

State's Control in Huxley's *Brave New World* and Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: A Comparative Analysis

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Abstract:

This paper explores a comparative analysis of state control in two classic dystopias: Huxley's *Brave New World* and Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, focusing on how both societies maintain power through contrasting mechanisms. While Orwell depicts control through surveillance and fear, Huxley illustrates a system sustained by pleasure and distraction. By examining these models alongside contemporary developments such as digital surveillance and consumer culture, the paper offers insight into how control operates beyond fiction, highlighting its continued relevance in modern society.

Keywords: dystopia, State control, resistance, *Brave New World*, 1984

Introduction

In today's digital world, the idea of a dystopian society no longer feels entirely fictional. With the rise of digital surveillance and the widespread influence of entertainment and consumer culture, individuals today are both monitored and distracted in ways that subtly shape their thoughts and behaviour. These concerns are powerfully reflected in dystopian literature, particularly in *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by George Orwell, both of which present contrasting visions of how state control can be exercised over society. While Orwell portrays a regime sustained through fear, surveillance, and repression, Huxley

imagines a society controlled through pleasure, conditioning, and distraction, highlighting the different ways in which power can limit individual freedom.

Literature Review

Several scholars have examined the theme of state control in dystopian literature, particularly in *Brave New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. These works are frequently analysed as critiques of totalitarian systems that seek to dominate not only political structures but also the psychological and social dimensions of human life. Studies suggest that while both novels depict restricted freedom and the suppression of individuality, they differ significantly in their methods of control, with George Orwell presenting a regime grounded in surveillance, fear, and coercion, and Aldous Huxley portraying a society maintained through pleasure, conditioning, and technological manipulation. "Totalitarianism silences freedom either through horrific pain or through plentiful pleasure" (Fatubun 140).

Furthermore, scholars emphasise that these contrasting approaches highlight two distinct yet equally powerful forms of domination: one that enforces obedience through external pressure, and another that internalises control by shaping desires and perceptions. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* mechanisms such as constant surveillance, propaganda, and the manipulation of language restrict independent thought and enforce conformity. In contrast, *Brave New World* demonstrates how scientific advancement and psychological conditioning can eliminate the need for force by ensuring that individuals willingly conform to societal expectations.

These interpretations provide a strong foundation for understanding how totalitarian systems operate through both psychological and physical means. They also suggest that control is most effective when it extends beyond visible authority and becomes embedded within everyday life, influencing not only actions but also thoughts, emotions, and desires. As a result, the comparative study of these novels continues to offer valuable insight into the evolving nature of power, authority, and human freedom in both literary and real-world contexts.

I. Mechanisms of State Control

One of the most significant differences between *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Brave New World* lies in the methods through which the state maintains control over its citizens. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the ruling authority relies heavily on fear, surveillance, and punishment to ensure obedience, "Orwell's 1984 portrays a regime

sustained by surveillance, fear, and absolute political dominance” (Shibu 159). Citizens are constantly monitored, and any form of resistance is met with severe consequences, creating an atmosphere of anxiety and submission. This is evident in the experience of Winston Smith, whose attempt to rebel ultimately leads to his psychological breakdown.

On the contrary, *Brave New World* presents a society in which control is achieved not through fear, but through pleasure and satisfaction. Individuals are conditioned from birth to accept their roles within society, and their desires are managed through the use of technology, entertainment, and the drug Soma. As a result, people remain content and do not feel the need to question authority or seek change. As Bernard points out, the people in this world are “Adults intellectually and during working hours. Infants where feeling and desire are concerned” (Huxley *Brave New World* 81). While Orwell’s regime forces individuals into submission through fear and coercion, Huxley’s society removes the very desire to resist by ensuring constant comfort and distraction. This contrast suggests that control achieved through pleasure may be more subtle and potentially more effective than control enforced through fear, as it operates without visible oppression.

II. Control of Thoughts and Consciousness

Beyond physical control, both *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Brave New World* demonstrate how the state exercises power over the minds of individuals, shaping their thoughts and perceptions to maintain authority. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, this control is achieved through propaganda, constant surveillance, and the deliberate manipulation of truth. The Party not only restricts access to accurate information but actively rewrites history to suit its needs, ensuring that citizens are unable to distinguish between truth and falsehood. A key tool in this process is Newspeak a language designed to limit the range of thought by reducing vocabulary and eliminating words associated with rebellion and freedom,“ Newspeak aims to eliminate the subtleties of language and ultimately limit the range of thought itself, making it increasingly challenging for citizens to articulate ideas contrary to the Party’s ideology (Tribhuvan and Singh 7). As a result, individuals are gradually deprived of the ability to think critically or even conceive of resistance, as Syme says in the novel:

Don't you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? In the end we shall make thoughtcrime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it. (Orwell *Nineteen Eighty-Four* 59)

In contrast, *Brave New World* presents a more subtle form of mental control, where individuals are conditioned from birth through repetitive learning techniques that shape their beliefs and behaviours. Rather than restricting thought through force, the World State ensures that individuals are never exposed to ideas that might challenge the existing order. Concepts such as individuality, deep emotion, and critical thinking are discouraged, while slogans and societal norms are continuously reinforced. This conditioning creates a population that willingly accepts its circumstances, as people are psychologically programmed to value stability and happiness above all else.

While Orwell's regime limits thought by controlling language and information, Huxley's society prevents independent thinking by shaping desires and perceptions from an early stage. This contrast highlights two distinct approaches to mental domination: one that suppresses thought through restriction, and another that eliminates it through conditioning. Together, these portrayals suggest that the most effective form of control is not merely physical, but psychological, as it influences how individuals perceive reality itself.

III. Role of Technology and Power

Technology plays a crucial role in the exercise of state control in both *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Brave New World*, though it is applied in fundamentally different ways. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, technology is primarily used as a tool of surveillance and oppression. Devices such as telescreens enable the Party to monitor citizens at all times, eliminating any possibility of privacy. This constant observation creates a sense of fear and self-censorship, as individuals are aware that even their smallest actions may be scrutinized. As a result, technology becomes an instrument of intimidation, reinforcing the Party's authority and preventing dissent.

There was of course no way of knowing whether you were being watched at any given moment ... You had to live ... from habit that became instinct — in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard and... every movement scrutinized. (Orwell 14)

In contrast, *Brave New World* presents technology as a means of shaping and maintaining social stability through scientific and psychological control. From the very beginning of life, individuals are subjected to advanced biological engineering, which determines their roles within society. Additionally, technologies associated with conditioning and the use of the drug Soma ensure that individuals remain content and emotionally stable. Rather than being used to instil fear, technology in this context is designed to create comfort and eliminate dissatisfaction, thereby reducing the likelihood of rebellion.

While both societies rely heavily on technological advancement, the purpose it serves differs significantly. In Orwell's dystopia, technology enforces obedience through surveillance and fear, whereas in Huxley's world, it sustains control by promoting pleasure and stability. This contrast suggests that technology itself is not inherently oppressive, but becomes a powerful tool depending on how it is used by those in authority. Ultimately, both novels demonstrate that technological progress, when combined with centralised power, can be used to limit human freedom in subtle yet profound ways.

IV. Individual vs State: Resistance and Failure

The conflict between the individual and the state is a central theme in both *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Brave New World*, revealing the limitations of personal resistance within highly controlled societies. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Winston Smith represents the struggle of an individual attempting to assert independence in a system built on surveillance and fear. His desire for truth and emotional connection leads him to question the authority of the Party. However, his rebellion is ultimately crushed through torture and psychological manipulation, forcing him to abandon his beliefs and submit completely to the state.

In contrast, *Brave New World* presents resistance in a different form through the character of John the Savage who rejects the artificial happiness and conformity of the World State. Unlike Winston, John is not forcibly broken by the system, but instead finds himself unable to coexist with it. His values—centered on individuality, suffering, and authentic human experience—are incompatible with a society that prioritises stability and pleasure above all else. As a result, his resistance leads to isolation and ultimately a tragic outcome.

While both characters attempt to challenge their respective societies, their failures highlight the overwhelming power of the state in each novel. Orwell's depiction suggests that resistance is futile in the face of direct oppression, whereas Huxley's vision implies that resistance may not even be sustainable in a system where individuals are conditioned to conform. Together, these portrayals emphasise that the loss of individuality is not only enforced by external authority, but also reinforced by the structure of the society itself.

V. Relevance in Modern Society

The themes explored in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Brave New World* remain highly relevant in the context of contemporary society, where elements of both dystopian models can be observed. In many ways, modern technological advancements have made forms of surveillance more widespread and less visible, echoing Orwell's depiction of constant monitoring. The extensive collection of personal data by governments and large corporations has raised concerns about privacy, as individuals are often unaware of the extent to which their information is tracked and analyzed. This reflects a system in which control is exercised not only through direct authority but also through the subtle observation of behaviour.

At the same time, Huxley's vision of control through pleasure and distraction can be seen in the widespread use of digital platforms and entertainment. Applications such as Instagram and TikTok provide constant streams of content designed to capture attention and maintain engagement. This culture of continuous stimulation often reduces the likelihood of critical reflection, as individuals become increasingly absorbed in entertainment and consumption. Rather than being forced into submission, people may willingly participate in systems that limit their awareness and autonomy.

The coexistence of these two forms of control in modern society suggests that the dystopian visions of Orwell and Huxley are not mutually exclusive. As observed by Shibu "both 1984 and Brave New World share a central concern: the loss of individuality and autonomy in the face of oppressive systems" (Shibu 160). While surveillance technologies reflect the mechanisms of control depicted in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the influence of media and consumer culture aligns closely with the world of *Brave New World*. This overlap highlights the enduring relevance of both

novels, demonstrating that the balance between freedom and control continues to be a significant concern in the modern world.

Conclusion

In conclusion, both *Brave New World* and *Ninety Eighty-Four* present powerful critiques of state control, illustrating how totalitarian systems can limit individual freedom through different yet equally effective methods. While George Orwell portrays a society dominated by fear, surveillance, and repression, Aldous Huxley envisions a world in which control is maintained through pleasure, conditioning, and the manipulation of desire. These contrasting approaches reveal that authority can be exercised not only through force, but also through the subtle shaping of thoughts and behaviours.

Furthermore, the comparative analysis of these novels highlights that the most powerful form of control is often psychological, as it influences how individuals perceive reality and their place within society. The failure of characters such as Winston Smith and John the Savage emphasises the difficulty of resisting systems that are designed to suppress or eliminate individuality.

Ultimately, the continued relevance of these works suggests that the concerns raised by Orwell and Huxley extend beyond fiction and remain significant in the modern world. As societies continue to evolve with advancements in technology and media, the balance between freedom and control becomes increasingly important, making these dystopian visions not only literary warnings but also reflections of contemporary reality.

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