept of “doublethink,” or the acceptance of contradictory beliefs, illustrates how truth reshaped through authority. By presenting this possibility, Orwell shows how fragile truth becomes when information is monopolized. This aspect of the novel functions as a warning about the dangers of losing trust in facts and memory.

Language becomes another means of control in the future Orwell imagines. The Party creates Newspeak, a language designed to reduce the number of words available for thought. By removing words connected to rebellion or freedom, the Party reduces the ability of people to imagine alternatives to its power. Orwell demonstrates how language shapes thought, and how restricting expression can restrict imagination itself. In this way, it illustrates

that speculative futures are not only concerned with politics or technology but also with the deeper structures of communication and culture.

Orwell's novel also portrays the psychological dimension of power. The Party not only punishes resistance but works to destroy individuality and independent thought. Thought crime, the idea that even silent opposition is illegal, turns the human mind into a site of control. Winston Smith, the protagonist, attempts to resist this system by holding onto his own truth, but he is eventually broken by fear, torture, and manipulation. His defeat shows the terrifying possibility of a future in which power extends into the mind, erasing personal freedom at its core.

Now I will tell you the answer to my question. It is this. The Party seeks power entirely for its own sake. We are not interested in the good of others; we are interested solely in power, pure power. What pure power means you will understand presently. We are different from the oligarchies of the past in that we know what we are doing. All the others, even those who resembled ourselves, were cowards and hypocrites. German Nazis and the Russian Communists came very close to us in their methods, but they never had the courage to recognize their own motives. They pretended, perhaps they even believed, that they had seized power unwillingly and for a limited time, and that just around the corner there lay a paradise where human beings would be free and equal. We are not like that. We know that no one ever seizes power with the intention of relinquishing it. Power is not a means; it is an end. One does not establish a dictatorship in order to safeguard a revolution; one makes the revolution in order to establish the dictatorship. The object of persecution is persecution. The object of torture is torture. The object of power is power. Now you begin to understand me. (276 - 277)

Orwell wrote long before the rise of digital technology, his novel anticipates many modern issues. The telescreens resemble surveillance cameras, and the manipulation of truth compared to the spread of misinformation and digital propaganda. The control of language is mirrored in today's debates on restricted speech, slogans, and media influence. By imagining these possibilities, Orwell creates a speculative future that continues to resonate because it reflects the risks of modern life. The novel remains relevant as it allows the readers to think critically about the relationship between power, technology, and human freedom.

Relationships and emotions are also reshaped in Orwell's imagined world. Love, loyalty, and trust are directed towards the Party rather than towards other people. Families are broken, and children are encouraged to report any disloyalty in their parents. Winston's fragile love for Julia represents a human attempt to preserve intimacy and individuality, but even this bond is destroyed by the Party's power. This aspect of the story shows that speculative futures are not only about external control but also about the inner damage caused to human emotions and identity.

The power of Orwell's speculative vision lies in its ability to act as a warning. The novel does not offer simple solutions but instead asks the readers to imagine the consequences of unchecked authority. What happens when surveillance dominates life? What happens when truth is no longer reliable? What happens when freedom of thought itself disappears? These questions make the novel both disturbing and thought-provoking, encouraging reflection on the paths that societies may take.

The influence of *1984* can also be seen in the way it has shaped cultural and political discussions. Words such as *Big Brother*, *doublethink*, and *thoughtcrime* have entered common language as ways of describing real-world situations of control or manipulation. This shows that Orwell's imagined future has become a framework for analyzing contemporary society. By providing concepts that continue to describe political and social realities, the novel proves its lasting significance.

In conclusion, *1984* by George Orwell is a profound study of speculative futures. It imagines a world ruled by surveillance, manipulation of truth, controlled language, and psychological domination. By presenting this vision, Orwell warns of the dangers that arise when power has no limits. His novel encourages the readers to think about freedom, individuality, technology, and the consequences of political authority. More than seventy years after its publication, *1984* remains as one of the most powerful texts for understanding the possibilities of the future and the importance of protecting human dignity and truth. "Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past" (Orwell 34).

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