Orwell and Huxley – a Progress Score

A context and predictive analysis of two dystopian novels

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David Kindon (S/N 456410)
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1   Abstract

The dystopian novels, *Brave New World* (Huxley 1932) and *Nineteen Eighty Four* (Orwell 1949) describe how two different regimes of oligarchic totalitarianism exert control over society; in the former case through individuals' passive surrender to technology, consumption and hedonism and in the latter case through surveillance and oppressive dictatorship. The novels are analysed from the perspective of cultural and philosophical allusion as well as the allegorical references to issues of contemporary culture. Through a comparison and evaluation of the issues raised together with an analysis of the world today a view is reached on how the concepts resonate in 2014.

2   Key Questions

I have elected to undertake a context and predictive analysis of the dystopian novels *Brave New World* (Huxley 1932) (*BNW*) and *Nineteen Eighty Four* (Orwell 1949) (*1984*). The allusions and allegorical references in the texts are powerful. Whilst influenced by the contemporary worlds in which they were written, their prescience of future developments in technology, social engineering, political authority and surveillance define important way points for the future.

The alternative modes of oppression in the novels invite an analysis of which, if either, has modern currency. Is it the State oppression through the methods of surveillance and punishment as advanced in *1984*, or is it the Huxleyian vision of a society where individuals have become unthinking, compliant slaves to technology and to the State? Is it neither? Or is it a combination of both?

The essay examines cultural and philosophical allusions drawn from the texts, including *Critical Theory* (Bohman 2005), *Hegelian Dialectic* (McKenna 2011), *Utilitarianism* (Williams 2002), *Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs)* (Althusser 2010) (Hole 2007), *Semiotics* (COMM110 Week 3 2013, p.1), *Language* (COMM110 Week 3 2013, p.2) (Boulding 2009) (Yeo 2010), *Myth* (Barthes 1973) (McNeil 1999), *Simulacra* (Baudrillard 1987) (Ritzer 2005), *Panopticism* (Ritzer 2005) (Solove 2004) (Lyon 1994) and *Postmodernism* (Boulding 2009).

Multiple allegorical references will be examined focussing on *technology* (Kessler 1957) (Postman 1992 and 2005) (Carr 2011), *economics* (Kessler 1957) (Posner 1999), *Eugenics*

(Woiak 2007) (Huxley 1958) and *freedom, oppression, privacy and political correctness* (Solove 2004) (Boulding 2009) (Kessler 1957).

The Discussion section examines the prescience of the authors in predicting life in the first half of the twenty-first century. This is undertaken through an analysis of *propaganda, surveillance, secrecy and privacy* (Ritzer 2005) (Edelman 1985) (Yeo 2010) (Lyon 1994) (Hole 2007) and (Solove 2004).

The essay concludes with an assessment of which of the authors' predictions come closest to describing life today and their implications for the future.

3   Methodology

The prime methodology is an extensive literature review of the original texts, further commentaries by the authors supplemented with an analysis of critical studies, comparisons and contemporary commentaries of the works on the relevance of social and cultural theories. Concept Mapping has also played a key role in designing the essay's structure and contents.

4   Literature Review

Scholarly articles and books comparing *Nineteen Eighty Four* (Orwell 1949) and *Brave New World* (Huxley 1932) is a well-trodden path. Nevertheless, there are sufficient differences of opinion in the literature about content, context and relevance to accommodate a further contribution. In examining the literature I address three areas of research; first, the contemporary worlds in which the novels were written; second, the cultural and philosophical references and allusions contained within the novels; and third, selected allegorical references to contemporary issues.

4.1   *The Contemporary Worlds Of Huxley And Orwell*

The books were written at different times of crisis in western society. Huxley wrote *BNW* in 1932 at the end of the Great Depression. It was set 600 years into the then future (Posner p.14). Orwell wrote *1984* in 1948 during the interval between WWII and the Cold War. This temporality not only affected their contemporary views but also their predictions of the future. The first half of the twentieth century had many characteristics of dystopia, two world wars, global economic depression, the rise of fascism and communism, the development and use of nuclear weapons and the Cold War. These events dashed any hopes of a utopia contemplated during the nineteenth century (Ritzer 2005, p.860).

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In a letter to Orwell in October 1949 Huxley suggested that *BNW* more accurately described the world of the future rather than Orwell's totalitarian scenario (Usher 2012). In *Brave New World Revisited*, written 26 years after the original, Huxley soberly and with a sense of resignation, addressed issues including over-population, the early arrival of his predictions, the pursuit of good ends by bad means, mental sickness, new Newspeak, propaganda, brain-washing, torture and drugs (Huxley 1958).

4.1.1   Huxley's World

Huxley describes hi*s* novel as being written in the period before the rise of Hitler and "... when the Russian tyrant had not yet got into his stride..." (Huxley 1958). The chronology of events in *BNW* - after the "Nine Year War" and the "Great Economic Collapse" - is analogous with the tumultuous events in the real world (Meckier 1996 p.206). Huxley's politics were leftist, professing his political leanings to be "…Fabian and mildly labourite…" (Woiak 2007, p.111). He admired the work of Alfred Mond, the industrialist who rationalised the British chemical industry into the massive ICI conglomerate. Interestingly Huxley's World State Dictator in *BNW* is called Mustapha Mond (Woiak 2007, p.117).

4.1.2   Orwell's World

According to Huxley, Orwell's *1984* was a prediction of Stalinism influenced by the immediate past of Nazism (Huxley 1958). Orwell's personal experiences included his participation in the Spanish Civil War, the rise of Stalinism and Mussolini's Italy (Lyon 1994, p.6). Orwell was a prolific essayist and letter-writer as well as a novelist. His sixth and final novel *1984*, published in 1949 was another success. However, following his wife's death in 1945, he sought reclusion in 1947 on a small island in the Hebrides (Kateb p.574) where he wrote the novel, succumbed to tuberculosis and died in January 1950. Whilst Socialist, Orwell despaired that it had become debased showing little respect for the individual (Atkins 1984, p.41).

In an earlier piece in "Toward European Unity" in *Partisan Review* Orwell envisaged three world scenarios. The first was a pre-emptive war brought on by the US as the sole nuclear power. The second was one in which the Soviet Union also acquired nuclear weapons resulting in a world nuclear war reducing civilisation to ashes. The third, which he feared most yet predicted as most likely, was the Cold War with the world "...divided into two or three superstates ..." thus setting up the scenarios in his novel (Kateb 1966, p.575).

4.2   Cultural And Philosophical Allusions

Multiple cultural and philosophical allusions may be drawn from the novels.

4.2.1   Dystopia

Described as "dystopian", the novels present worlds which are undesirable and avoidable yet conceivable (Lyon 1994, p.3) and are based on a fear of the impact of technology on political power and individual freedom. Huxley saw technology as leading to a world of vacuous self satisfaction and excessive consumption whereas Orwell predicted a world bereft of freedom through the surveillance of citizens and an oppressive central authority. The plot of each novel occurs in an oligarchic totalitarian state where individual needs are subjugated to those in power. However the authors arrived at the destination by different routes. Orwell feared the truth would be denied to us whereas Huxley feared the truth would be drowned in a meaningless sea of excess. Orwell was concerned about a captive culture; Huxley feared culture would become irrelevant. In commenting on Orwell's *1984*, Huxley observed that people are controlled by inflicting pain whereas in *BNW*, they are controlled by inflicting pleasure (Postman in Karpf 2013).

4.2.2   Hegelian Dialectic

In examining the relevance of the Hegelian dialectic to the novels, whilst characters in each book attempt to rebel against the synthesis of the worlds they inhabit they are unable to step outside the existing dialectic to create a new antithesis and therefore fail in their endeavour (Raapana and Friedreich 2005).

4.2.3   Utilitarianism

In his paper "Orwell and Huxley: Making Dissent Unthinkable" John Williams suggests that the worlds of both novels are inversely utilitarian (Williams 2002, p.14). The technocracy in *BNW* projects the utilitarian theory of working in the interests of the majority to maximise pleasure; the Inner Party Members of *1984* aim to maximise misery whilst experiencing the thrill of power. The concept of inverted utilitarianism of *1984* fits John Stuart Mill's declaration that "…It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied..." (John Stuart Mill in Utilitarianism, chapter II. in Mordanicus 2013).

4.2.4 Ideological State Apparatuses

Althusser's dissertation on *Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs)* in which ideology is the "...representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence..." is characteristic of the worlds in the novels (Althusser in Evans and Hall 2010 p. 317). In order for the ideological illusion to work it must be propagated by a ruling elite of individuals (Ibid p.318). This group identifies and manufactures the ISA; in *BNW* represented by the *Alpha* group and in *1984* the *Inner Party Members*. Within this illusion individuals succumb to and support the ideology in which actions become practices and practices become rituals (Ibid p.319); through this process ideas disappear whilst new practices and rituals appear. Individuals become subjects - in *BNW* before they are even born. At the centre of any ideology is its creator, referred to by Althusser as the Absolute Subject - in the case of *BNW,* Ford, and in *1984,* Big Brother (Ibid p.322).

Both novels offer a *lacunar* discourse described by Althusser as one in which, whilst propagating propositions which are true, suggest a number of other propositions which are untrue. This is characterised by not what is told, but what is suggested (Riley 1990, p.7). In his paper on *Power and the Individual* Hole agrees that Orwell's concept of power and how it is diffused throughout society, suggest that the ISA is "...fruitful in describing this Orwellian landscape..." (Hole 2007, p.7).

4.2.5 Semiotics

The novels make extensive use of semiotics in communicating meaning to the reader as well as to the characters in the stories. Accepting that semiotics describes anything that can be perceived by the senses, then the use of language, signs, ideology and other signifieds in the novels is prolific (COMM110 Week 3 2013, p.11).

Language

Viennese philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein believed that "...we speak the way we do because of what we do..."; That words and their meanings are inextricably bound up with the culture and ways of doing things (COMM110 Week 3 2013, p.2). The power of language and its debasement by the authorities plays a central role in supporting the State in both novels. In the overtly oppressive regime of *1984*, through the clevger device of *Newspeak,* language becomes a key tool of oppression. In the covertly repressive world of *BNW* language is debased through the elimination of "...high art and literature..." and its replacement with hedonistic unquestioning indolence (Boulding 2009). *Newspeak* is an example of

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Wittgenstein's theory in that it imposed unthinking orthodoxy in such a way that it would be impossible to think otherwise. (Yeo 2010 p.60).

Myth

Myth was conceived by French philosopher Roland Barthes who saw it as a second-order semiological system in which the original sign and signified becomes a new signifier - described by Barthes as "form" which in turn detroys meaning and creates the myth (Barthes 1973, p.51). *Myth* has been described as the "...semiotics equivalent of ideology..." (COMM110 Week 3 2013, p.11). It provides the underlying base for the ideology of both novels where the legitimacy of the State is supported by myths creating socially constructed reality with a "universal truth" presented as fact (McNeil 1999) and where "...reality if turned inside out becomes empty..." (Barthes 1973, p.58). The destruction of the dialectic creates a world without contradiction and without depth and hence debases human endeavour (Ibid p.58).

Simulacra

The worlds of *BNW* and *1984* exist as examples of hyper-reality in which the generation of models of reality have no origin or inherent reality of their own. This phenomenon, described as the simulacrum, substitutes signs of the real for the real itself (Baudrillard 1987, p.167). Like Barthes' *myth* it is a reality without substance. Eventually the simulacra come to refer only to themselves and other simulacra thus rendering them meaningless. Each novel describes a world of distorted truth with simulated images accepted with the fear that there may be nothing behind them. The image on the *Telescreen* and on posters everywhere of Big Brother, a person who has never been seen in the flesh and who may not even exist is a good example of the simulacrum. The predestination of events supports the semiotic principle that everything appears to be written in advance - hence the precession of simulacra (Ritzer 2005 p 32).

Baudrillard suggests that simulation eliminates the possibility of distinguishing between signs and their objects implying that one of a pair has absorbed the other (Ritzer 2005, p.32-32). However the acceleration of unreality through the Hegelian dialectic could eventually lead towards the synthesis of a new reality (Ritzer 2005, p.705).

Panopticon

The concept of the *Panopticon* is credited to Jeremy Bentham who described it as an architectural solution to discipline and punishment by revolutionising the design of gaols.

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Inside the Panopticon all inmates are visible constantly to the controller who remains invisible to them (Foucalt in eds. Evans and Hall 1975, p.65).

The panoptic references are overt in *1984*, whilst *BNW* allows for a consensually-based control in which conformity is achieved through, pleasure, consumption and drugs. In *1984* the *Telescreen* operates as an electronic Panopticon providing two-way, total and unavoidable surveillance. It has been described as an example of "...the controlling gaze..." (Ritzer 2005, p.467). Through this device, everyone including Inner Party Members, are in a Panoptic Prison (Hole 2007 p.26). The threat and uncertainty of observation leads to the internalisation of discipline and self-policing (Ibid p.467) relieving the need for anyone to be in the "Watch Tower" (Solove 2004, p.31).

The example of *Disneyworld* is used to suggest a Huxleyian covert Panopticon where control occurs through seduction and conformity rather than coercion, just as people are today seduced to conform through advertising and the lure of consumption (Lyon 1994, p.19).

4.2.6   *Postmodernism*

Both novels accept the postmodern notion that reality is subjective, the task for the State being to align perceived reality with official ideology (Boulding 2009). They anticipate and address postmodernist themes such as the power of language, group relationships together with a satiric scepticism towards traditional moral and religious values (Boulding 2009).

4.3   *Allegories*

The novels are symbolic narratives containing allegorical references to issues such as technology, economics, eugenics, surveillance and privacy.

4.3.1   *Technology*

Whilst prescient, neither Huxley nor Orwell foresaw a technology exceeding that which exists in modern-day industrialised nations (Kessler 1957, p.568). Where the authors saw technology as a means of "freezing" a social structure in time, today's continued accelerating advance of technology suggests otherwise (Kessler 1957, p.570).

Neil Postman in *Amusing Ourselves to Death* (Postman 2005) and in *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (Postman 1993) feared that as well as being a boon, technology is also a danger to man with a potentially retrogressive impact on civilisation. This theme is taken further in Nicholas Carr's *The Shallows: What the Internet is doing to our brains* in which he claims that media content is "...the juicy piece of meat carried by the

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burglar to distract the watchdog of the mind..." (Carr 2011, p.4). He mirrors Postman's views when he says that (technology) "...is so much our servant that it would seem churlish to notice that it is also our master..." (Ibid p.4).

Postman argued that technology not only presented a culture "…without moral foundation…" but also contorts our understanding of the world, changing our understanding of what is real. To Postman this was another way of saying that inside every technology is an ideological bias with a tendency to refract our world view (Postman 1992, p. xii).

4.3.2   Economics

Starting with the shared premise that technology had liberated production and conquered the subsistence barrier, Orwell based his economy on conspicuous production whilst Huxley's was based on conspicuous consumption (Kessler 1957, p.565). However the removal of the barrier has the potential to increase expectations and desires to a higher plane "...from the stomach to the psyche..." (Kessler 1957 p.566) leading to negative implications for the market and for democracy (Posner 1999, p.7) and presenting an opportunity for the Hegelian dialectic to occur.

4.3.3   Eugenics

In real life, Huxley was a supporter and outspoken proponent of the Eugenics movement (Woiak 2007, p.118), a technology he described as "genetic standardisation" (Huxley 1958). He supported the concept of "differential fertility" of the professional classes versus unskilled labourers and the unemployed (Woiak 2007, p.119). In *Brave New World Revisited* (Huxley 1958) Huxley outlined his concerns about mental ability and democracy, going so far as to ask "... what about the congenitally insufficient organisms, whom our medicine and our social services now preserve so that they may propagate their kind? ..." (Ibid). He came to the view that about 99.5% of the world population were "...stupid and philistine..." and that therefore it was important to nurture the remaining 0.5% to ensure their survival and domination of the rest (Woiak 2007, p.106).

4.3.4   Freedom, Oppression And Privacy

Through the device of "Big Brother" Orwell created the most widely-known metaphor for oppression and surveillance. It remains in frequent use in today's "information age". In an era of wiretapping, video surveillance and espionage it is not surprising that Big Brother and

Orwell have come to represent government and corporate intrusion in the twenty-first century (Solove 2004, p.27).

Rewriting History

Orwell's characters rewrite historical events in a continuous and incremental way in order "...to change objective reality by tacitly denying its very existence..." (Kessler1957, p.576). Ironically this task is undertaken by workers in the *Ministry of Truth*. The central character, Winston systematically destroys old texts and replaces them with new ones, a clear example of Baudrillard's *simulacra* (Boulding 2009).

Huxley's World Leader *Mustapha Mond* found it necessary to abolish history which could result in inappropriate distractions. Hence art, science, and religion were expunged from society. There was no need to rewrite history; there was none (Boulding 2009).

Politics, Power And Class

Orwell's concepts of *NewSpeak* and *DoubleThink* live on in today's political economy. The Snowden/Assange equivalent in *1984*, Goldstein, describes *DoubleThink* as "...the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one's mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them..." and believes that without this construction, the Party would be unable to function (Kessler 1957 p.576).

The Party has three-word slogans reminiscent of Australian politics today. Meaningless phrases such as "War is Peace", "Freedom is Slavery", and "Ignorance is Strength" are remindful of political mantras of recent election campaigns. Responsibilities are divided among the satirically-named Ministries of Truth (News, entertainment, education, and the fine arts), Peace (War), Love (Law and Order) and Plenty (Economic Affairs).

5   Discussion

In assessing which of the authors' predictions come closest to describing life today discussion focuses on surveillance, privacy, secrecy and propaganda before positing a balance of how their prescience stands up to analysis and critique.

5.1   *Propaganda, Surveillance, Secrecy And Privacy*

The central concerns of the novels involve propaganda, surveillance, secrecy and privacy. These are also in the vanguard of current international political discourse. With the emergence of nation states over 500 years ago the notion of political surveillance and

information-gathering developed. The first instruction manual on political surveillance was *The Prince* written for the Prince of Florence, Lorenzo de Medici around 1500AD (Machiavelli 1995). As empires waxed and waned there was an increasing need to exercise territorial and societal surveillance and control in the form of censuses, registries, identity documents and generally increased government intrusion into private lives. These are supplemented in today's heavily-regulated society through the imposition of controls such as taxation, law enforcement, electronic surveillance, immigration and border controls (Ritzer 2005, p.816).

5.1.1 Propaganda

Propaganda, central to both novels, is ubiquitous today. Lasswell's definition of propaganda as "...the control of opinion by significant symbols..." including "...stories, rumours, reports, pictures, and other forms of social communication..." captures its essence (Yeo 2010, p.51). Today's political environment sees a continuous propagation of political messages; it is pervasive, intrusive, camouflaged and insidious (Ibid p.51). Through propaganda meanings are evoked which support Party policy and which encourage support and acquiescence in order to legitimise regimes (Edelman 1985, p.10).

Propaganda and surveillance are obverse sides of the same coin. They work in tandem. For instance, the phrase "Big Brother Is Watching You" tends to be associated with surveillance yet, it is also a piece of propaganda consistently reinforcing central control (Yeo 2010, p.54). Through rewriting the "facts" of history and the interchange fact and fiction we see the precession of the simulacra (Ibid p.52). A modern day example is the *War On Terror* which like the military balance in *1984* is probably a perpetual war with production supporting production of the military industrial complex but with no clear winner (Hole 2007 p.6).

5.1.2 Surveillance and Espionage

Information technology enables surveillance to be carried out in multitudinous ways inconceivable in Huxwell's and Orwell's day (Lyon 1994, p.4). Examples include video cameras, speed cameras, computer profiling, data mining, CCTV monitoring and electronic crime control as well as medical technology offering DNA analysis, drug tests and brain scans (Ritzer 2005, p.817). London has over 500,000 CCTV cameras with one study suggesting that in a single day a person could be captured on camera 300 times (Hole 2007, p.5). In *The Culture of Surveillance*, William Staples observed that "...we have internalised

Big Brother we have created a Big Brother culture, where we all act as agents of surveillance and voyeurism..." (Solove 2004, p.31).

The picture painted by Orwell is similar to that painted by Mark Poster (Lyon 1994, p.15) in which consumer surveillance has become a *Superpanopticon* because there are no technical limitations. Poster claims that the "...population participates in its own self- constitution as subjects in the normalizing gaze of the Superpanopticon..." (Ibid p.15). The Internet is a modern form of panoptic surveillance *par excellence* through companies' ability, acting clandestinely, to gather personal information about individuals as they surf the web. It has been suggested that instead of Big Brother, we now have a surfeit of Big and Little Brothers monitoring our activities and collecting data about us (Solove 2004, p.32). This surreptitious form of surveillance detects peoples' thoughts and views even as they are being formed in falsely-assumed privacy (Yeo 2010, p.54).

Espionage has kept pace with advances in technology. The actions of whistle blowers like Bradley Manning, Julian Assange and Edward Snowden in releasing volumes of top secret information collected by security agencies places them as modern counterpoints to Goldstein and Winston in the novels. Beginning at a time before *1984* was even written, the US, UK, Australia, Canada and New Zealand spy agencies in 1946 established the *Five Eyes Alliance* to share signals intelligence. The arrangement was so secret that allegedly the Australian Prime Minister was not told of its existence until 1973 (Nyst 2013). The alliance developed its own NewsSpeak using terms such as *THINTHREAD, TEMPORA* and *ECHELON* to describe its technical programs. Recent revelations that surveillance has extended to eavesdropping on the private telephone conversations of world leaders suggests that governments have lost control over the apparently independent, covert and illegal activities of their own spy agencies.

One program of the National Security Agency (NSA) uncovered recently called PRISM gives it the capacity to access all communications via Google, Gmail, YouTube, Microsoft, Skype, Facebook, Yahoo, Apple, AOL, and Paltalk. It has been suggested that PRISM is Orwell's America (Karpf 2013). However, insofar as we arrive at this personal vulnerability through distraction rather than through fear, then Huxley's warnings still have currency (Karpf 2013).

5.1.3 Secrecy

Personal secrecy has disappeared with the arrival of total surveillance. However as our own secrecy has been surrendered, governments themselves have become more secretive when it

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suits them. This trend is perhaps most obvious in the Australian Government's program *Operation Sovereign Borders* which has turned the task of processing asylum seekers into a quasi-military operation to stop the boats, return them to whence they came and to outsource processing to borderline Pacific Nations. Asylum Seekers have successfully been written out of history which has now become the war on people smugglers saving lives endangered by perilous voyages at sea. Added to this is the new level of secrecy manufactured by the Minister for Immigration of hiding behind the NewSpeak of "on-water issues", "illegal maritime arrivals" and "operational issues". Here we see the panoptic principles of inspection, isolation, outsourcing and the separation of individuals and families writ large.

5.1.4 Privacy

Along with secrecy, privacy is fast becoming a thing of the past - often through our own volition by engaging in risky exhibitionist behaviour encouraged at no cost on social media (Posner 1999, p.9). Our aversion to solitude has unlocked the gate of privacy and we now appear to crave the presence of other people through media such as Facebook and Twitter. This encourages anonymity and uninhibited behaviour but also conformity and submission to constant surveillance (Posner 1999, p.8).

5.2   Huxley And Orwell Revisited

Orwell feared that the truth would be hidden by the simulacra. Huxley feared the truth would be superseded by irrelevance. Orwell feared we would become a captive culture; Huxley believed we would surrender culture to entertainment. Both predictions resonate today (Karpf 2013).

Huxley argued that the future would look more like *BNW* than *1984* with governments using pleasure and distraction to control and influence people's behaviour, even their thoughts. The control/reward model poses a threat to freedom because it can be introduced unconsciously and continued indefinitely (Huxley 1958). The post war consumption of soma-like drugs also captured Huxley's attention with the ready availability of tranquilizers . This was before the arrival of today's prescription, recreational and performance-enhancing drugs. He warned his readers that they may be unconsciously accepting a world that they would otherwise reject. Huxley feared that the prophecies made in 1932 were happening much sooner than he had anticipated (Huxley 1958).

In revisiting *1984*, in many respects Orwell today is ubiquitous and more relevant than ever[2]. It is said that "Orwellian" is the second most overused literary-generated adjective after "Kafkaesque" (Jeffries 2013). Along with the technical possibility of human equality Orwell also feared that abandoned practices such as public executions, torture to extract confessions, the use of hostages, and ethnic cleansing were again on the increase and seemingly tolerated by people. With the use of extraordinary rendition, Guantánamo, the rise of militant fundamentalism, suicide bombers, drone attacks, border protection and other facets of modern conflict, Orwell's fears were apt (Jeffries 2013).

5.3   2014

In 1984 (real time) there was no Internet, cell phones, PDAs, cable channels, flat screen TVs or iPods. Even so, this was when Postman first despaired over the surrender of reasoned discourse to the detrimental effects of electronic media and the "…age of show business..." Postman's son Andrew in writing the Introduction to the 20th Anniversary Edition of *Amused To Death* wonders what his late father would make of the then modern day technologies - how image had taken over other forms of communication and where we appear to no longer care provided we are kept amused (Postman 2005, p.vii). However in the decade since the anniversary edition was published our lives have become inextricably bound up with previously unimaginable technological advance and the arrival of the digital era. It is notable that Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and other forms of "social" media were not even on the horizon then.

The original Postman observed that there was no time for reflection anymore. His son added that silence had been replaced by background noise and suggested that the need for constant stimulation may have led to a surge in attention deficit disorder (Postman 2005, p.x). Postman Snr asserted that technology is ideology and that serious discourse has been reduced to "giggles" with our culture "…being drained by laughter…" (Postman 2005, p.156).

It is the very principle of "myth" as Roland Barthes pointed out, that transforms history into nature with educators no longer capable of de-mythologising media (Ibid p.162). Postman concludes by saying that what afflicted the people in *BNW* "…was not that they were laughing instead of thinking, but that they did not know what they were laughing about and

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[2] On 21 January 2013 *The Guardian* reported on the inauguration of "Orwell Day", to be followed by a month-long Orwell season on Radio 4. In March 2014 it was announced that a stage version of *1984* is to open in London's West End for a three month season.

why they had stopped thinking…" (Ibid p.163), perhaps what US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld once referred to as "…unknown unknowns" (Logan 2009).

6   Conclusions

Debate over the relevance and accuracy of the novels in predicting the future has been pervasive since the publication of *1984* and began with Huxley's own response to Orwell's novel (Usher 2012). As globalisation occurs, as governments and corporations become more powerful and as technology engulfs us the *Huxwellian*[3] debate increases in relevance.

In formulating a view on their prescience, several possibilities need to be addressed. The first is that perhaps that neither was right and that today's political economy has no resemblance to conditions in either the *World State* or *Oceania*. A second hypothesis is that only one of them was accurate; in which case who was it? A third option is that both systems may exist but with chronological separation. It is also possible that both systems exist simultaneously within one country.

A problem for commentators is that technological advance is not only rapid but accelerating exponentially and that this phenomenon exceeds the capacity of writers to measure and analyse the moving target. This disjuncture is evident in the *Huxwellian* debate.

In the latter part of the twentieth century, opinion favoured the "Huxley was right" proposition citing that the technology we had embraced, then mainly television and consumer goods, had enslaved us (Masters 2000). In 1985, it was concluded that the Huxleyian world had arrived through our infatuation with media which had led to our imprisonment within it (Postman 2005, p.xv). Postman observed that today "Big Brother" does not watch us - we watch "Big Brother" (Ibid p.155). Postman concluded "…that we are wonderfully entertained and woefully uninformed..." (Postman in Masters 2000).

With the turn of the Millennium and the rapid development of the Internet followed by a tsunami of social media, views have shifted. In his book *Our Posthuman Future* American philosopher Francis Fukuyama argued that with the arrival of the Internet operating as a two-way interactive Panopticon, *1984* is on the horizon (Mordanicus 2013).

There is an outlier view that both systems can operate simultaneously within the one Country. That Country is modern day China where Tibet and Xinjiang Provinces suffer from an

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[3] Huxwellian is a contraction of the names of both authors coined by the writer.

Orwellian mode of dystopian rule whilst in the southeast and in particular Hong Kong, control mechanisms are more Huxleyian, where books on the Dalai Lama are sold openly and where demonstrations are tolerated (Fic, 2014).

Most commentators today do not support the "either/or" proposition; rather they see elements of both occurring over time. The prevalent view, and one with which I agree, is that the Huxleyian world into which we fell in the twentieth century has made us dull and vulnerable to the onset of an Orwellian world. This view suggests that Huxley provided the lulling prelude to Orwell by making us complicit in our own enslavement. Orwell then took the enslavement and overlayed it with oppression. It turns out then that both were right "…Huxley saw the first stage of our enslavement. Orwell saw the second…" (Hedges 2011). We are living in a world where lies and illusions manipulate our views overlaid with increasing draconian and overt political control.

The political philosopher Sheldon Wolin used the term "inverted totalitarianism" in his book *Democracy Incorporated* to describe the current US political system (Wolin 2008, p.11). He suggests that the rise of global corporations, mass-media manipulation hidden by "spin" and corrupt political lobbying are masked by the seductive abundance of a consumer society. In our own country, we are now told that we have reached the end of the "age of entitlement" and are entering one of "personal responsibility". This provides a contemporary bookmark on our transition from Huxley to Orwell (Hockey 2012).

The shift connotes a move towards heightened control by propaganda, surveillance, misinformation and denial of truth, all reminiscent of Orwell's world (Boetel 2013). Accepting that an Orwellian future is now here, the next question should be to anticipate how the mix of indolence and repressive control will play out over the remainder of the century.

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