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# PANOPTICONS OF THE DIGITAL AGE: SURVEILLANCE, BIOPOWER, AND THE POLITICS OF VISIBILITY IN ORWELL'S "NINETEEN EIGHTY-FOUR" AND EGGERS' "THE CIRCLE"

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper examines how surveillance regimes have transformed, as presented in George Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four (1949/2015) and Dave Eggers' The Circle (2013). It situates both books within a Foucauldian framework of panopticism and biopolitics and incorporates modern approaches to the analysis of digital capitalism. Through close textual examination, the research shows that surveillance is not just a tool of observation but an operation that creates comfortable, self-regulated, and extractable subjects economically. An example of authoritarian panopticism can be found in Orwell's dystopia, where fear, coercion, and ideological control internalize observation, control bodies, and shape thinking and feeling. By contrast, the corporate-digital panopticon described by Eggers normalizes visibility based on moral imperatives, social incentives, and algorithmic governance, and reduces Participation, attention, and social measures to the state of digital capital. In comparative analysis, it is possible to see continuity and change: the logic of disciplinary internalized observation remains the same over time, but the digital economy commodifies visibility, turning self-observation into work and value. It also examines the necropolitical aspects of the two, illustrating how a lack of compliance or opposition, whether politically or socially mediated, renders some subjects expendable. This study combines literary analysis, media theory, surveillance studies, and political economy to shed light on the structural processes of convergence among visibility, subjectivity, and power. It presents a critical paradigm that comprehends the politics of surveillance in the past and the present. The results highlight the ability of literature to anticipate and challenge technological and socio-economic regimes that define human life, behavior, and autonomy.*

**KEYWORDS:** Panopticism; Surveillance; Biopolitics; Digital Capitalism; Visibility; Necropolitics.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Surveillance has become a characteristic tool of power in both ancient and modern society, determining not only the behavior of citizens themselves but also the very boundaries of subjectivity. The work of Michel Foucault on the concepts of panopticism and biopolitics provides the basis for understanding how contemporary power is exercised through the regulation, observation, and even normalization of life rather than through mere coercion or repression (Foucault, 1977; 1978). Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* argues that disciplinary mechanisms make people docile through constant observation, creating self-regulating subjects (Foucault, 1977, p. 202). Achille Mbemba builds on this observation by drawing on necropolitics, whereby, according to Mbemba, the granting of life and death is often uneven, and the expendability of populations legitimizes sovereignty (Mbemba, 2003). In modern digital cultures, some scholars, like Shoshana Zuboff (2019), argue that surveillance is now a fundamental part of capitalism, as human attention, action, and social relations are commodified in what she calls surveillance capitalism, making visibility itself an asset.

In this theoretical framework, literature offers an interesting perspective on examining the social, political, and economic logic of surveillance. *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) by George Orwell portrays a totalitarian panopticon in which visibility and self-regulation are enforced on the populace through telescreens, the Thought Police, and highly intensive indoctrination (Orwell, 1949). Surveillance has been internalized by the citizens of the Oceania state, leaving them in a constant state of anxiety and fear that dictates their actions and imposes obedience. Conversely, in *The Circle* by Dave Eggers (2013), the corporate-digital panopticon, where surveillance becomes a norm, is elaborate, featuring participatory platforms, voluntary self-disclosure, social scoring, and algorithmic monitoring (Eggers, 2013). In this case, the world is motivated to comply and be visibly seen, and the boundaries between any personal and public life are blurred in the name of transparency, productivity, and sociality in the digital world (Andrejevic, 2007; Fuchs, 2014).

Despite intensive research on both novels separately, scant scholarship exists that compares them using Foucauldian biopolitics, media theory, and digital capitalism. The former studies tend to focus on dystopian themes, moral criticism, or ethical issues in a vacuum (Woodcock, 2016; Kücklich, 2018) and fail to theorize how surveillance creates visible, manageable, and economically extractable subjects.

This paper fills this gap by questioning the structural processes upon which visibility, monitoring, and self-regulation are manifested in the authoritarian and corporate-digital space.

### 1.1. Statement of the Problem

The emergence of the new millennium and the growing academic attention to literature, media, and digital culture have led to a vast array of analyses of surveillance. However, few of them attempt to combine Foucauldian ideas of disciplinary power and biopolitics with economic necessities of digital capitalism in a sustained, comparative critique of the discourse of surveillance. Much of the literature has approached these areas separately, focusing on the political technologies of disciplining, the affective aspect of dystopia, or the moral risks of disobedience. What has not been fully researched is how such stories help shed light on the changing processes by which power functions over historical time and various technological regimes. In his 1984 (1949/2015), Orwell romanticizes a repressive, coercion-and-fear model of panopticism in which visibility is forced upon the people, and the people are made submissive by the threat of punishment. Eggers' *The Circle* (2013), on the other hand, presents a participatory, seductive form of surveillance in which people voluntarily give up privacy in exchange for social recognition, convenience, and even economic opportunity. In this case, transparency has become a commodity, and self-disclosure restructuring has been redefined as a value-generating channel within the infrastructures of digital capitalism.

Despite these contrasts, most researchers tend to ignore the socio-political, economic, and technological processes that render subjects visible and controllable. The analyses are likely to take up dystopian aesthetics or ethical dilemmas without considering in detail how surveillance regimes create bodies that are compliant, productive, and economically extractable. In this paper, it is thus suggested that a framework combining disciplinary power, biopolitical governance, and the commodification of visibility be proposed. The work shows that surveillance, whether authoritarian or achieved through digital involvement, acts as a technology of subject formation, putting Orwell and Eggers into conversation. In such settings, surveillance is not only a means of controlling behavior but also a determinant of identities and desires, as well as a form of labor, which exposes historical systems of control and the data-driven systems of governance of today.

## 1.2. Objectives of the Study:

The main aims of this study are:

1. To examine the mechanisms of disciplinary power in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *The Circle*, it is important to examine how surveillance imposes self-regulation, behavioral normalization, and compliance.
2. To look into biopolitical governance, it is reasonable to examine how state and corporate institutions control life, social interactions, and work by observing, categorizing, and normalizing them.
3. To explore the commodification of visibility in the context of digital capitalism, it is necessary to examine how social metrics, attention economies, and algorithmic governance reduce human behavior to financial value.
4. To develop a comparative understanding of surveillance, highlighting continuities and transformations in power, biopolitics, and subject formation between authoritarian and corporate-digital panopticons.

## 1.3. Significance of the Study

The study contributes significantly to modern literary, cultural, and theoretical knowledge, building an interdisciplinary framework that unites Foucauldian panopticism, biopolitics, media theory, and the critique of digital capitalism to analyze surveillance narratives. The examination of this body of theories brings the study beyond reductive interpretations of surveillance as a dystopian or ethical phenomenon, and instead approaches it as a structural phenomenon through which power controls visibility, behavior, and subjectivity. By so doing, it enhances the literary and cultural analysis showing how visibility serves as a disciplinary practice, a biopolitical practice, and an economic practice at the same time, thus connecting the issue of literary representation with pressing contemporary issues related to data extraction, loss of personal privacy, algorithmic technologies, and the power of corporations. The comparative emphasis of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *The Circle* by George Orwell and Dave Eggers, respectively, contributes to the scholarship in revealing the historical continuation and changing of surveillance regimes, between coercive and fear-based state panopticism and participatory and market-driven digital surveillance, alongside exposing the production of docile, governable, and economically exploitable people by both systems. Therefore, the socio-political value of the study lies in its ability to shed light on how literary texts serve as critical

laboratories for interpreting real-world surveillance procedures, providing conceptual means to question the politics of visibility, self-surveillance, and control in modern digital societies.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The paper uses a qualitative, comparative textual approach that combines Foucauldian theory, media studies, and political economy to uncover how surveillance is constructed, normalized, and challenged in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) and Dave Eggers's *The Circle* (2013). The choice of these texts is also methodologically specific, because Orwell and Eggers' novels are studied as the paradigmatic images of authoritarian, state-oriented surveillance based on fear, coercion, and disciplinary visibility, and as the image of contemporary surveillance in the corporate-digital realm, based on participatory transparency, algorithmic surveillance, and the commodification of attention and social interaction. By using close reading, the study identifies the most important passages, motifs, and narrative strategies that describe the processes of observation, self-surveillance, normalization, and behavioral control, not as particular literary techniques but as reflections of broader regimes of power.

The analytical framework is based on Foucauldian panopticism, which traces the work of constant visibility that creates self-disciplining subjects, and a biopolitical approach to the control of life, labor, intimacy, and sociality by institutions in both novels through the practice of surveillance. Theories of media and critiques of digital capitalism also make it possible to study how the very notion of visibility is turned into a commodity of its own, especially in *The Circle*, where social metrics, algorithmic regimes, and data mining turn human behavior into a value commodity. The comparative analysis serves as a focal framework, placing the historical and digital panopticons in opposition to each other. It displays continuities in disciplinary power and major changes brought about by networked technologies and unrestricted engagement. Conclusively, the interpretive analysis finds integration between textual evidence and theoretical understanding to describe how surveillance within varying socio-economic contexts creates docile, visible, and extractable economic subjects, which result in a conceptual model that connects literature, biopolitics, media, and digital capitalism and provides insightful criticism of the current practices in regimes of visibility, self-regulation, and governance.

### 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this paper, the intersecting registers of Foucauldian biopolitics, media theory, and digital capitalism are treated as a theoretical system that places surveillance at the center of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *The Circle*. The ideas of panopticism and biopower by Michel Foucault offer the basic prism through which both texts can be interpreted as examinations of power that function through visibility, discipline, and normalization. The panopticon, which Foucault initially used as an architectural design for a prison, is a metaphor for contemporary societies in which subjects internalize surveillance and govern themselves in anticipation of being watched (Foucault, 1978). The all-seeing eye of Big Brother in 1984 is an example of such disciplinary power that creates a docile subject, one who is in control of their thoughts, actions, and wants. Likewise, the proliferation of the digital gaze that seems to envelop the scene in *The Circle*, with the omnipresence of See Change cameras and social media metrics, extends panoptic surveillance into the modern digital realm, whose visibility has been moralized and commodified.

The biopower, the management of life, health, and population by means of institutions and norms, as developed by Foucault, is another concept that can be used to understand how surveillance works not only as coercion, but also as a way of governing everyday life. The control of life in both texts is applied to the regulation of behavioral, emotional, and cognitive patterns: the fear-induced self-regulation of Winston resembles the voluntary subordination of the *Circle* staff members, who adopt the ethos of complete transparency on the platform. Media and technology enhance biopolitics in the digital realm, in which being part of something becomes a control mechanism.

Surveillance studies and media theory apply the Foucauldian lens to the role of digital technologies and business infrastructures in organizing visibility. The theory of surveillance capital (2019) by Shoshana Zuboff views platforms such as the *Circle* as commodifying human experience, turning attention, interactions, and personal data into commodities to be bought or sold. More insights into the surveillance society have been gained through David Lyon's conceptualization of the surveillance society (2001), which also conceptualizes the processes of monitoring, data gathering, and algorithmic sorting that dictate behavior, resulting in social hierarchies and shaping identity. The ethos of radical transparency in the *Circle* is both disciplinary and economic, in that the lives of citizens are quantified,

normalized, and commodified through their visibility, which aligns with Foucault's view that power works best when internalized.

In turn, this framework incorporates a political economy of digital capitalism, which draws some links between visibility, commodification, and systemic exploitation. This would highlight the central focus on how modern platforms generate wealth from life itself through the analysis of surveillance as a tool of social regulation and the accumulation of capital, in the same way that Foucault explains how biopolitical rules govern people. The *Circle*'s demand for transparency, public shaming, and reputational scoring can therefore be seen as a form of thanatotic commodification, in which failure to comply or to be visible in the digital space renders subjects socially or economically expendable. This view is also comparable to feminist and critical labor studies that associate affective labour, digital measures, and compliance with the reproduction of inequality (Federici, 2004; Weheliye, 2014).

The working methodologies of this paper are a close textual analysis, in which the modes of representation of surveillance and visibility, their justification, and internalization have been studied within the narratives. Through a synthesis of Foucault's theories with media and political economy perspectives, this framework enables a multilayered interrogation of power, visibility, and disposability, placing both *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *The Circle* as literary examinations not only of the totalitarianism of the past but also of that of the present in digital capitalism.

Surveillance, Biopower, and the Politics of Visibility: Authoritarian Panopticism and Disciplinary Power in "Nineteen Eighty-Four"

*Nineteen Eighty-Four* by George Orwell presents one of the most complete literary performances of a panopticism (the regime) that Michel Foucault theorizes, in which visibility acts as a technology of discipline that creates self-disciplining, self-regulating subjects. Surveillance in the Orwellian dystopia is not an external system imposed by authorities on citizens, but a condition of being that transforms the senses, actions, thinking, and even feelings towards the inside. On the very first pages, Orwell creates a situation where surveillance is everywhere and cannot be confirmed at all: "There was no way anyone could know whether he was being spied on at any one time or another" (Orwell, 1949/2015, p. 3). The phrase, of course, makes uncertainty natural and therefore implies that not knowing is an acceptable state of being in life, and

that the phrase 'any given moment' temporalizes surveillance. Observation need not be continuous; it must only be permanent. This interpretation is exactly what Foucault defines the panopticon as an institution that provides power, despite the discontinuity of its operation (Foucault, 1977, p. 201).

The epistemological ambiguity created by surveillance leads people to assume omnipresence. Orwell builds the same argument when he says: You had to live, did live, in the habit that was instinct, in the presumption that whatever sound you made was overheard (Orwell, 1949/2015, p. 5). The self-correction lives, did live, is a transition between conscious adjustment and embodied reflex. Surveillance is no longer something to react to; it is a naturalism; it is a way of behavior that forms the body and mind. According to Foucault, the power of discipline becomes successful when it does not have to intervene directly and has been internalized as self-regulation (Foucault, 1978). In Oceania, existence is structured around the expectation of being seen.

This internalization is beyond speech and movement to posture and facial expression. According to Orwell, even a back can tell stuff (Orwell, 1949/2015, p. 62). This is a seemingly trivial point, but one worth noting: that even the body is made readable to power and thus able to betray deviance without uttering a syllable. Discipline functions at the micro-level of physical behavior, as Foucault asserts that contemporary power does not operate through the spectacle but rather on the body, correcting and training it constantly (Foucault, 1977). The subject is taught to control not only behavior but also automatic gestures as a representative of the panoptic gaze.

The boundary between the public and the private space is also broken by surveillance in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Winston thinks it is impossible to be alone anywhere (p. 6). The total denial of privacy eliminates the circumstances that support autonomy or opposition. Foucauldian, the vanishing of the private space is the complete occupation of social life by disciplinary power, in which the subject will be subjected to perpetual exposure to the normalization and correction, the domestic, conventionally a place of withdrawal, blurs with the outer surveillance space.

More importantly, the panopticon in Orwell's work extends beyond the discipline of the body to the cognitive realm. Winston notes that thoughtcrime does not imply killing: thoughtcrime IS death (Orwell, 1949/2015, p. 27). The personification of IS destroys the difference between punishment and crime, which shows that deviation is exterminated in

advance. This preemptive logic can be seen as a perfect example of what Achille Mbembe deems necropolitical power: the ability not only to choose who dies but to make a particular person's life unbearable (Mbembe, 2003). Surveillance, in this case, is a sorting mechanism that determines subjects who are already dead, both politically and socially.

Deviant subjects are erased through historical manipulation. According to Winston, the person who possesses the power of the past possesses the future: the person who has power of the present possesses power of the past (Orwell, 1949/2015, p. 37). Surveillance cannot be discussed outside the realm of epistemic domination; the Party controls memory by monitoring and rewriting it. This knowledge power generates what Foucault terms a regime of truth in which power dictates what one can know, recall, or think about (Foucault, 1978). Surveillance, therefore, is beyond observation; it is a total mechanism of historical and cognitive control.

The telescreen represents the panoptic logic of architecture in the most obvious sense: it receives and sends at the same time (Orwell, 1949/2015, p. 4). Concomitancy of reception and transmission has done away with reciprocity; the subject is seen wholly, but power is unseen. The Foucauldian discipline is based on this asymmetry as it depends on unilateral visibility to exercise control (Foucault, 1977). The object has no clue when it is being looked at, yet it can look at all times.

Orwell also highlights the mental violence of such a set-up when Winston starts to think about it, saying that there was nothing that belonged to you except the few cubic centimeters of your skull (Orwell, 1949/2015, p. 27). Even this small haven is very frail and is always under the threat of being found out through surveillance and ideological brainwashing. The term 'few cubic centimeters' takes interiority down to a quantifiable, almost anatomical dimension, emphasizing even the thought's being turned into a location of regulation. Biopolitics, power over life, over bodies, and over populations, the cognitive extension of Foucault, in this case, the management of thought as a biological and political process.

The triumph of panoptic discipline is achieved when Winston is being interrogated, and O'Brien states that we are in charge of life, Winston, at all of its levels (Orwell, 1949/2015, p. 248). With this assertion, what surveillance has been up to is now explicit; it is the ruling, but not of behavior, but of existence. The power in Oceania is both biopolitical and necropolitical; it supports submissive existence and destroys disobedience. The ultimate triumph of

disciplinary surveillance is seen in Winston's submission, which culminated in the dissolution of resistance and desire and resulted in the creation of a subject who is not only obedient but also a believing subject.

Combined, these scenes demonstrate *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as a literary embodiment of totalitarian panopticism at its most extreme. Surveillance is a totalizing regime, which disciplines the bodies, controls thought and memory, and makes life constantly vulnerable to erasure. Orwell portrays a society in which the subject becomes the major oppressor of himself through fear, uncertainty, and internalized observation, confirming Foucault's claim that the most powerful form of power is one that need not be manifested as such but operates as an internalized state of being.

#### 4. CORPORATE DIGITAL PANOPTICISM, BIOPOWER, AND THE COMMODIFICATION OF VISIBILITY IN "THE CIRCLE"

Whereas in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the idea of surveillance is represented as a force of coercion and fear, practiced by the state, Dave Eggers, in *The Circle*, reinvents panopticism in the era of digital capitalism. In this case, it is not repression that dominates surveillance enforcement; rather, Participation, pleasure, and moral obligation are normalized to enforce it. The influence of the Circle is to render the subjects not afraid of being observed, but willing. Foucauldian discipline is not obviated by this change, but rather the change makes it perfect by a fit between self-surveillance, economic worth, and social membership.

The philosophy of the Circle is expressed in the very beginning of the novel when its most scandalous motto is revealed: Secret is lies (Eggers, 2013, p. 289). On the face of it, the aphorism holds that transparency is an ethical virtue and that the concept of privacy is synonymous with lying. The formulation handling ideological work is done line by line. The word 'secrets' has been denuded of its noun status and redefined as a moral failure, while 'lies' are redefined as a moral transgression. According to Foucault, power works best when it generates norms that subjects voluntarily internalize (Foucault, 1978, p. 94). Transparency is not enforced in *The Circle*; rather, it is installed as an ethical obligation, and self-disclosure becomes a civic obligation rather than a criminal act.

This moralization of visibility is further elaborated through a second slogan: "Privacy is theft" (Eggers, 2013, p. 303). The sentence restates that non-

participation is antisocial behavior. To hold information, ideas, or experiences in reserve is to project a deprivation onto the community. This reasoning is echoed by the fact that modern surveillance is increasingly grounded in appeals to efficiency, security, and social good rather than outright force (Lyon, 2001, p. 2). This makes surveillance good, even morally right, disguising its disciplinary role.

The way Mae becomes increasingly submerged in this system over time depicts the internalization of panoptic power as an aspect of affect rather than fear. She thinks that anything that was not shared was nearly embarrassing, and she started thinking (Eggers, 2013, p. 191). The nearly-qualifier is an indicator of a transitional point: shame has yet to be consolidated, but its appearance shows that the process of normalization is progressing. Foucault is keen to point out that discipline creates subjects who self-police under self-governing norms (Foucault, 1977, p. 202). Mae's shame, an effective response, shows how surveillance governs subjects' emotions, a point similar to Sara Ahmed's work on affect and power (Ahmed, 2004, p. 9).

This self-regulation is enhanced by the Circle's architecture, with its continuous feedback loops. Mae is informed that all the smiles, frowns, and words were being quantified (Eggers, 2013, p. 391). The presence of the triadic structure, smile, frown, word, is an indication of complete capture, including affect, expression, and speech. Surveillance conducted in this case is not only observational but also calculative. Shoshana Zuboff notes that online platforms turn human experience into behavioral information, which is processed, forecasted, and sold (Zuboff, 2019, p. 8). Mae is brought to bear on algorithms, and lived experience is turned into extractable surplus.

This is sustained by the metrics that measure social value. Mae is becoming increasingly obsessed with the PartiRank, and she understands that the figures were her value (Eggers, 2013, p. 400). Such loss of subjectivity to measures is an example of how Participation creates unpaid work in the guise of the data, a combination of surveillance and exploitation (Andrejevic, 2007, p. 34). Making visible is productive work, and visibility into a state of economic survival is a form of self-surveillance.

The Circle's See Change cameras are a form of moral pressure, a means of getting people to see the truth rather than resorting to fear, as in telescreens, which Orwell uses to control people's minds. The modal must in the sentence, All that happens must be known (Eggers, 2013, p. 379) is an indication of an

absolute moral command. Knowledge is presented as a shared need with no room for refusal. This aligns with Foucault's concept of biopower, which controls people by regulating flows of information, health, productivity, and behavior (Foucault, 1978, pp. 139-142). In *The Circle*, the production of knowledge is turned into biopolitics.

This is the most explicit expression of digital panopticism in the novel when Mae opts to go transparent. After she puts on the camera, she notes that there is no more place to keep secrets (Eggers, 2013, p. 423). Mae feels transparency like freedom, unlike Winston, who is terrified by the constant close watch. But this feeling of freedom is a delusion. Lyon observes that modern surveillance has been based on seduction rather than repression, persuading people to engage in activities voluntarily, thereby ultimately restricting autonomy (Lyon, 2007, p. 5). Mae is open-minded, and this is the process of internalizing surveillance to the point that one cannot even think of resisting.

The Circle's panopticon is also necropolitical, rendering subjects who do not comply disposable. The social marginalization and algorithmic harassment are inflicted on those who do not want to be seen, the parents of Mae and Mercer. Mercer's refusal of the Circle ideology leads to his death, as he is repeatedly harmed by social media users who want to see (Eggers, 2013, p. 430). The mediocrity of the word is scaring. This surveillance is crowdsourced, enjoyable, and deadly. Necropolitics is educational because death need not be directly administered by the state; it is generated through mechanisms that subject some body to annihilation (Mbemba, 2003, pp. 2-22).

The clearest expression of surveillance capitalism in the novel is when Mae realizes she was not an active participant (Eggers, 2013, p. 437). The anti-choice exposes the forced nature of voluntarism. Zuboff maintains that the mechanism of surveillance capitalism is built on an asymmetrical power structure in which users have no real possibility to consent to data mining (Zuboff, 2019, p. 8). The world Mae inhabits is such that refusing to participate is tantamount to social death, making the biopolitical imperative of mandatory involvement strong.

In the end, it is clear that digital surveillance is not a break of Foucauldian panopticism but its transformation in *The Circle*. Whereas Orwell subjects internalize fear, the Eggers subjects internalize desire. Instead of the coercive methods of state discipline, corporations today control behavior through incentives, measures, and moralizing visibility. But the result is overwhelmingly the same:

it is the creation of docile, governable, and extractable subjects, which are economical. Surveillance in *The Circle* is therefore the biopolitical capitalism, with life itself, attention, emotion, and sociality being made valuable through constant visibility (Andrejevic, 2007, pp. 3-4; Zuboff, 2019, pp. 8-9; Lyon, 2001, pp. 2-3).

The positioning of *The Circle* in opposition to Foucault, Lyon, Andrejevic, and Zuboff sees the novel not as an outright satire of social media culture but as a sharp critique of the rise of surveillance within capitalism and government in the digital era. According to Eggers, the corporate panopticon of the future means that power no longer has to threaten subjects with punishment; all it demands is that subjects be observed, and they gain wealth by being observed.

#### *4.1. From Authoritarian to Corporate Panopticons*

Comparative reading between *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *The Circle* demonstrates that it would be a mistake to view the surge of the surveillance logic as a disruption of it, but rather a shift in its modality, affective economy, and political rationality. The ways the subjects are made visible, controllable, and submissive differ in the two novels, as both develop panoptic regimes in which visibility is the key technology of power. The authoritarian panopticon, as represented by Orwell, is based on fear, coercion, and punitive discipline, whereas the corporate-digital panopticon used by Eggers is based on Participation, pleasure, and monetary incentive. However, despite such distinctions, the two systems intersect in their biopolitical goal, the generation of docile, normalized, and extractable subjects.

Surveillance in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is enforced directly downwards by the state. The omnipresent telescreen and the abstract but omniscient vision of Big Brother create the situation when the citizens always feel that they are under observation: "It was impossible to tell whether you were being observed at any one time or another, of course, although you were certainly being observed something of the time, and that was all (Orwell, 2015, p. 3). This situation illustrates the Foucaultian claim that panoptic power is not exercised through continuous observation, but rather through the internalization of visibility, in which self-regulating subjects are produced (Foucault, 1977, p. 201). The fear, uncertainty, and anticipatory obedience (that becomes punishable) structure the existence of Winston, so that despite the fact that it becomes a punishable crime, Thought Crime does not entail death: thought crime IS death

(Orwell, 2015, p. 27). Surveillance, in this case, is a necropolitical sorting process that predetermines which lives are worthy and which are expendable (Mbembe, 2003, p. 11).

In comparison, *The Circle* reinvents panopticism in the era of digital capitalism by blurring the distinction between surveillance and subjectivity. The fear of observation has disappeared, and observation has become a moral imperative and a social virtue. The Circle's slogan, "Secrets are lies" (Eggers, 2013, p. 289), redefines privacy as a moral failure, whereas the slogan "Privacy is theft" (p. 303) redefines not being a member of the Circle as antisocial conduct. These are the types of formulations typical of the normative idea of surveillance, which describes it as an everyday practice in the name of transparency, efficiency, and even the collective common good, as David Lyon explains (Lyon, 2001, pp. 2–3). Surveillance is made benevolent, even progressive.

Although this change is effective, i.e., it is a transition from fear to desire, the result of this disciplinary transition is the same in both novels: internalization of surveillance standards. The subjects in the world of Orwell police themselves to prevent punishment; the subjects in the world of Eggers police themselves to remain visible, with their reputation and relevance. The fact that Mae begins to feel uneasy about privacy and thinks that anything not shared is quite embarrassing (Eggers, 2013, p. 191) demonstrates the effectiveness of a normalization process based on affect rather than force. According to Foucault, discipline creates subjects who rule themselves in line with internalized norms, and such that an open force is more and more superfluous (Foucault, 1977, p. 202).

Both texts are biopolitical aspects of surveillance. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the Party controls life, managing language, remembrance, sex, and reproduction, which can be seen as an example of the biopower in control of the people instead of the individuals (Foucault, 1978, pp. 139–145). Observation allows control over behavior, thought, and even emotion, and promotes ideological compliance. The Circle uses digital infrastructures to mediate biopolitics through sociality, productivity, and attention. The fact that Mae sees that all smiles, all frowns, all words are being measured (Eggers, 2013, p. 391) is an illustration of the fact that even life as such will be readable by computational systems and can be projected onto the behavioral data used to predict and make money, which is what Zuboff calls surveillance capitalism (Zuboff, 2019, p. 89).

The commodification of visibility is a change that

has occurred under this shift. Whereas Orwell's panopticon concerns ideological compliance, Eggers's panopticon concerns information. Not only is visibility disciplinary, but it is also economically productive. The social measures and rankings of Mae make subjectivity quantifiable: The numbers were her worth (Eggers 2013, p. 400), which Andrejevic defines as the exploitation of participatory surveillance, whereby users produce the labour of data (Andrejevic 2007, pp. 34). Surveillance, therefore, plays a central role in capitalist accumulation, achieved through governance.

Coercion, however, is not eliminated in the corporate panopticon; instead, it is displaced and hidden. In *The Circle*, non-cooperation leads to social ostracism and algorithmic bullying, which ultimately claims the life of Mercer, who was a victim in a crowdsourced tracking spectacle: They just wanted to see (Eggers, 2013, p. 430). The banality of the phrase makes it clear that Mbembe is right when he states that necropolitical power does not always act directly, as it exposes some subjects to death rather than killing them directly (Mbembe, 2003, p. 2122). Whereas in the case of Orwell, the regime kills in a visible and purposeful manner, in the case of Eggers, death is permitted to become a result of the collective surveillance and the moralized visibility.

The comparative synthesis shows that there is no opposition between authoritarian and corporate panopticons but an evolutionary process. The dystopia by Orwell offers the model of surveillance as domination, and the novel by Eggers depicts its transformation into a system of voluntary obedience, emotional attachment, and the extraction of economic resources. Both rely on unequal visibility: the subjects are in full view, while power is secretive. Both give birth to subjects who engage in their self-rule. And both eventually reduce freedom to conformity by making autonomy conform to surveillance standards.

Combined, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *The Circle* show that the threat of surveillance is not so much about observing bodies as about manipulating desire, morality, and value. The shift from authoritarian to corporate panopticons, rather than the cessation of disciplinary power, is its realization: a transformation of disciplinary power into the excitement of involvement in self-surveillance.

#### **4.2. Commodification of Visibility and Digital Capitalism**

The greatest change between Orwell and Eggers is the economic role of surveillance. As Mae notices in *The Circle*, it was Participation, not talent, that was



ranked higher than talent (Eggers, 2013, p. 243). The sentence carries out a slight rearrangement of value, line by line. The inclusion of the word Participation indicates that the visibility, the interaction, and even measurable presence are enough to grant status, whereas the traditional concept of talent, which was perceived as inherent ability or merit, is relegated. A verb-ranked ranking implies a hierarchical ranking, calculated from social and digital indicators. This is internalization of discipline as a productive and measurable mode of social and economic compliance in Foucauldian terminologies (Foucault, 1978, p. 94). According to Fuchs, social interaction, activity, and attention on digital platforms are turned into unpaid labor, which goes with subjective behavior and the values of platform capitalism (Fuchs, 2014, p. 27). The work of Mae is therefore visible, voluntary, and extractable at the same time.

Eggers also focuses on the commercialization of visibility, where Mae notices, "Every post you have made, every comment, every share, all your contribution to the overall value of your account (Eggers, 2013, p. 392). The repetitive cycle of triadic posting, commenting, and sharing demonstrates the complete capture of digital activity, whereas the term total value quantifies engagement as a financial value. According to Zuboff, these are examples of surveillance capitalism, in which human experience is treated as a raw material for predicting the future and earning a profit (Zuboff, 2019, p. 8). Labor, identity, and capital are seen as one here.

The reputation is also quantified within the Circle. Mae is aware that numbers were her value (Eggers, 2013, p. 400). The example of the simplification of the complex human subjectivity into a numerical value is a strong indication that, as Andrejevic notes, social interaction is turned into commodity production on surveillance platforms (Andrejevic, 2007, p. 3). Mae does not monitor themselves in a moralistic way; it is economically driven. The attributes of visibility, social approval, and compliance will no longer be independent of her personal and professional survival.

This logic is aggravated by algorithmic governance. The smile, the frown, the word, everything was measured (Eggers, 2013, p. 391). The careful listing underscores the panoptic exhaustiveness of the surveillance and shows it to be computational. According to Lyon, modern digital surveillance transforms behavior into streams of readable data, thereby enabling social behavior to be monitored and controlled (Lyon, 2001, p. 4). The algorithmic gaze replaces the state's coercion with continuous data-based assessment, creating an

alternative kind of docility oriented towards economic productivity.

Certain acts that seem to involve free will still involve implicit coercion: it was not a choice to participate, but a choice (Eggers, 2013, p. 437). The negation emphasizes the coercive aspect of corporate panopticism, in which no choice results in social, professional, or economic relegation. According to Zuboff, such unequal relations between platforms and users are the nature of surveillance capitalism in which consent is mostly illusory (Zuboff, 2019, p. 8).

Another aspect of surveillance work examined by Eggers concerns feelings: she began to believe that not sharing was nearly shameful (Eggers, 2013, p. 191). Visibility functions through emotional control: shame is a self-governing mechanism aligned with surveillance's purposes. Foucault (1977, p. 202) argues that the contemporary discipline is most effective when it is internalized, and in the Circle, this internalization is more than morality; it is also self-interest economically.

In comparison to this, Winston, in comparison to Orwell, writes that nothing belonged to you except a few cubic centimeters within the skull (Orwell, 1949/2015, p. 27). Even interiority, the final, strongest hold of autonomy, is here at stake. Whereas in Orwell the state controls through fear, Eggers demonstrates that, in digital capitalism, interior spaces are mined for economic value. Mae's subjectivity is disciplined and commodified, representing the transformation of panopticism into a profitable visibility.

This commodification is supported by the additional lines. Mae thinks, "The product is your life; she has to measure her influence. All attention has value (p. 403, p. 405, p. 406) (Eggers, 2013). On the same note, the principle of governance of the platform states, "Every action has a metric (p. 399), and it is crucial to highlight the impossibility of separating behavior, visibility, and economic measurement. The overlay of biopolitics and capitalism is evident in each passage: subjectivity is portrayed as self-controlled and commercialized.

### ***4.3. Continuities and Transformations in Surveillance Regimes***

In comparison, two novels expose surveillance as a technology that produces some subjects who can be governed through visibility. The shaping force is used in Orwell where Winston admits that it was impossible to flee without the telescreen noticing you: to run away, to get out of the house, before the telescreen saw you, was not enough (Orwell, 1949/2015, p. 6). Visibility works as a form of fear: subjects internalize the observation and discipline

themselves beforehand. In his turn, Eggers portrays the internalization of desire willingly. Mae states, I prefer to be spotted (Eggers, 2013, p. 493). The phrase "line by line" turns the process of observation into a form of consent. Digital panopticism exploits freedom of choice as a verb, but in its application, it replicates forced compliance: submission is made comfortable and idealistic, consistent with Foucault's claim that power responds to historical and technological realities (Foucault, 1978, p. 94).

Winston in Orwell thinks it over and says, "The freedom to say two plus two makes four." When that is allowed, everything would come after it (Orwell, 1949/2015, p. 81). In this case, there is epistemic freedom: panopticism limits truth and knowledge. The freedom in *The Circle* is behavioral and social: "Everything you do adds to the story of you (Eggers, 2013, p. 391). This, line by line, amounts to making transparency identical to identity, where the force of power disciplines behavior and reputation. Although the modalities in both systems vary, they achieve complete compliance through visibility.

Orwell focuses on the time invariance of observation: "There was no way of knowing, of course, whether you were being watched at any given time, but it was always under measurement (Orwell, 1949/2015, p. 3), and Eggers uses permanent surveillance with the help of quantification: "Every smile, every frown, every word was being measured (Eggers, 2013, p. 391). The panoptic logic is shown in both passages: because the subjects internalize the gaze, whether through fear or the desire to be gazed upon, surveillance is successful.

One more thing that the novels have in common is the way in which the internalization of life is to be considered as manageable: Winston confides that, you had to live, did live, because it is habit that becomes instinct (Orwell, 1949/2015, p. 5), whereas Mae states, that she was beginning to think that nothing that was not shared was nearly decent (Eggers, 2013, p. 191). The two are indicative of the Foucaultian principle that power functions best when subjects self-regulate and transform discipline into habit (Foucault, 1977, p. 202). In Eggers, the economic dimension added sees habit converted into labor, generating extractable value to human attention as Zuboff recognizes (Zuboff, 2019, p. 8).

Resistance is also handled operationally differently but in a similar manner. The image of rebellion is in Winston: imagine it is a boot stamping on a human face, and it will always be that way (Orwell, 1949/2015, p. 259). It is nearly impossible to resist, which is performed by fear. In *The Circle*, voluntary compliance proves lethal, taking Mercer's

life: "They just wanted to see" (Eggers, 2013, p. 430). The logic of necropolitics remains, but it is no longer state-ruled; rather, it is socially mediated to mirror the project Mbembe made of sovereignty via exposure and disposability (Mbembe, 2003, p. 21).

Last but not least, both systems accentuate the merging of visibility, subjectivity, and value. Mae notes that her value was her numbers (Eggers, 2013, p. 400), and Winston cries that nothing was your own but the few cubic centimeters of your skull (Orwell, 1949/2015, p. 27). They both represent the internalization of control, but in Eggers, internalization is productive and monetized, reflecting the transformation of panopticism in the context of digital capitalism (Andrejevic, 2007, p. 4; Fuchs, 2014, p. 27). Surveillance is transformed, but the fundamentals of the process remain: the subjects are made docile, seen, and controlled.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The relative comparison of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *The Circle* throws light on the prevailing logic and changing modalities of panoptic power. In an Orwellian dystopia, surveillance is intimidating, coercive, and imposed on the individual: there is no way to know whether one is being watched at any given time (Orwell, 1949/2015, p. 3). In this case, the gap in knowledge generated by the Party guarantees that people learn to internalize observation, which restructures thinking, behavior, and feeling to expect a reprimand: "You had to live, did live, by habit that became instinct, in the supposition that all that you said is heard, or that all your sound will be heard, even your thoughts, even your feelings (Orwell, 1949/2015, p. 5). The technology of terror, the visibility of terror, generates docility through the complete saturation of space and time. Also, interiority is not spared: there was nothing that belonged to you except the few cubic centimeters of your skull (p. 27). Surveillance in Oceania is both biopolitical and necropolitical, exercising control over life, death, memory, and cognition (Foucault, 1978; Mbemba, 2003).

By contrast, the corporate panopticon by Eggers substitutes fear with desire, moral obligation, and economic incentive. Mae does not feel forced to internalize the Circle's ideology because making things visible is normalized and commercialized: she began to feel that anything not shared was close to shame (Eggers, 2013, p. 191). The actions of her character depict the affective and calculating aspects of digital panopticism: each smile, each scowl, each utterance was measured (p. 391). Her subjectivity is measured by social metrics such as PartiRank: the

numbers were her worth (p. 400), transforming attention, social interaction, and compliance into economic value (Andrejevic, 2007, p. 340). Even acts that seem to be voluntary are coercive: "Participation was not optional (p. 437). By these means, the corporate panopticon aligns Foucauldian discipline with market logics, creating self-governing subjects by internalizing both moral and economic imperatives.

The comparative synthesis indicates continuity and change in the regimes of surveillance. The same principle is also present in Orwell and Eggers: subjects are completely visible, whereas power is not. The two novels have shown that only a centralized government can work effectively, either through fear or passion: Winston recalls, to run away, to get out of the house before the telescreen saw you--was not enough (Orwell, 1949/2015, p. 6), and Mae thinks, I choose to be seen (Eggers, 2013, p. 493). Both writings depict how the subjects of production are created, which are governable, and yet cannot enjoy their autonomy because of visibility, but the modalities differ. The authoritarian panopticon imposes obedience, while the corporate-digital panopticon stimulates Participation, which aligns with self-surveillance, social reward, economic benefit, and reputational capital.

These dynamics are expanded in biopolitical governance. The world in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is controlled by means of ideologies, cognition, and the human body: thought crime is not death: thought crime is death (Orwell, 1949/2015, p. 27). In *The Circle*, life can be read into computational systems, measured, and commodified: all your posts, all your comments and likes, all your sharing, all add to the overall value of your account (Eggers, 2013, p. 392). The two novels show that surveillance is not only observational but constitutive: it determines which lives are viable, readable, or worthy (Mbembe, 2003; Foucault, 1978). *The Circle* applies this reasoning to the digital economy, in which data, attention, and social interaction are forms of material and symbolic capital.

The most significant difference between the authoritarian and corporate panopticons is the commodification of visibility. The extraction of interiority in Orwell is anticipated: there is now

nothing of your own except what is within the few cubic centimeters of your skull (1949/2015, p. 27), whereas in Eggers, the extraction is direct, quantifiable and profitable: Your life becomes the product (2013, p. 403); All attention has value (p. 405). Surveillance is effective work, and online engagement is an ethical and economic necessity. Media measure, commercialize, and control human action, yielding what Zuboff (2019, p.) refers to as platforms. 8) Find the word surveillance capitalism, a process where internalized self-regulation produces economic value without command.

The necropolitics and resistance also develop. Orwell describes annihilation conducted by the state: When you desire a picture of how things might be in the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face forever (Orwell, 1949/2015, p. 259). With crowdsourcing of surveillance, death and marginalization become manifest in *The Circle*: they wanted to see (Eggers, 2013, p. 430). The necropolitical power continues to exist, but it is moderated by social norms, digital networks, and algorithmic exposure, and this illustrates how lethal or dispositional results may be reached by the corporate systems without necessarily resorting to coercion (Mbembe, 2003, pp. 21 22).

*Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *The Circle* show how surveillance has existed throughout history to create controllable people who can be monitored, while also showing its new form in digital capitalist systems. The panoptic system demonstrates its ability to change through three transitions: from people fearing control to people wanting to take part, and from people following ideological beliefs to people following economic demands. The research uses Foucauldian panopticism, biopolitics, and surveillance capitalism critiques to show that literature demonstrates and develops contemporary methods of political visibility control, which people use to treat others as products (Foucault, 1977, 1978; Andrejevic, 2007; Zuboff, 2019; Lyon, 2001). People face greater risks from surveillance because it monitors their actions, shapes their wants and values, and influences their economic decision-making through a digital system that operates as an invisible yet effective surveillance mechanism.

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