Andrea Torres

Ms. Skinner

ELA 12

1/11/14

Big Brother 2.0

In *1984*, George Orwell writes about a dystopian future known as Airstrip One that is dominated by a totalitarian government which keeps its citizens under full supervision and controlled by a large variety of laws. This book’s description of the decayed city and corrupt government makes it seem that the setting can only exists in Orwell’s imagination.. Even though there is no telescreens, thought police, or Ingsoc, the technology we have today is taking us closer to the world of Big Brother. The totalitarian government in *1984* uses 3 main factors to dominate the citizens of Airstrip One: the telescreens, “who controls the past controls the future”, and money.

First we can begin by analyzing the telescreens, Orwell gives a brief description in the beginning of book one,

The telescreen received and transmitted simultaneously. Any sound that Winston made, above the level of a very low whisper, would be picked up by it, moreover, so long as he remained within the ﬁeld of vision which the metal plaque commanded, he could be seen as well as heard. There was of course no way of knowing whether you were being watched at any given moment. How often, or on what system, the Thought Police plugged in on any individual wire was guesswork. It was even conceivable that they watched everybody all the time. But at any rate they could plug in your wire whenever they wanted to. You had to live — did live, from habit that became instinct — in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard, and, except in darkness, every movement scrutinized.

Of course the TV’s are only one-way but television isn’t the only possible way a telescreen can be. Laptops, video game consoles, 3D televisions, cell phones, and security cameras are all telescreens of today. One may think that the webcams on their laptops can only be activated when they wish but the scary part is there are programs that allow individuals to hack into a computer without actually touching it and can turn the webcam on without the owner ever knowing. That isn’t the only way we can be spied on through the use of a computer; it is no secret that the NSA has been hacking into our internet to see what we have been doing.

In early 2006, EFF obtained whistleblower evidence from former AT&T technician Mark Klein showing that AT&T is cooperating with the illegal surveillance. The undisputed documents show that AT&T installed a fiberoptic splitter at its facility at 611 Folsom Street in San Francisco that makes copies of all emails web browsing and other Internet traffic to and from AT&T customers and provides those copies to the NSA. This copying includes both domestic and international Internet activities of AT&T customers (NSA).

Video game consoles such as Xbox 360 also have cameras built into the Kinects which tracks your every move. 3D televisions now have eye trackers that follow your every eye movement and its data can actually be used to advertisers to see what appeals to the human eye. Telescreens do not only physically watch you but they also hear and know your every step just like a cellphone. According to Peter Maas, our cellphones aren’t safe either,

Thanks to the explosion of GPS technology and smartphone apps, these devices are also taking note of what we buy, where and when we buy it, how much money we have in the bank, whom we text and e-mail, what Web sites we visit, how and where we travel, what time we go to sleep and wake up — and more.

There has been many speculation about who is looking at the data given from our phones, is it only the cellphone companies? After the September 11 attacks from 2001, George W. Bush signed the Patriot Act which gives full authorization for the government to tap into our phone calls without an issued warrant. One of the most obvious telescreens of today are security cameras. An individual can walk down the parking lot of a Wal-Mart and have 50 cameras watching their every blink and step. The government of today has their citizens convinced that the use of security cameras are for their safety, but what if they could tap into our private cameras? According to Richard Winton Long Beach police are able to tap into hundreds of privately owned cameras,

Although the city has a few dozen cameras across the community, McDonnell has set up a system to tap into hundreds of privately owned cameras that are part of the city's streetscape. The new program synchronizes law enforcement data with real-time video feeds from parks, beaches, business corridors and even some retail centers.

Just like the telescreens in *1984*, one can never know when they are being watched through their privately owned security cameras.

In *1984*, Big Brother dominates by the quote “whoever controls the past, controls the future” which means if the government erases every mistake they have ever made then in the future they will have the country’s full trust. In the world of today it seems impossible for a government to trace every newspaper, history book, and magazine that reports a flaw in their system, but it actually is possible. Thanks to the internet the government is now capable of controlling the past which only leads to the control of the future. The internet is now an every-day tool when it comes to homework and even checking the news; if one does not believe so, then when was the last time they picked up an encyclopedia or a newspaper? With all the hacking the government has done to the internet it is obvious they are able to control it. It is very simple for them to be able to manipulate the internet for their favor, they could locate old history and change it to make them seem flawless or simply just make up lies. And according to Psychologist Dr. Douglas LaBier, we can’t help to naturally believe whatever we read rather than to question it,

“So, what happens within our minds and emotions that make us receptive to lies, and then resistant to information that exposes the truth? A study led by Stephan Lewandowsky of the University of Western Australia explains part of what may happen. The researchers found that ‘Weighing the plausibility and the source of a message is cognitively more difficult than simply accepting that the message is true — it requires additional motivational and cognitive resources.’”

Now not only is our government beginning to appear like Big Brother, but it the citizens of *1984* are very gullible just like the citizens of today which makes it all the more facile for the government to manipulate.

Money is another way the government has become similar to Big Brother. In *1984*, there are 4 ministries that rule the country: the ministry of love, peace, plenty, and truth. Each of these ministries are in charge of certain parts of their governments but their names are completely ironic. The ministry of plenty is in charge of producing money and supplies when in reality they are actually taking them away and announce that prices have lowered when as a matter of fact increase. We are facing the same dilemma, election after election we have heard of promises of improvement in the economy. But, when one looks back to the economy of the US it is clearly shown that economy has slowly declined more and more according to Michael Snyder,

30 years ago, the U.S. national debt was about one trillion dollars.  Today, it is almost 17 trillion dollars.  40 years ago, the total amount of debt in the United States was about 2 trillion dollars.  Today, it is more than 56 trillion dollars…… The percentage of Americans that are self-employed is at a record low, and the percentage of Americans that are dependent on the government is at a record high.  The U.S. economy is a complete and total mess, and it is time that we faced the truth.

The government isn’t the only one lying to us, stores are too. Every day there are advertisements of money earning discounts and claims of lower prices when in reality they are only getting more expensive. Suzanne Kapner unmasks the secrets of store’s discounts,

The common assumption is that retailers stock up on goods and then mark down the ones that don't sell, taking a hit to their profits. But that isn't typically how it plays out. Instead, big retailers work backward with their suppliers to set starting prices that, after all the markdowns, will yield the profit margins they want. The red cardigan sweater with the ruffled neck on sale for more than 40% off at $39.99 was never meant to sell at its $68 starting price. It was designed with the discount built in.

Without knowing it, we have our very own variety of Ministry of Plenty’s.

Now that we are able to connect the dots from George Orwell’s Big Brother to our own government we are to ask ourselves how to stop it. The answer to that is one word, “awareness”. The only way the both of these governments have controlled so much power is because the people were not even aware of what was going on and the government took advantage. In *1984* the protagonist, Winston, shares his opinion on how to overthrow the government,

But the proles, if only they could somehow become conscious of their own strength. Would have no need to conspire. They needed only to rise up and shake themselves like a horse shaking oﬀ ﬂies. If they chose they could blow the Party to pieces tomorrow morning.

And according to the constitution the people have every right to overthrow or make changes to the government if it is found inadequate or denies us of our unalienable rights.

In closing, Orwell’s fictional totalitarian government is possible of becoming reality. Many of its beginnings can be seen in our government whether is telescreens, manipulating the past, or the creation of ironical ministries. But one must keep in mind that we are the ones the hold the power, and are able to prevent Big Brother.

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