

## **Panoptic Life in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four***

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### **Abstract**

This article discusses panopticon as a controlling mechanism that moulds the conduct of Winston Smith and Julia in George Orwell's political novel *1984*. It aims at examining the government tactics; panopticon, that exerts power for controlling and constructing the subjectivity. Taking the recourse to Jeremy Bentham's penal theory of panopticon, Michel Foucault appropriates his notion of biopolitics to remap how power constitutes the subjectivity of the population. This article probes into the state paradigms that indoctrinates and makes people docile via panopticon in 1984 to subject Julia and Smith to power and their rendering of self-subjection as the political outcasts. Finally, the surveillance telescreen of the Big Brother instantiates to fortify absolute regime leading it to institutionalized punishment and outlawry of Smith and other in Orwellian novel.

*Keywords:* docile, nudging, panopticon, subjectivity, zoomorphic

### **Introduction**

[E]ach of us is constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies. - Judith Butler, *Precarious Life*

Panopticon derived from Greek *panoptes* (all seeing) refers to the institutional regulation and monitoring of the people from the center of a circular building. Jeremy Bentham's notion of panopticon describes it as an index of iconic presence of authority in the circular architectural cell for constantly inspecting the activities of the prisoners. He proposes panopticism as the circular designs of prisonhouse for regular scrutiny to safeguard and disseminate state policy so that that person under authoritarian gaze starts behaving himself. While building idea on Bentham's panopticon theory, Michael Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* extends it to a wider paradigm to probe

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into historical archive (cited in Lamke, 2005, p. 5) and to a political strategy to analyze how the regime controls the people and constructs their subjectivity to inject the regimes of truth into them via the disciplinary institutions; church, barracks, factory and hospitals, among other. In short, Frederick Rosen (2018) passed his remarks on panopticon as a surveillance tool to make feel the inhabitants in the jail that there is somebody overseeing on them. The sole objective of panopticon is to subjugate and discipline the prisoners (Rosen, 2018, p. 102). Panopticon to Bentham is a jail paradigm which stands for the camp to Agamben: “the hidden paradigm of the political space of modernity” (Agamben, 1995, p. 123) that helps control, discipline and succumb people to power: a production of bare life. Further, Agamben claims that camp: ‘hidden matrix’ of modern state affairs exerts state of exception which ultimately turns to be the rule to abide by. In sum, Bentham, Foucault, and Agamben remove away the historical archieval meaning of panopticon and regard it as the indexed paradigm of control that curbs people.

In line with social surveillance, this article investigates the panoptic life in Gorge Orwell’s political dystopian novel, *1984* (1949). Winston Smith and Julia the main characters in the novel who due to the surveillance telescreen, thought police and young league ultimately subject to power and act accordingly after their traumatic carceral brainwash in room 101. Invariably, their self-subjection leads them to inculcate the regime’s truth that replicates Louis Althusser’s notion of interpellation, hailing or name calling that compels the subject to respond to the caller, or compels to behave themselves in the oligarchic regime in Orwellian novel. Smith’s job in the Record Department of the Ministry of Truth, or his official inclusion, sheds light on his inculcation of Big Brother’s propaganda in reconstructing and fabricating the history. Precisely, in Oceania Smith and Julia among other subject to power because of the constant observation of “the telescreen: BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU”, (Orwell, 2021, p.1). Like Althusser’s interpellation, Bentham’s panopticon facilitates in subject formation, here annulling the political life (*biós*) of Smith, Julia, and Syme in *1984*. This informs that panopticon functions as the conduits of power mechanism to render the inmates loyal to the system.

This article taking the reclose to Bentham’s panopticon as an analytics of textual evidences, examines the socio-political engineering paradigm instigated by two ways telescreens in *1984* that tames Smith and Julia for their docile life confined in *oikos*, the life like an animal attributed to re/production. It further explores how the surveillance on rituals of hate ceremony, propaganda dissemination, and love affair

of Julia and Smith help to regulate the outer party members along with the proles by exerting power over them. This schema of Oceania in *1984* fortifies the regime which seemingly emulates Michel Foucault's biopolitics, politics over life exerted in the form of disciplinary technologies. The novel where in Deleuzian 'society of control' monitor every citizen by two ways telescreen, along with thought police, and young league that makes it more difficult for people to have independent life, Cartesian self. I postulate that panoptic tools hinder the life of the people and conduct their conducts also. Because they have the feeling of constant being gazed over that compels them to mould their thought and behaviors. That is why, panopticon shows implicitly the regime's growing interest in controlling the social bodies and populations at large. The imbrication of power and knowledge in the form of panopticism in Foucauldian sense assists to manipulate peoples' conduct and bars their political rights also. Doing so, the regime succeeds in rendering the absolute rule. Moreover, the subjects are nudged to pursue and assimilate the regime's propaganda i.e. 'regimes of truth' in Foucauldian term. More precisely, the subjects are perpetually under the state's paternalism which appeals them to pursue the policy of the regime if not there is the extermination process.

Given that *1984* engrafts the futuristic dystopian regime whereby the citizens succumb to power. Besides this, there is ripping off their rights and freedom. At this background this article inquires to dig out the measures exercised by the regime to mould Smith like people into the tamed subjects and make them readily agree with the 'regime of truth' circulated in social discourse. Largely, this article explores the crushing of the free will; Cartesian self, of Smith and Julia to relegate them to docile beings. Here, this process subscribes the functioning of Foucauldian power/knowledge in shaping their subjectivity. Upon brooding over the aforementioned queries, I postulate that the regime not only inculcates its ideologies via panopticon but also exercises repressive state apparatus over people that make them governable. Tuning with this assumption, Foucauldian biopolitics, politics over Julia and Smith examines the government rationality which does not solely rely on the power but also rests on political technology like panopticism which steers behaviour and shapes the subjectivity. Further, I contend that Foucauldian panopticon also probes into behavioural moulding and modification which happens upon Smith and others in *1984*. I believe that Foucauldian behavioural moulding seems to be appropriated by Thaler and Sunstein in (2008) in 'nudge theory' that also explains steering of people's mind to the desirable direction of the nudger (Thaler and Sunstein, 2008). In addition, I argue that Smith and other characters' succumbing to power results into their outlawry as the aftermath of panopticon political technology.

## Reviews of Literature

Alok Rai (1990) reads Orwell's *1984* as the political despair. Amanda Baule (2015) also demystified the novel from Marxist lens of classes wherein the interest of the elite deployed via the two ways functioning telescreen that inserts the propaganda of the regime and monitors the household activities at the same time (Baule, 2015). Likewise, David Morton (1997) underpins the features of detective fiction where in the intruder is entrapped and brought under the jurisprudence of baton (Morton, 1997, p 32). In tandem with repressive mechanism of the state Gerald S. Bernstein (1985) points out the architecture of repression in *1984*, which is reinforced by Deborah A. Stanley (1999) who also highlighted the severe punishment for the minor mistake in *1984*. The continuous vigilance of the party over the people occupies high room in *1984* to bring home the sense of totalitarian regime that exerts the controlling measures like espionage also. Further, he focused on the coercive docility of Smith and Julia (Stanley, 1999). In collaboration to Stanley, Roger Paden's (1984) resonates surveillance based torture in Orwell's novel.

Ostensibly, Orwell's fictional Oceania transcends Foucauldian panopticon and finds the proximity with Didier Bigo's banopticon when Smith's spouses and Julia are kept away from libidinal life. O' Brien's advocacy for ever-vigilant'thought crime'to safeguard the regime nudges Julia and Smith in such a way that they turn into Giorgio Agamben's *Muselmann*, an iconic figure who suffers high in Nazi Camp. In line with Stanley's humanistic appeal for basic needs of human life, Ian Watt (1983) describes Winston Smith as a humanist and his destruction at the hands of the Party as the destruction of the values of humanism" (Watt, 1983,105). Watt's claim is to oppose the repressive steps deployed by the police state to destroy Smith in *1984* though not physically resembles with the impending threat over humanism under dictatorship or oligarchy.

Despite the above critiques of *1984* that also invokes the state's political agenda, surveillance over the denizens, and loss of humanism in tyrannical regime, this article develops a new insight into the surveillance for constructing the subjectivity, panoptic life of Smith and Julia in *1984* who overtly go through the traumatic experience in room 101 wherein they submit to the power. Apparently, Bentham's penal panopticon works for management and control in biopolitical *1984*. Smith's inundation in the constructed self, is his social death, an outcast. Orwell's novel also entails the same contents to contain the denizens in Oceania which panopticon measures appropriates.

## **Materials and Methods**

Above encrypted critics express their concerns on political despair, humanism and other issues when they analyse Orwellian *1984*. However, my perusal of it provides the significance of panopticon as the tool of social engineering to mould the conduct of Smith and Julia. Taking recourse to Bentham notion of panopticon which has been developed by Foucault, and Didier Bigo, this article analyses the textual evidences to show how panopticon helps to exert power to ban and control over life. Frederick Rosen (2018) regards Michel Foucault as the critic of Bentham's panopticon as an image of a totalitarian society where rationality joins social control to establish a regime of human subjugation has served to define the legacy of Bentham's social thought to the present age (Rosen, 2018, p. xvi). To Foucault (1977) panopticon is a tool of social control that results into the subjugation of people. He deemed it as "the regal cage wherein the man is kept and observed in place of the animal governmental purpose (Foucault, 1977, p. 203). His *Discipline and Punish* detailed the processes of panopticism to have an extensive control over people. He argues because of this society of control in the privacy and biological processes of individual's life via panopticon devices modern society differs from the society it precedes. Focusing on the unavoidability of surveillance technology in modern time Foucault (1977) states, "Our society is not one of spectacle but of surveillance" (Foucault, 1977, 217). Extending Bentham's penal architectural design having a watchman in the center from where every room is under his gaze. This all seeing, omniscient project makes the inmates of the jail feel that they are under scrutiny which Foucault conforms "the inmate must never know whether he is being looked at any one moment; but he must be sure that he may always be so" (Foucault, 1977, 201). He further adds, "The Panopticon is a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad: in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen" (ibid). This marks the internalization of the social norms (process of subjectification) by the larger numbers of the populace. It arguably brings homogenous but desired effects of power on the populace.

The governmental data registrations of the biological life of the people in modern era makes one believe the fact that one can be surveilled at any time. It enables him to be responsible also. His subjection to power naturally leads him follow the constraints laid by regime. Foucault explained "He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which

he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection” (Foucault 1977, pp. 202-203). Thus, the subjection to power brews the prime concern of panopticon in both Bentham and Foucault which has been replicated in Orwell’s *1984* to nudge and subjugate the denizens in Oceania. This pervasive two ways telescreen in *1984* is so powerful that there is no way to escape from it which Foucault concludes as “We are neither in the amphitheatre, nor on the stage, but in the panoptic machine, invested by its effects of power, which we bring to ourselves since we are part of its mechanism” (Foucault, 1977, p. 217). Therefore, the subjugation of life by power in *1984* comes into the range of panoptic machine that molds the psyche and bodies of Julia, and Smith among other.

### **Discussions: Paternalist Regime and Coerced Nudges in *1984***

To begin with, all seeing power of panopticon, to Roger Paden (1984) is a disciplinary tool that Orwell projects as the index of power exertion, “who controls the past controls the future. Who controls the present controls the past” (Orwell, 2021, p. 16) to nudge Smith and Julia. Indeed, nudgeliterally refersto push into action or impel an individual to act. Richard Thaler and Cass R. Sunstein (2008) in their nudge theory opine that "Initiatives that maintain freedom of choice while steering people’s decisions in desirable direction" (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008, 222), thereby the nudger, a paternalist who dictates the nudge perennially to the destined direction. From their explanation, it is clear that the nudger visibly or invisibly sets the agenda which is endorsed by the nudgee under a certain socio-political matrix or pattern. Here 'freedom of choice' in Smith's context is either subject to the power which is also his social death, a cultural annihilation or be ready for extermination like Syme. This indicates that life and death comprise politics not the scientific (Agamben, 1995, p. 165).

Upon focusing the viable danger of absolute rule based on high-tech surveillance and censorship O’Brien spies Smith’s activities and finally arrests him. His arrest illustrates the end of freedom (banopticon as decried by Bigo), an abjection of subjects in *1984*. O’Brien’s assertion of penal system in the novel “We convert him, we capture his inner mind, we reshape him. We burn all evil and all illusion out of him” (Orwell, 2021, pp. 121-122), signals the habit molding paternalist functioning of the panopticon. The espionage, incarceration, torture, and killing in Air Strip comprise catopticon of Jean-Gabriel Ganascia whereby gaze is made from every direction unlikeof panopticon. Ganascia (2010) asserts that the watchman is also under the range of watched or where everyone watches everyone else (Ganascia, 2010, pp. 2-3). Which is equiveillance. Above all, panopticon (overseeing), banopticon (controlcentric

seeing), and catopticon (*equivoillance*) fortress the repressive process of indoctrination over inmates in Oceania. Obviously, O' Brien exercises power over Smith to shape his thought and subjects him to power coercively. O'Brien bluntly secures Smith's compliance by the threat of deprivation and punishment.

Encapsulating patterned life of the nudges (in *1984* Julia and Smith) who also stay tuned with the allocated space. Sarah Conley (2013) also deals with coercive paternalism. She argues that, "Paternalism is a practice wherein people are forced to perform actions that bring about good consequences for themselves" (Conley, 2013, p. 48). Largely, paternalism goes with win- win policy but in praxis in the world of Orwell Smith and other outer party members enact and ultimately dragged to 101 room to succumb to power. To retain under patterned canopy of the power different tactics are exercised. Among them one is "governmentality, a dispersed means of exercising power upon populations, propelled by political economy and articulated through security apparatuses. Power is also exercised over populations to control human life which is carried out by technologies of disciplinary power, or 'biopower'" (MacDonald and Hunter, 2019, p.131). MacDonald and Hunter both refer to the technologies of controlling population imbibing Foucauldian biopower that also advocates the life enhancing, controlling, monitoring,... to make docile body (Foucault, 1998, pp. 136-140).

In the case of Smith, he is nudged and impelled to be inside the paternalism of Big Brother, the in/visible nudger in *1984*. Smith seems to be a dissenter from the onset of the novel though he works in Record Department palimpsesting the records by abolishing the reality of the history. He composes daily journals expressing his angst, "Down with Big Brother" (Orwell, 2021, p. 8), and he also believes in Brotherhood, a league against Big Brother (p. 6), indicate that he is not docile but at the end he is politically nudged and starts adoring the system, "He had won the victory... he loved Big Brother" (Orwell, 2021, p.143). And "You hate him. Good.... You must love Big Brother. It is not enough to obey him: you must love him." (Orwell, 2021, p. 136). Mentioned accounts infer Smith's nudged condition, or the socio-politically engineered life after he was crushed physically and psychologically by O'Brien, a nudger who exercises soft and hard power to indoctrinate Smith thoroughly and feeds him the truth,  $2+2=5$  (Orwell, 2021, p. 140) in Big Brother's infallible regime.

Fed up with mandatory hate farming rituals and pervasive surveillance, Smith comments the oddity of oceanic politics as; "It was even conceivable that they watched everybody all the time" (Orwell, 2021, p. 7), with "concealed microphone" (Orwell,

2021, p. 54). Smith allegedly refers to the exertion of panopticon. The dismaying fact, "The children are taught to spy their parents' sexual relation and family was the extension of Thought Police" (Orwell, 2021, p.143), epitomizes *equivoillance* of catopticon. Naturally, it eases the regime to regulate its subjects and make them docile which is the prime concern of biopolitics. Moreover, the two way telescreens set on everywall including the "living-room,"and "The telescreen received and transmitted simultaneously" (Orwell, 2021, p. 2) to help the Thought Police monitor the denizens.

Coupling with techno-centered surveillance Charles McGrath in *New York Times* also rightly correlates, "The main technological advancement there is the two-way telescreen, essentially an electronic peephole (1<sup>st</sup> para), the fact of employing the technology to gaze and oversee other. Apparently, this statecraft is not to enhance life, or life-affirming activity of the people in Airstrip One but to insert party ideology into the people for constituting ideological slavery. It, notably infers the hidden interest of the state to manage the population through 'an electronic peephole,' modern close circuit camera. By the way, this drive of the state is to curb the freedom of the outer party members in the novel.

Noticed by panoptic device Julia and Smith are arrested while making love in Mr Charrington's home and taken to room 101. Their arrest and the vaporization of Syme and Parsons remind the seizure of life of the time of Sovereign power. Indeed, they remain inside shelter of the law to be excluded from its jurisprudence which is the normalized state of exception in *1984*. Agamben rightly holds this lawlessness state of the Oceanic subaltern and states, "Bare life remains included in politics in the form of exception" (Agamben, 1995, p.11). Therefore, unlike the claim of Foucault's paradigm shift of power in biopolitics, it is the continuation of sovereign power with additional feature of liberalism which is biopower. Rather it is the revival of sovereign biopower. Interestingly,sex control is a signpost of managing the demography which also Foucault advocates as the feature of biopolitics. Julia and Smith's arrest is the iconic parable of outlawry. Smith enumerates this process of outlawry as the terrible Human right violation, "there was no trial, no report of the arrest. People simply disappeared, always during the night. Your name was removed from the registers, every record of everything you had ever done was wiped out.... You were abolished, annihilated: vaporized was the usual word." (Orwell, 2021, p. 9). Mentioned excerpt dramatizes the banoptic life in Oceania replicating Agamben's camp. Carl Echoing with Carl Schmitt sovereign ban Oceania stands as the prototype of the state of exception under the veil of two ways telescreen panopticon. There is uncertainty of who would suffer



from thought crime and vaporization like the unprotected life of Agamben's *homo sacer*. Because of thought police under the veil of surveillance, there is sovereign ban that makes life always precarious.

Further, O'Brien traps Smith under the camouflage of a rebel and leads him to 101 room: Agamben's banoptic camp wherein he is nudged both physically and psychologically until he complies with the regime's truth and starts loving Big Brother (Orwell, 2021, p. 143). O'Brien's brute paternalist treat impels Smith to pursue the Oceanic 'games of truth';  $2+2=5$ , and propaganda; "War is Peace, Freedom is Slavery, Ignorance is Strength" (Orwell, 2021, p. 12). The propaganda dissemination among the denizens in *1984* illustrates the knowledge/ power collaboration. This event infers that subjectivity is not autonomous under totalizing regime but manufactured. Additionally, this episode leads one to believe that how repressive regime subjects its subjects like Julia and Smith through absolute control by blatantly installing Big Brother's ideology. It ostensibly echoes Agamben's summing up of Foucault's biopolitics "The growing inclusion of man's natural life in the mechanisms and calculations of power" (Agamben, 1995, p. 119). Julia and Smith's inclusion as the outer party members marks the calculated inclusion in the political mechanism. Their carnal affair falls under the regulation and calculation of the regime. The panoptic paternalism of the regime is the impetus of their sponsored subjectivity which epitomizes Foucault's notion of subjectivity thereby subjectivity is, subject to someone else by control and dependence.

Further "the two aims of the Party are to conquer the whole surface of the earth and to extinguish once and for all the possibility of independent thought" (Orwell, 2021, p. 92) concretizes the indelible amalgam of power and knowledge that the regime exercise to mould the subjectivity of the subjects. Allegedly the neologism of newspeak functions like the circular architecture which replicates Bigo's banopticon to confine the thought process. Syme, working for dictionary claims that "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, 2021, p. 24). Primarily, the process of stopping the Cartesian sovereign self that produces independent thoughts signals the signpost of indoctrination which Julia and Smith underwrite and thereby they inculcate regime's truth. Similarly, vaporization and *unpersoning* of Withers and Syme do not symbolize the safeguarding of the territory but of sovereign which complies with Foucauldian state racism: killing other that turns the nation/state into the camp in Agambenian sense.

## **Smith: A Panoptic Nudgee**

Orwell's *1984* replicates a fluid semiotic signifier of panopticon totalitarian regime based on the state sponsored atrocity and violation of human rights. Smith's coercive indoctrination, fear of vaporization led by two ways telescreen is the iconic symbols of repressive paternalist state, Oceania. The telescreen and the hidden microphones in *1984* function as the indexes of mind moulding paradigm beyond Bentham's panoptic jail. Moreover, this all seeing political tool helps to curb the anti-regime activities as well as subject formation as Foucault believes. Julia and Smith's ultimate arrest who later comply with the propaganda farming in *1984*. Their compliance to the party's ideology signals the success of the nudger in panoptic Oceania projected by Orwell.

Finally, the exercise of Thought Police, Young League, Spy Cameras, and pervasive ban/opticon through telescreens are the synecdoche uses of panopticon to impel Smith and Julia among other to be docile. These technologies of panopticon not only subject them to power but also self-subjection to political outcasts. Their internalization of Party Propaganda after their arrest and intimidation juxtaposes Agamben's concentration camp where is rampant violence of human rights. The mandatory two minutes hate harvesting ceremonies, admonitory torture, incarceration, electric shocks, vaporization of Ampleforth, and Syme among other, intimidation, and propaganda feedings are the compelling coercive technologies of power to conduct the conduct of Smith like people in *1984*. By and large, subjectivity is under power's canopy which surveillance system desires to beget. Finally, these politically engineered drives, 'hidden matrixes' nudge and paternalize the inmates' subjectivity. This process underpins that subjectivity is manufactured by panoptic measures which is coercive in *1984*. At last, Smith's consigned subjectivity under the paradigm of panopticism, as the symbol of disciplinary power, castrates and asks him to behave himself in the whirlpool of propaganda constituted by the regime in *1984*.

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