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Exploring the New Front of the Culture War: *1984*, *Oryx and Crake*, and Cultural Hegemony

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EXPLORING THE NEW FRONT OF THE CULTURE WAR: *1984*, *ORYX* AND
CRAKE, AND CULTURAL HEGEMONY

A Thesis
Presented to
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Western Kentucky University
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Master of Arts

By
Terry Ryan Hall
August 2008

EXPLORING THE NEW FRONT OF THE CULTURE WAR: *1984*, *ORYX AND CRAKE*, AND CULTURAL HEGEMONY

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For Emily and the workers of the world.

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AND CRAKE*, AND CULTURAL HEGEMONY

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August 2008

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Dystopic fiction is defined by its depiction of oppressive societies with power structures that seek to exercise control on its citizens. Orwell's classic *1984* depicts a society that is a reaction to World War II and totalitarian regimes. This society depicts elements of cultural hegemony that are altered during the move to postmodernism. Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* evolved to reflect the political climate that grew out of the Cold War's end, while retaining the cautionary messages regarding the state's ability to control. *Oryx and Crake* can be seen as completely reversing the concern from centralized power to decentralized power (represented by multinational corporations beholden to no single government.)

This phenomenon is indicative of the postmodern period and the onset of late capitalism as defined by cultural critic Fredrick Jameson. Using the theory of Jameson and other postmodern theorists, an exploration of the dystopic novels of Orwell and Atwood reveals how cultural hegemony has been implemented and altered from the modern to the postmodern.

Introduction

Dystopia and Reflections of Hegemony

“In a time of universal deceit - telling the truth is a revolutionary act.”
-George Orwell

When confronted with utopia¹ as described by Socrates, the Roman satirist Juvenal famously posited the question “*Quis custodiet ipsos custodes?*” or “Who watches the watchmen?” Like many utopian descriptions that followed, Socrates’ model for “utopia” was dependent on a slave class that needed to be guarded. Juvenal’s inquiry points out that the necessity for guards creates moral conundrums: can a society that must rely on sentinels trust those in power, and can the society truly be called an utopia in either event? Thus, early in human history the idea of the utopia highlighted the moral ambiguity that accompanies social control in any society.

Juvenal’s question also highlights another important point: utopia and dystopia do not lie at the extremes on an absolute spectrum of civilization; rather, he proves how easily one man’s description of utopia can be another man’s dystopia. Echoing that sentiment, postmodern scholar Erika Gottlieb states, “it becomes obvious that each dystopian society contains within it seeds of a utopian dream” (8). Dystopia plays upon this very phenomenon; the descent from an ideal society or flaws in a civilization’s design that fail to account for all points of view (an impossibility in itself, which may account for utopia’s literal meaning of “no place”) leads to a failed nation. The pursuit of perfection is at the heart of almost every literary utopia and dystopia; it is their outcomes that distinguish them. Dystopias invariably present a world where oppressive social

control is ubiquitous, impediments to freedom are rampant, and paranoia and fear tend to be the dominating emotions. They often portray a stratified society, and survival can often represent the only luxury afforded to those who find themselves at the bottom. Indeed, almost any imaginable form of human suffering can be found on the pages of dystopic fiction, but it is not simply the dark, oppressive and foreboding tropes and milieus of dystopia that mark it as such.

M. Keith Booker, a scholar of dystopian literature, provides a further evaluation of just how dystopian literature functions:

[A dystopian novel] situates itself in direct opposition to utopian thought, warning against the potential negative consequences of arrant utopianism. Literary works that critically examine both existing conditions and the potential abuses that might result from the institution of supposedly utopian alternatives can be seen as the epitome of literature in its role as social criticisms. It is precisely such literature that is encompassed by the term “dystopian.” (315)

Booker suggests that, while a great many tropes are common to dystopia, the true hallmark of dystopian literature is its function as social satire. Thus, dystopias seek to extrapolate modern happenings and political systems in order not only to predict a “worst case scenario,” but also highlight flaws in any period’s present form of governance. With that in mind, an exploration of dystopias produced in the period beginning with the Cold War and ending with its demise can provide significant insight into our contemporary, postmodern world. In particular two novels—George Orwell’s *1984* and Margaret Atwood’s more contemporary dystopia *Oryx and Crake*—can shed light on the changing ways Western societies have functioned since World War II.

In order to explore the function of these two books, a brief examination of the history that produced them is in order. During World War II, the rise of centralized governments, represented by the Axis Powers, was perceived as a threat to western democracy, and, at the close of World War II, the smoldering tensions between political ideologies would begin to play themselves out on the pages of satirical novels. Predictably, the dystopic fiction produced during that era (such as Orwell's *1984*), continuing the tradition of social consciousness and caution indicative of the genre, presented maniacal, draconian, oppressive governments as the path on which the world was heading if it did not change its course. Thus, totalitarian governments triumphing over democracy was often the prophecy for a future in which Soviet style government was globalized.

The fall of The Soviet Union and the so-called defeat of communism rendered such warnings quaint, and contemporary dystopic fiction, like Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, evolved to reflect the political climate that grew out of the Cold War's end, while retaining the cautionary messages regarding the state's ability to control. In fact, *Oryx and Crake* could be seen as completely reversing the concern from centralized power to decentralized power (represented by multinational corporations beholden to no single government). Ultimately, the shifted focus for who wields power is one of the divisive points between Cold War dystopias and post-Cold War dystopias. The fragmentation of the globe with the collapse of the Soviet Union fostered a reevaluation of political ideologies that is reflected in the art and literature that followed. Couple this breakup with technological advances, particularly in the production and the dissemination of

information, and the new world order is something quite different from the future Orwell predicted.

While the ultimate antagonists and historical positioning of Orwell's nascent Cold War era dystopia may differ from contemporary models such as Atwood's, there is one important similarity—the depiction of hegemony. Antonio Gramsci's term has been co-opted by a variety of disciplines to refer to a system whereby a powerful minority dominates a diffident majority through coercion rather than direct force. Aldous Huxley once said that "A really efficient totalitarian state would be one in which the all-powerful executive of political bosses . . . controls a population of slaves who do not have to be coerced because they love their servitude" and see themselves not as slaves but, rather, as free (329). The situation Huxley describes is reminiscent of the claims made by many Marxist scholars concerning the way hegemony functions in the modern West. While claiming the population "loves [its] servitude" may be a stretch, there can be little doubt that capitalist powers operate in much the way Gramsci describes. Two primary theories can be used to analyze such a hegemonic system, and both are manifest in Orwell's *1984* as well as Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*: Michel Foucault's theories of the panopticon, and Jean Baudrillard's characterization of modern consumer culture and hyperreality.

Surveillance has always been a staple trope for dystopic fiction, so much so that the famous line "Big Brother is watching you" has come to be a household phrase uttered whenever there is any instance of a power or government observing and intruding upon its people. Why "Big Brother" wants to watch its public is of course important and can usefully be discussed in terms of security and the retention of power; these are certainly

legitimate lines of discourse. However, how such a system is enacted, and its machinations, are more important to the discussion of hegemony as reflected in dystopic literature. Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* examines how surveillance has become the primary tool by which governments or other organizing bodies retain power. He uses the panopticon, a prison designed for total surveillance, as a metaphor for how contemporary power structures operate:

Bentham's *Panopticon* is . . . at the periphery, an annular building; at the same time a tower. All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and shut up in each cell a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker, or a schoolboy. The panoptic mechanism arranges spatial unities that make it possible to see constantly and to recognize immediately. In short, it reverses the principle of the dungeon; or rather of its three functions—to enclose, to deprive of light and to hide—it preserves only the first and eliminates the other two. Full lighting and the eye of a supervisor capture better than darkness, which ultimately protected. Visibility is a trap. (200)

Foucault argues that there has been a notable shift in how societies maintain control of the populace—a shift from the brute force of the monarchical states to the internalized, complex coercion of modern “democracies.” Rather than threaten physical harm upon its people, the modern state has come to rely on internalized rules and the appearance of an ubiquitous all-seeing state. This appearance is created through a number of means: proliferation of surveillance in day-to-day venues, repetition of media images depicting the effectiveness of said surveillance and law enforcement officials, state rhetoric that implies its gaze knows no bounds, and the ever increasing ability of law enforcement to

seize digitized records of one's dealings. Convincing the masses that they make the decisions they are being led to is the key to reinforcing hegemony, and this, it can be argued, is the phenomenon that dystopic literature responds to and depicts. Foucault writes, "like the prisoner in the panoptiscopic penitentiary, the citizen is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication" (200). Individuals in dystopic societies are observed either indirectly or directly, but are ultimately incapable of truly seeing the manipulation and "reality" of their situation. A look at dystopic literature's attempts to represent societies that collect information without reciprocity (for example Orwell's Oceania), reveals the need, as Foucault describes, to observe while controlling what is observed. These societies are a reflection of the growing technocracy that had its seed in the interwar period, and the growing sense of ethnocentricity that led to suspicion of all members of the populace for fear they sympathized or belonged to those deemed as enemies, be it the "communists" of the cold war or "terrorists" of the contemporary one. Foucault states, when discussing the prison designer, "Bentham laid down the principle that power should be visible and unverifiable" (201), and one can see in dystopic fiction, and the postmodern reality, that governance relies upon a clear exercise of power with little accountability.

Foucault seems to hint at Marxist determinism and the inevitability of a slim class of the powerful and a swollen class of the subjugated when discussing the panopticon apparatus:

In each of its [the panopticon's] applications, it makes it possible to perfect the exercise of power. It does this in several ways: because it can reduce the number of those who exercise it, while increasing the number of those on whom it is

exercised. Because it is possible to intervene at any moment and because the constant pressure acts even before the offences, mistakes or crimes have been committed. (206)

The “constant pressure” Foucault speaks of has various aspects, is apparent throughout our modern lives, and is dutifully reflected in dystopia. Some aspects of this pressure are the increasing demand for productivity, the stupefying bombardment of information, and the endless enticement to focus on entertainment, sports, celebrity scandals, or other such media that create obsessions which directs attention away from an ideologically incisive view. This method of inculcating hegemony also relies on the individual self-correcting any “unacceptable” behaviors, any nonconformity that threatens to expose the hegemon. In order to do this, various models of “correct” behavior are built into the same outlets that serve as distractions; thus, individuals are distracted and molded in an efficient way that is often obfuscated by being presented as “entertainment” or by redirecting desires through consumerism. Lastly, the constant inundation of “correct behavior” models and the distractions from real observations are coupled with a sense of paranoia fostered by the feeling of being surveyed, and this leads to a placated populace. The rise of “real video” television programming, the increasing number of recording of lives, the constant reminders of police power (including television programming that depicts prison life and the efficiency of policing agencies), and the growing reality of eavesdropped phone calls, seized personal records and the collapse of private and public life all are part and parcel of the surveillance state and its reinforced paranoia. Foucault’s critique of power suggests a reality that is echoed in the sentiments of dystopia. The crux of dystopic fiction is often a representation of this very phenomenon—an underprivileged majority

unwilling (unable?) to resist a minority because of an internalization of norms that leads to social control.

It can be reasonably stated then that the surveillance that denotes postmodern dystopia and is a vital part of a panoptic system does not simply derive from a state apparatus overseeing the masses. It is also dependent on individuals within a given community overseeing themselves and one another. The ability to make use of the idea of surveillance to create a mood of self-policing is the vital aspect of the panoptic system. According to Foucault,

it does not matter who exercises power. Any individual, taken almost at random, can operate the machine: in the absence of the director, his family, his friends, his visitors, even his servants. Similarly, it does not matter what motive animates him: the curiosity of the indiscreet, the malice of a child, the thirst for knowledge of a philosopher who wishes to visit this museum of human nature, or the perversity of those who take pleasure in spying and punishing. The more numerous those anonymous and temporary observers are, the greater the risk for the inmate of being surprised and the greater his anxious awareness of being observed. The Panopticon is a marvellous machine which, whatever use one may wish to put it to, produces homogeneous effects of power. (202)

The ability to inject a sense of paranoia into a society, to create a populace of “norm” police, is the primary tool by which modern hegemony operates and the primary tool of the dystopic novel’s critique of totalitarianism. Each citizen becomes a cog of the power structure by the internalization that takes place through a process Foucault calls “individuation.” Individuation is the removal of a communal force in society and its

replacement with a focus on the self. This can be seen in numerous ways throughout postmodern society, but it may be most evident again with the way interactions with the television and computer have developed. Countless hours are spent passively engaged with these two technologies, and both create a disconnected experience as they remove any real human interaction.

Even when engaged in computer activities with others, the lack of a human presence still puts the focus on the individual experience and not a communal one. Beyond these two examples, since the industrial revolution the workforce has increasingly put a higher value on individual effort, and one need only listen to the rhetoric of “self reliance” that is championed in Western societies to see how true human interaction is dissuaded. Regarding the way that individuation is impressed upon members of a society even while in groups, Foucault states, “The crowd, a compact mass, a locus of multiple exchanges, individualities merging together, a collective effect, is abolished and replaced by a collection of separated individualities” (203). An evaluation of dystopic novels from post World War II up to the present show how this process has evolved in satirical fiction right alongside “reality.”

Without question Foucault’s theories give us powerful tools to help navigate dystopia’s elucidation of our postmodern condition. A contemporary and sometime rival of Foucault, Jean Baudrillard, likewise posits theories that are indebted to a Marxist tradition and also provide a method for understanding modern hegemony. Baudrillard’s work has a wide scope, but most importantly his theories on consumer culture and simulated realities (which he calls *simulacra*) provide relevant cultural and philosophical theories for the events that take place in dystopic fiction that extrapolate on our own

contemporary society. Baudrillard argues in *Symbolic Exchange and Death* that simulacra now supercede the original. What we are left with in our modern society is a series of signifiers and signifieds that point to no true sign. Increasingly, culture exists in this state of hyperreality. Media images, the Internet, computer games and virtual worlds detach people from the real by presenting versions of reality taken to be real, and this detachment has consequences on behavior. For example, hyperreality is exploited in advertising. Advertising uses a fake world to define in each person a character that he or she wishes to be. Advertising sells the public an image in the hope that people will desire and buy products to acquire this created lifestyle. Hyperreality suggests to consumers that they can adopt a persona by buying the merchandise associated with that version of reality. Thus, the question becomes, is there anything seen or experienced that is truly real? According to Baudrillard, “History has stopped meaning, referring to anything—whether you call it social space or the real. We have passed into a kind of hyperreal where things are being replayed *ad infinitum*” (73). One might consider how this repetition plays into perception of reality by looking at modern examples. The constantly repeated message coming from the American government claiming its 2002 invasion of Iraq is for “democracy promotion” came to define the conflict, despite the much more complicated and nuanced motivations for the invasion.² Indeed, this repetition is part of the indoctrination process of hegemony, but also implicit in this sentiment is the idea that loss of meaning is derived from infinite repetition with no true reference point.

Baudrillard also posits that “history isn’t over, it is in a state of simulation, like a body that’s kept in a state of hibernation.” He continues, “surreptitiously, it’s possible that everything is no longer real or true. In any case we would no longer be in a position to

decide on that” (72). Baudrillard suggests that the truly devious aspect of hyperreality is that it is a trap that is inescapable because one is unable to see where it begins and “reality” ends. Postmodern society has come to be dominated by marketing, government falsehoods, and virtual worlds that are all symptoms of a hyperreal society that has fallen into the trap. Like America’s assertion that it had to invade Iraq, or any other innumerable dubious statements made by the state and transmitted by the media, the sound bytes generated by the fictional states of dystopic novels employ similar methods of disinformation. Julia, Orwell’s female protagonist, suspects the hyperreality of her own world, asserting her belief that the telescreen’s daily news of the war with Eurasia may be false, and no war might exist; the government of Oceania might itself be firing rockets on its own capital, London. For Baudrillard the television is a central catalyst in this breakdown of reality, and we could certainly apply a similar logic to more modern technologies such as the computer.

The intensification of consumer culture is key to postmodern hegemony and is an integral component (in various forms) in modern/postmodern dystopias. Baudrillard suggests that the creation of a hyperreal society serves a brand of hegemony that is fueled by corporations and their quest for increasing market share by increasing their influence and interference in how we define the human experience and ourselves. He claims that marketers have played a decisive role in disconnecting the public from the real. Since marketers seek to sell merchandise by crafting a lifestyle that creates desire for the merchandise. Ultimately, companies seek to alter perceptions of reality and self, thus creating an entirely artificial reality. One of the major themes of Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* is the complete control of the state by corporate “bio-firms” and their attempts to

manipulate the public. While Atwood's novel may be an emphatic example, more subtle depictions of Baudrillard's corporate sponsored hyperreality can be found throughout postmodern dystopic fiction.

Even attempts to resist hyperreality and to create or find some sort of genuine reality are nearly impossible in the hegemon. One can actively resist the status quo and avoid the messages of marketers and yet still fall prey to this perverse postmodern phenomenon. Baudrillard suggests that the citizenry is inundated with so many images of what a particular person "should be" that individuals' lives begin to pattern themselves after these images, like an actor playing a role. For instance students will enter college with such a vast collection of images and representations of college students from television that they will inevitably behave in a similar manner. As stated earlier, postmodern citizens are in no position to see the suspension of their own reality, and, even if they get a sense that something is out of sync, they may still fall prey to hyperreality. It can be argued " [citizens] may . . . attempt to resist the stereotype, to play against the expectations, but the priority of the image still prevails. An 'authentic' experience becomes ever harder to conceive; simulation, willed or not, rules the day" (Leitch 1731). Ultimately, this inescapable trap plays itself out innumerable times in dystopic fiction, and often the protagonists of these works can be seen locked in a futile struggle to escape, if only for a moment, the irreality of their condition.

Both Foucault and Baudrillard sought to elucidate the modern human condition, and their theories are apt for studying dystopic fiction precisely because dystopic fiction seeks to achieve a similar end. By examining contemporary examples of dystopia, one can see how the implementation of hegemony through two interconnected and powerful

phenomena—the adoption of a panoptic system of power and an associated rise in consumer culture—is achieved. In particular, Atwood’s novel displays many of the conditions of postmodernism as defined by cultural and literary critic Fredrick Jameson. Jameson’s theories seek to explain modern society through a Marxist lens and suggest that societies are indeed the product of their prevailing economic system. Jameson sees recent human history as taking place in a series of reactions to capitalism. The Frankfurt school members posited that late capitalism would consist of two components: impenetrable, interwoven bureaucratic control and the merging of government and business into state capitalism. Jameson expands on these ideas and suggests that postmodernity is in many ways synonymous with late capitalism. An understanding of Jameson’s critique on late capitalism sheds light on the warnings presented in *Oryx and Crake* and also clarifies much concerning the methods of hegemony depicted. So, while both novels depict hegemonic qualities, Atwood’s dystopia provides evidence that the onset of late capitalism has deeply altered the systems that are found in Orwell’s *1984* and in our own contemporary reality. Ultimately both novels serve to illuminate the hegemonic process, and each serves as an ideal text for such analysis, as each is eminently applicable to the contemporary western world. These theories that seek to explain how hegemony is exercised in the western world are easily adapted to dystopic novels which seek to warn and illuminate in a *dulce et utile* fashion. By beginning an analysis with Orwell’s *1984* and moving to Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*, one can gain a feel for how these theories progressively apply to both novel’s critique of its projected “reality.”

Chapter 1

1984 and Incipient Postmodern Hegemony

“The empires of the future are the empires of the mind.”
-Winston Churchill

Orwell's *1984* presents a version of the future where repression and terror are coupled with propaganda and thought control to create a totalitarian society. The society in *1984*, Oceania, is dominated by the state and its functionaries, the bureaucratic “Party,” and they attempt to control every aspect of life, including one's thoughts, perception of what is real, and sexuality. From the opening scenes, the novel presents the reader with an oppressive landscape where citizens can find no escape from the state. Ubiquitous reminders of the state and its power serve to empower the Party, and the evolution of the television, the “telescreen,” not only broadcasts government propaganda from the one channel citizens have access to, it also gazes back at the observer, acting as a surveillance device for the Party.

Winston Smith, the main character of the novel, is a thirty-nine year old man living in London. Winston works for the Ministry of Truth, where his job is to alter the past and present by removing things from newspapers, records, and other such documents and, in essence, to rewrite history. Winston, despite his job at the ministry, secretly questions the society of Oceania. The Proles, those members of society who do not

belong to the party and who live largely outside of Party dictates, fascinate Winston because of his unhappiness with the society of Oceania.

At work, Winston is approached by a woman, Julia, who slips him a note that says “I love you” and Winston is instantly intrigued, despite the prohibition on relationships put in place by the Party. Eventually the two arrange a secret meeting and begin a secreted romance. The two eventually take up residence in the attic of an old junk shop in the Prole area. After the two have solidified their love affair, Winston has another strange encounter. An inner Party member, O’Brien, arranges to give Winston his address. This is uncharacteristic, but Winston suspects that O’Brien may be a member of the Brotherhood, an anti-party, underground counter movement. Winston and Julia eventually meet at O’Brien’s home and, after O’Brien confirms his Brotherhood membership, he gives them a copy of *The Book*, which he claims exposes the Party and Big Brother. Once back in the junk shop the two are just about to read the book when the Party police arrive to arrest the two, and we learn that O’Brien is indeed a Party agent. Winston and Julia are taken to the Ministry of Love, where O’Brien oversees their “re-integration” through torture and brainwashing. As final proof of Winston’s absorption by the Party, he betrays Julia and is eventually released to live out his days as a defeated and derelict man.

Orwell’s *1984* is unquestionably a commentary on the rise of fascism and totalitarianism during World War II; even a passing familiarity with Orwell’s time and his personal history exposes this. In his essay “Why I Write” Orwell says, “Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, against totalitarianism and for social democracy as I understand it” (58). The many

existing analyses of Orwell's critique of his two contemporary examples of totalitarianism (Nazism and Stalinism) have illuminated his novel and the function of dystopia in general. However, to suggest that the scope of Orwell's work goes no wider is to miss a great deal of Orwell's nuanced dialogue on power. Orwell's dystopia casts its nets far wider than his own time and place, and ultimately his novel provides commentary on the corruption/methodology of power birthed in the modern age and brought to fruition in the postmodern.

Surveillance is omnipresent in the world of *1984*; Oceania's citizens can find no place to hide from the watchful eye of the state and Big Brother. The effect this surveillance has on behavior is absolute, and the state requires little physical coercion to alter the perceptions and behaviors of the citizenry. This control is exercised in a number of unique ways; for example, the repeated saying found on posters and repeated by the telescreen, "Big Brother is watching you," reminds citizens of Oceania that there is no escaping surveillance, and they must always be mindful of their behavior as it will certainly be discovered. The effects of the paranoia and perceived surveillance take various forms throughout the novel; however, we are provided a poignant example of how these reminders affect the human conscience in the early pages. Unconsciously, Winston pens the repeated message "Down with Big Brother" in the diary which he "illegally" keeps, and immediately the narrator states, "He could not help feel a twinge of panic" (19). While this is a relatively small act in comparison to some of Winston's later transgressions, it clearly displays the internalization of the rules and laws (despite there being no "official" law in Oceania) that Winston has undergone. Winston's transgression exemplifies "thought crime." The narrator of the novel comments, "He had committed—

would still have committed, even if he had never set pen to paper—the essential crime that contained all others in itself. Thoughtcrime they called it” (19). That questioning his government or having a seditious thought is considered a crime, even if not expressed physically, displays the depth to which the will of the state is impressed on the populous. Winston does not question that thoughtcrime does exist, and, as he states himself, knows that it is a crime, not because of some popularized message or by some actual statute, but because he has seen and heard enough examples of thoughtcrime and its perpetrators to sense where it exists. The Party has managed to *instill* in Winston the understanding that he has done wrong, and this exercise of power is uniquely subtle. He is so frightened by his own assurance that he will be discovered that he expects the knock on his door that follows shortly after his penning the seditious comment to be the Thought Police coming to take him away. Winston is convinced that the state can see and respond that quickly, and it is a testament to the amount of control the Party has established over the citizenry that Winston believes them to be almost superhuman in their ability to respond to even the slightest contravention.

Foucault’s assertion that power has become primarily disciplinary and moved away from a need to assert physical punishment is clearly seen throughout Orwell’s *1984*, and the belief in thoughtcrime is but one of many examples indicating that a panoptic system has taken root. Like all other Oceania citizens, Winston has no idea if he is indeed being watched through the telescreen and therefore operates under the *assumption* that he is being watched. The narrator states, “you had to live—did live, from habit that became instinct—in the assumption that every sound you made was heard and every movement scrutinized” (6-7). Mario Varricchio in “Images of Power in *Brave New World*

and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*” suggests “there is a clear allusion to the role of mass media in manipulating public opinion. . . . political control has been ensured, above all, by the evolution of television: the invention of the telescreen, a device which can transmit and receive at the same time, is rightly considered of the utmost importance for the maintenance of a police state” (103). Orwell clearly saw the writing on the wall with the burgeoning technology of television; the use of television for political purposes³ and to propagandize all areas of life were well under way by the time Orwell was penning *1984*. Orwell seemed to (reasonably) find it logical to see the power of the television extended in the future to something that could not only manipulate opinions or provide carefully selected information, but also ensure the provided models for behavior are followed.

Clearly the telescreen functions much as the “central tower” does in the original panopticon conceived by Bentham. Harry Strub, in “The Theory of Panoptical Control,” elaborates on the connection between Orwell’s *1984* and the panopticon, stating, “It was this aspect of panoptical control—of a disembodied all-seeing eye, an invisible, omnipresent, inspective force—which Bentham regarded as the new mode of obtaining power of mind over mind” (44). The “eye” as well as the “omnipresence” and “inspective” forces are a complex tapestry of technology and ideas in Orwell’s *1984*, but the telescreen is central to these forces. Foucault suggests that one may never know the individual doing the observing in any panoptic system, and the same can be said to be true in Orwell’s *1984*. The Party operates the machinery, but the actual individual could be anyone in Oceania, and the inability to tell friend from foe that is indicative of Foucault’s panopticon is what eventually leaves Winston at the mercy of O’Brien. A distinct aspect of the surveillance used for societal control in Oceania is the single

artificial face, in the form of Big Brother; the citizens are provided a substitute for all those who may be watching. Big Brother himself serves as a stand-in, with his ever-open eyes, for the ambiguity and mystery surrounding the question of who is actually doing the observing. Big Brother is the face of the Party, a solidified symbol of the diffuse power that it wields through its various members. Certainly those responsible for the observation are members of the Party, but their identity is never known. Thus, the idea of being watched is multiplied by the idea that anyone can be privy to information about the citizenry, as anyone could be watching.

The image of Big Brother also serves an important role in the construction of the simulacra that is the ostensible reality of Oceania, created by the Party. Big Brother is, as far as anyone can tell, not a real person but a model, a representation that has no actual physical body and thus is lacking in any true reality. We are provided an image, the signifier, but no true signified exists. Rather, Big Brother is simply a fabrication, yet he is something that has a clear impact and effect on the citizens. Thus it is apparent that Big Brother is the unreal made real simply because so many now believe him to be authentic, and the Party spends a substantial amount of energy to reinforce Big Brother's image and power. Winston even asks if Big Brother exists once he is detained by the duplicitous Party loyal O'Brien. O'Brien declares the reality of Big Brother: "of course he exists" (214). Though Big Brother cannot be touched or seen by the physical senses, he exists because he is *created* "within the human mind" (205). O'Brien suggests that what is real can be influenced by the Party. Big Brother, a true simulacrum, becomes reality. Thus the Party has provided a perfect idea of a leader instead of a living one.

One could also argue that the Big Brother posters (in addition to the coins minted) are a form of marketing, as they are tactically positioned throughout the society to have the maximum impact and impress on the people the power that Big Brother controls. Baudrillard's theories apply in the sense that power has been artificially constructed, and this artificial construction is conducted through the use of popularized forms of media. As Varricchio states, "everyone is expected to show an expression of serene optimism to the telescreen and nobody can withhold his/her attention when the plate demands it to announce military victories or magnify the results of industrial production. Reality is systematically and viciously altered" (160). The repetition of the Party mantra, the posters, indeed all of the Party's iconography, reinforce the hyperreality in which the citizenry now lives. It seems clear that Big Brother's power both to imply surveillance and create an intangible force plays an essential role to the Party's maintaining power through discipline rather than force.

Winston and his fellow citizens, both prole and Party members, have also had their ability for human interaction and communication stunted by the internalization of the party dictates. Oceania is a society that has devalued the written word and overvalues the fleeting moment of the spoken. Early in the novel Winston finds it difficult to write in the diary as his untrained hand struggles to make letters. Winston comments on the growing reliance on the speechboxes, devices which translate and transcribe the spoken word. It is clear from the beginning then, that Orwell's Oceania has limited the ways its citizens can communicate. This keeps with a Foucauldian evaluation, as it is key in a panoptic society to limit communication. Indeed, the citizens of Oceania are confined by their fear of the Party, their internalization of its message, and

their lack of ways to communicate distrust of the Party and to foment dissent among the people. Winston's first encounter with Julia suggests that the impediments to communication limit human interaction, as Julia struggles to speak and presses a note that professes her love in to Winston's hand. To so hastily claim she loves Winston suggests that one or both of two scenarios are in place: Julia has no clear understanding of what such an overture means, or she is desperate in her need for human interaction. In any case, a reduction in language, hence a reduction in human interaction, is implied.

If the growing inability to write suggests a breakdown in the ability to communicate, then the phenomenon of "newspeak" is the *coup de grace*. Newspeak, the official Party language, represents a deevolution and devaluing of language throughout the society. Its ultimate end is, assuredly, to stunt communication, but it also serves the more insidious purpose of restraining human thought itself. Sym, the man responsible for the newspeak dictionary, elaborates on the dictionary and the new Party language when speaking to Winston, saying, "Don't you see that the whole aim of newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? In the end we shall make thoughtcrime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it" (47). Sym, as a Party shill, goes on to exalt newspeak for its surprising ability to shrink, rather than grow, with each passing year. Thus, Foucault's assertion that individuals are "never subjects of communication" in a perfectly functioning panoptic system seems applicable to Oceania. Although, Orwell does not depict a fully realized panopticon, as Winston and Julia do manage to conduct a relationship and "communicate" while temporarily avoiding surveillance, but the limiting of language and communication is clear. Oceania is moving toward, although not yet fully arrived at, total control of communication and, subsequently, thought. A

predominance of literature claims Orwell's *1984* represents an absolute version of a totalitarian society, but the promise of a new newspeak dictionary each year suggests that Oceania is yet to reach that state. Nevertheless, the Party has a keen interest in manipulating and limiting language and exercising control over its people, and, in many ways, this control mimics one of the key factors in implementing the kind of control Foucault analyzes.

Big Brother's regime maintains its control through another equal and intertwined pair of phenomena, the continuous shift of public opinion and the distraction created by the outer Party. The most obvious example is the shifting conflict between Oceania, Eurasia, and Eastasia. This revolving war represents a hegemonic power structure and is a powerful example of the simulacra the Party has created. Limiting thought through newspeak is certainly a primary goal of the Party, but adjunct to this are attempts to direct the public conscience away from evaluations of their own government. The Party continually reminds the populace of its foreign enemies to ensure that the citizens will never consider their domestic enemies. The Party protects its power by insulating itself against scrutiny; the Party turns its gaze upon the populace, limits its ability to communicate, and finally distracts it from the true situation.

John Atkins, in *George Orwell and the Cold War: A Reconsideration*, elaborates on the mechanisms of the warfare between the three fictional blocs of Orwell's novel: "There is a state of permanent war but it is a contest of limited aims between combatants who cannot destroy each other. The war cannot be decisive . . . as none of the states comes near conquering the others; however, the war deteriorates into a series of skirmishes [although] the protagonists store atomic bombs" (237-8). The war is not

fought for territory or resources; it is an *agreed upon* war that serves the economic and political interests of each of the super nations involved. The shifting wars allow the Party to manipulate two primal human emotions, fear and anger. The Party provides the public with an enemy that is to be both feared and hated, and in effect removes all chance that the Party may be the target of those emotions. The perpetual war is, then, *1984*'s ultimate example of simulacra and hyperreality.

The final goal of the Party is to create its own version of history, and, in doing so, create its own version of the present. While Orwell provides many glimpses into the gulf that exists between the "reality" as presented by the Party and the reality as it truly is, Winston's job at the Ministry of Truth, the very existence of which is telling, provides us with the most powerful and poignant examples. The gulf between the Party-created reality and the reality that Winston remembers is confronted when the narrator states,

Winston could not definitely remember a time when his country had not been at war . . . The enemy of the moment always represented absolute evil, and it followed that any past or future agreement with him was impossible. The Party said that Oceania had never been in alliance with Eurasia. He, Winston Smith, knew that Oceania had been in alliance with Eurasia as short a time as four years ago. But where did that knowledge exist? Only in his own consciousness, which in any case must soon be annihilated. And if all others accepted the lie which the Party imposed -- if all records told the same tale -- then the lie passed into history and became truth. 'Who controls the past,' ran the Party slogan, 'controls the future: who controls the present controls the past.' (32)

Winston knows that facts and reality have become disconnected. The Party has managed to achieve its ends through two separate methods. First it has manipulated the records to reflect a different version of reality, a version of reality where what is stated is more important than what is real. The lie will become truth when only a small number disagree based on their own interactions with reality, and the majority accepts that recorded history contains facts. Reality becomes a collection of signifiers with false signifieds. The second way the Party accomplishes its establishment of hyperreality through perpetual warfare is to repeat images and messages. The war has waged so long and its vicissitudes have been so frequent that the populace is left in a stupor, indifferent to figure out exactly how the war has been conducted in truth. Constant repetition is a key feature of Baudrillard's hyperreality as it establishes that a society has entered into a kind of closed circuit loop, where power recycles infinitely along with the images, attitudes, and messages associated with it. Oceania has fallen into such a loop, with the history of its warfare doomed to be shadowy and forever repeating the same changes as it serves the interest of the Party by diverting and distracting the populace.

The Two Minute Hate, a propaganda film that repeats each day for the crowds of Oceania, provides the populace with yet another diversion for their emotions and interest. The enemy, Emmanuel Goldstein (a thinly veiled caricature of Leon Trotsky), is purportedly a former leader of the Party who betrayed the Party and the people of Oceania. Winston comments on Goldstein's importance in the society of Oceania early in the novel:

[Goldstein] was the primal traitor, the earliest defiler of the Party's purity. All subsequent crimes against the Party, all treacheries, acts of sabotage, heresies,

deviations, sprang directly out of his teaching. Somewhere or other he was still alive and hatching his conspiracies: perhaps somewhere beyond the sea, under the protection of his foreign paymasters; perhaps even—so it was occasionally rumored—in some hiding place in Oceania itself. (14)

This passage highlights two distinct phenomena in action. First, the members of Oceania society are again given a scapegoat, an overly simplified emotional target⁴ toward which to direct their animosity. Much like the shifting war, the intent is clearly to distract the populace. Again the telescreen plays a pivotal role in manipulating the public. Goldstein also provides a false originator for all the society's ills (truly heavy handed) but in Oceania the people are, for the most part, fervent in directing their hate at Goldstein. Gramsci's definition of hegemony relies on the populace actively and enthusiastically taking part in their own subversion, and the Two-Minute Hate in many ways mirrors Gramsci's definition. In much the same way, Foucault suggests that the modern systems of power rely heavily on the powers-that-be resisting any scrutiny through the use of proxies.

It is clear, then, that the society of Oceania and the citizens that inhabit its gloomy streets are being subverted through a series of phenomena that are distinct in the postmodern clime. We are no strangers in the 21st century to the propagandizing force of the television or the false images that our sacrosanct technologies have created. The prescient qualities of Orwell's novel are oft praised, and with good reason—it is apparent that his own novel in many ways fits the models for societal organization that philosophers before and after him have astutely observed.

Orwell's telescreen is, after all, quite accurate in its depiction of the media's use in political and propagandized efforts in contemporary times. How far removed are the repeated images of Goldstein from our modern media's repeated airing of images of Saddam Hussein or Osama Bin Laden? Comparisons between the falsely named Ministries from Orwell's Oceania and government agencies in our own time with similar contrivances, such as the Homeland Security Agency, come easy—indeed the names do little in either case to expand on what either truly does. In October 2007, while still suffering from the Hurricane Katrina⁵ controversy, FEMA held a news conference to assure the public that California wild fires were being handled responsibly; less than a week later it was discovered the press conference was a staged event. Certainly Orwell was privy to propaganda created by countries embroiled in World War II with overtly false news broadcasts being produced to dupe citizenry, and he seems to predict in *1984* that propaganda of the sort would only escalate in the future into something akin to FEMA's counterfeit broadcast. Our contemporary world and the world of *1984* clearly show similar hyperreal traits. John Fiske, in his book *Media Matters*, states, "Hyperreality is . . . our loss of certainty in being able to distinguish clearly between reality and its representations" (62). Like contemporary Western society, the denizens of Oceania are, in some ways, similarly affected by this phenomenon.

Likewise, few would argue that clear similarities between the surveillance-laden society of *1984* and contemporary societies could not be found. The surveillance cameras that inundate Oceania can be found in our own contemporary lives. Increasingly rare is the public space that does not fall under the watchful gaze of a recording device. The question of our own government being privy to traditionally private things like our

phone conversations has arisen in the wake of the “War on Terror,” and it represents a contemporary invasion of privacy similar to the telescreen watching over its citizens. Orwell cleverly predicted the consumption of private space that is a hallmark of Foucauldian analysis and is in many ways a reality in contemporary society. As well, the restructuring of language that post structuralists have contended with in the postmodern period undoubtedly share similarities with Orwell’s newspeak. The carefully directed language of phrases like “enhanced interrogation techniques” or “enemy combatants”⁶ is an effort to reduce the versatility/power of language (and subvert the law) in a way that many have even described as Orwellian.

Despite the prescient qualities of Orwell’s novel, it is, after all, a stepping stone between modernity and postmodernity, and, in many ways, it doesn’t align itself totally with our understanding of contemporary society and the phenomena that dictate contemporary life. Yes, Orwell is correct in understanding that the television would play a significant role in how power, politics, and social stratification are incorporated in our own time through the use of misinformation and simulacra, but he couldn’t predict the way messages would be carried in modern society and the amount of, as Gramsci puts it, “autonomous choice” left to the average citizen. As Fiske states, “an image-saturated culture differs from a culture of controlled and organized representations not just in degree, but in kind” (62). Oceania is not dominated by a plurality of messages; rather it is dominated by a unified “controlled” and “organized” message. The telescreen may have similarities to the television of postmodern society, but where Oceania had one government-run television station reminiscent of closed societies, contemporary television is a cacophony of varying and seemingly competing voices. Likewise, the

posters of Big Brother are entirely systematic, and, while intimating aspects of contemporary western society, contrast the mosaic of advertisements that dominate the contemporary cityscapes.

Orwell's *1984* represents a nascent model of a hyperreal dystopia, but it lacks the fundamental component, related to the absence of image-saturation, required for it to be a representation of postmodern hegemony. The inundation of images creates the perception that society has made choices itself, rather than being given none. This in turn creates the compliance that is necessary to prevent rejection of what the powers that be wish to instill in society. The single voice of the Party, mimicked by the single television station and the single mode of advertising, are far too rudimentary to achieve the type of societal control Gramsci outlines. The more sophisticated hegemons operate by injecting the superstructure with "norms" and allowing those norms to be filtered into society through multiple channels. Some of these channels may not even be aware they are participating in such coercion, unlike the society of Oceania where all members of the Party are privy to the manipulation they are undertaking. The creation of hyperreality is, in a sense, a symptom of a hegemonic state as the plurality of images begin to overlap and repeat. A sense of reality is lost because it becomes impossible to navigate the multitude of images to arrive at any version of the truth. Indeed the Party creates simulacra, but the simulacra are carefully crafted and are simple binary oppositions rather than complex tapestries.

Thus, while Orwell in many ways captures the essence of what postmodern society will develop into, because of the omnipresence of totalitarian models in his time, his dystopia does not reflect the true level of sophistication the postmodern hegemon

achieves, including the necessity for the citizenry to “enjoy” its subversion rather than to acquiesce because of fear. Douglas Kellner, author of “From *1984* to One Dimensional Man” claims that *1984* “undercuts the Gramscian distinction between force and hegemony, and fails to see that the state and bureaucracy can serve the interests of the ruling class, or Party, without resorting to force to the extent that they do in Orwell's bureaucratic state”(71).

Perhaps with his depiction of surveillance Orwell was most prescient in his predicting our contemporary culture. As stated, modern western culture has wholeheartedly accepted the need to employ cameras, listening mechanisms and a litany of other methods and devices to police the public. The panoptic qualities of Oceania are not entirely removed from the methods we know today; however, there are some important differences. The invasion of private places, particularly homes, is overt in *1984*, and contemporary society has far more subtle forms of detection. Rather than being physically watched in their homes, contemporary citizens are only truly watched and recorded when contacting public spaces. So, while acting in the home is not perceived by outside forces, contacting the outside world, via the phone or Internet for example, is. Paranoia is only minimal when simply “living,” although the increasing interactions with the computer make private “living” increasingly difficult. Thus, in our private spaces, we feel much less of the “pressure” from government sources than do the citizens of Oceania. Most private “observations” of the public are conducted through tracking individual citizen transactions. A dutifully recorded paper trail is the preferred method of observation for modern power systems. That is not to say that overt surveillance is

absent in the public sphere of contemporary lives, and, again, this is where Orwell could be considered largely accurate.

Ultimately, Orwell's warnings adumbrate many of the ideas that have come to dominate society, and his *1984* can, in many ways, be seen as a hyperreal, panoptic dystopia. The fundamental difference in his depiction of what future governments might bring, however, is his inability to see the sophistication of the modern media or the subtlety of contemporary control methods and how they rely heavily on the private sector in conjunction with the government. Scott Bradner, author of "Orwell Did Not Guess the Worse Half of It" comments on Orwell's warnings stating, "Orwell missed the fact that much of the privacy threat would come from the private sector, where there are few meaningful, legally mandated controls" (24). The private sector in contemporary society produces the messages and distributes them. The private sector is increasingly responsible for making each citizen an observer rather than an actor by arming citizens with recording devices and encouraging increased access via computer. In conjunction with this Kellner states,

Orwell misses the rise of what Foucault calls "normalizing" disciplinary power . . . That is, contemporary capitalist societies utilize a wide array of social welfare programs and agencies, schooling, and institutions and techniques such as psychotherapy, mental institutions, prisons, and media to socialize individuals and to suppress deviancy. Deviant behavior in capitalist societies is thus more likely to be reshaped by techniques of behavior control rather than Big Brother's boot-in-the-face. (361)

Thus, contemporary society is dominated by large sections of the private sector (for example any number of multinational corporations) working in concurrence with government efforts that adopt and reinforce one another, something far sleeker than Orwell's Oceania.

We can gain a much better understanding of how contemporary authors react to the precedents set by Orwell and how dystopias produced in the 21st century react to and reinforce the suppositions made by postmodern thinkers by analyzing and contrasting Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, as a representative of contemporary postmodern dystopia, with Orwell's *1984*. Unquestionably Atwood's dystopia is indebted to *1984*, and in many ways it extrapolates contemporary themes in much the same way as Orwell treated those from his own time. Atwood, however, clearly reacts to the private sector in a more profound way than Orwell. Atwood is more conscious of the complex mingling of state and private industry "whereas Orwell in *1984* tends to collapse social system into state bureaucracy, assimilating civil society to the state" (Kellner 369). In the end the nascent hegemony commented on by Orwell has evolved in Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*.

Chapter 2

Oryx and Crake, Postmodernity, and Late Capitalism.

“The history of any nation follows an undulatory course. In the trough of the wave we find more or less complete anarchy; but the crest is not more or less complete Utopia, but only, at best, a tolerably humane, partially free and fairly just society that invariably carries within itself the seeds of its own decadence.”

- Aldous Huxley

Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* in many ways mimics the cautions of *1984*: surveillance as a tool of control, the hypnotic and programming effects of the television, the creation of artificial images, the adoption of false needs and the assimilation of particular hegemonic methods of thought. However, *Oryx and Crake* differs in many regards as well, and perhaps most important among those differences is how Atwood represents the government/citizen relationship in her dystopic world and what that reveals about power in contemporary society. *Oryx and Crake*'s critique of societal ills condemns the modern West and its brand of hegemony, a brand that is closely aligned with Gramsci's original notion of the concept: a decentralized form of power that resists overt controls. While Orwell's *1984* represents nascent qualities of the kind of hegemony theorized by Gramsci, Atwood's novel shows the more carefully crafted capitalistic hegemony that utilizes simulacra, disciplinary power and deindividuation.

Oryx and Crake recounts the story of humanity's last years as experienced by Snowman, a shabby, delusional man whose real name, as we learn through a series of flashbacks that detail his upbringing and early adult life, is Jimmy. Jimmy had lived in one of the protected corporate-controlled compounds that separated the well-to-do corporate employees from the less affluent and eminently-preyed upon residents of the Pleeblands, the overpopulated, polluted areas of the globe that are left to those born outside of privilege. Atwood evokes a classical dystopic trope by presenting the reader with a stratified society, here also serving as a comment on the growing number of impoverished and the accumulation of wealth by a small handful of people that the postmodern era has brought the West.

Jimmy's father worked for one of the many mega-corporations that center on bioengineering and pharmaceuticals, a common industry for the corporations that dominate Atwood's future society. Jimmy grew up sheltered from the rest of the world, as life inside of the compounds is uniform and controlled, policed by the corporate security or CorpSeCorps. As we discover throughout the novel, the CorpSeCorps is as interested in protecting the companies' assets and spying on their employees as it is in protecting them from the disease-infested outsiders. Jimmy's father's company, OrganInc, was responsible for creating many animal hybrids, one of which, the pigoon (a cross between a pig and a baboon), is used for growing organs that can be transplanted into humans. We also learn that Jimmy's mother worked for the same company in the past until she developed distrust toward science. Jimmy spent his early years enduring the domestic disputes his work-obsessed father and scientist-turned-activist mother engage in over the experiments she finds immoral. Eventually, Jimmy's mother left the

compound out of unhappiness, and Jimmy is questioned and pursued by the CorpSeCorps for many years due to her disappearance. It is after her disappearance that it becomes clear to the reader just how closely citizens are monitored within the compounds. We learn that Jimmy's mother had to fake records and create false documents in order to leave the compound, as every action (in this case Jimmy's mother fakes a dentist visit) is carefully monitored and recorded.

Later in life, Jimmy moves to a new compound where his father has taken a new, more lucrative job. At the new compound Jimmy meets Glenn, who is a genius, especially in the fields of science where Jimmy has always been lackluster. The two form a friendship and spend their teenage years surfing the Internet, playing games and indulging in taboo videos. One of these games, Extinctathon, is the source of Glenn's new name, Crake, because each player must select the name of an extinct species. During one of the boys' many encounters with pornography on the Internet, a girl gives Jimmy a look that haunts him. He is infatuated with the girl who he comes to know as Oryx.

Crake's intelligence leads him to one of the top corporate bio-firm-sponsored universities, Watson-Crick, while Jimmy must attend Martha Graham, a lesser school where those with little gifts for science must prepare for jobs in less lucrative fields. Jimmy finds that he has a talent for words, and he eventually graduates and goes to work for a marketing company, creating ads for products that his intellectual "superiors" create. After graduating from school, Crake is employed at the preeminent bio-firm in the world, and when he hires Jimmy to work there as well, we discover that Crake has been secretly working on a project that has created a new kind of human. Jimmy

encounters Oryx, who has been hired by Crake, while employed there, and ultimately they have a troubled affair. Eventually Crake unleashes a pill, BlyssPlus, on the world, one that promises utopia but in reality proves to be fatal and the demise of most of the world's population. Jimmy learns that he has been given an inoculation and he survives to become one of the only human survivors, after he shoots Crake for murdering Oryx and unleashing the end of humanity. The novel then comes full circle with Jimmy adopting the name Snowman and shepherding the Crakers, Crake's semi-human creations, into the shattered world to build anew.

Atwood's model, much like Orwell's, is a reaction to the world she herself experiences, and her novel is a reflection of how in contemporary society societal control is more insidious than in Orwell's novel: The rise of the capitalist corporations that wield more power than some nations. For example, the power that a company such as Exxon currently wields, with a net worth of almost 500 billion dollars and its vast influence with arguably the world's most needed resource, in many ways puts them in competition with governments, and not other companies. The wealth of the top ten richest companies, a figure in excess of two trillion dollars⁷, forces governments to be beholden to these companies, and not the other way around. Atwood penned *Oryx and Crake* to comment directly on the monolithic and powerful corporate powers that have arisen, and not the monolithic government that was the fear of another age. Atwood's novel centers on a corporate-controlled capitalistic society, rather than a stratified totalitarian one.

Particularly, Atwood's novel can be illuminated by the theories on late capitalism and the postmodern era set forth by Fredrick Jameson. Jameson's work centers on defining the postmodern condition as a reaction to the present stage of capitalistic

development. Jameson's theories seek to explain modern societies through a Marxist lens and suggest that societies are the product of their prevailing economic systems. Jameson sees recent human history as a series of reactions to capitalism. According to Jameson, capitalism has undergone three stages: early competitive capitalism, monopoly capitalism that reigned during the modern period, and multinational or "late" capitalism, which coincides with the postmodern period. Jameson is heavily influenced by the Frankfurt School⁸; he borrows the term "late" capitalism from its members and uses many of their ideas to further his own. The Frankfurt School members believed that the ultimate outcome of any capitalistic system was a total bureaucracy where state and business interests increasingly blur to the point where they are no longer separate. Jameson suggests that postmodernity coincides with the final, "late" form of capitalism, and the merger of various public and private sectors resonates throughout every citizen's daily life and interactions with "reality." Jameson's analysis of the postmodern era provides unique insight into the world of Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* and also helps us understand how many of the novel's themes extrapolate on our own reality. His theories also help provide an explanation for how the novel represents the shift in hegemonic systems that coincides with changing economic conditions from modernism to postmodernism. Jameson's argument, in many ways allied with those of Baudrillard and Foucault, provides an understanding of how Orwell's dystopia adumbrated postmodern conditions that are fully articulated in Atwood's novel. This in turn suggests that the postmodern condition was germinating in the late '40s and '50s.

Jameson proposes that contemporary society has moved into the third and last stage of capitalism, multinational capitalism, having left behind monopoly capitalism

with the end of the modern age: “the economic preparation of postmodernism or late capitalism began in the 1950s, after the wartime shortages of consumer goods and spare parts had been made up, and new products and new technologies (not least those of the media) could be pioneered” (117). Postmodernism would continue its rise throughout the ‘60s with the further integration of new technologies for the recording and tracking of individual lives. According to Jameson this would lead to the full solidification of postmodernism in the ‘70s. In describing this process Jameson states, “We have gone through a transformation of life which is somehow decisive but incomparable with the older convulsions of modernization and industrialization, less perceptible and dramatic, somehow, but more permanent precisely because more thoroughgoing and all-pervasive” (218). Jameson believes that the contemporary age is dominated by a “transformation of life” which denotes a shift in thought, media, artistic expression and social organization. Jameson strengthens his assertion that the postmodern is a distinct age when he states, “Consequently, to speak of postmodernity is to suggest an epochal shift or break from modernity involving the emergence of a new social totality with its own distinct organizing principles” (194).

These principles are organized around a capitalistic system that no longer seeks to fulfill needs, but rather seeks to create needs. With the epic struggles of the early century mostly decided, an era of production was born. As the Cold War progressed, production of weapons to divert war in many ways mimicked the growing production of all goods, and, just as many of those weapons proved to be excessive and unneeded—made for the sake of being made—so too did many of the new era’s products in all industries prove to be equally unneeded. In addition, the swelling number of products produced in the name

of “variety” and “choice” brought along with it increasingly technological goods for consumer use. Considering the term “consumer-electronics” is a product of the postmodern age itself, it is clear that consumerism and technology are indebted to one another. Jameson firmly believes that the post World War II era birthed postmodernism because of such economic forces. With it, postmodernism brought about shifts in thought, inexorably linked to capitalism’s advancing stage, away from modernism.

Jameson suggests that the lock-step drive of modernism toward “progress” was achieved through capitalistic endeavors, and as society entered the contemporary period, it saw an increasing production and the spread of capitalism and corporate power throughout the globe. The commitment toward “progress” was realized, but rather than leading to a coherent, unified world view, postmodern society has become a fragmentary landscape where individuals find an overabundance of images, ideas, and competing world views. In much the same way Baudrillard describes hyperreality, Jameson describes a modern society that has seen individuals driven into further disconnected spheres of existence that resist unified perspectives and instead are increasingly individual. Jameson argues that history too has become a fragmentary aspect of life, as semiotic bits of history are recycled in countless ways and ultimately redefined into something quite removed from any perceptible “reality.” Jameson states, “the evident existential fact of life [is] that there no longer does seem to be any organic relationship between the American history we learn from schoolbooks and the lived experience of the current multinational, high-rise, stagflated city of the newspapers and of our own everyday life” (205). Jameson goes on to suggest that this is but one of many ways that “depth” has been removed in the postmodern climate. The impact on the consciousness

of the postmodern subject is extreme, as the endless parade of needs created by a late capitalist society inspires a kind of schizophrenia in all individuals, and the ability to experience a coherent existence is robbed from the individual because it lacks a larger example in society: “If, indeed, the subject has lost its capacity actively to . . . organize its past and future into coherent experience, it becomes difficult enough to see how the cultural productions of such a subject could result in anything but heaps of fragments” (215). Thus, the postmodern climate is dominated by fragmentary images, and in turn the subjects participating in postmodern societies are rendered incapable of producing anything other than fragments themselves.

A clear connection between Jameson’s theories and Atwood’s novel can be seen, as hers is a world dominated by the very multinational capitalism he describes. If we consider Atwood’s warnings and her method of representing our contemporary culture, we can see how the capitalistic developments in our “real world” have inspired Atwood’s warnings based upon late capitalist society; we can also draw conclusions concerning how late capitalism transformed hegemonic devices, such as the panopticon, in concert with the growth of the hyperreal and how they have become a natural byproduct of multinational corporate control through media manipulation and technological advances.

For instance, consider the methods of surveillance used in *Oryx and Crake*. The novel depicts a world where government seems to leave the populace to its own devices. After all, Jimmy and Crake are free to observe all manner of illicit material on the internet, and they engage in several illegal activities, such as smoking marijuana. The citizens of Oceania could never imagine such “freedoms”; they could never imagine the luxury of ingesting illegal substances without fear of reprisal, and they certainly could not

imagine interactions with a device that seemed to expand knowledge rather than limit it. Despite the fact that the boys often use the computer for things that are not necessarily educational, they do have the freedom to (instantly) summon any type of knowledge, a far cry from the single television station of Oceania. This “freedom” is but a ruse, however, as the two teens, along with the rest of the compound residents, are confined to a space with guarded gates and subtle surveillance. Within the confines of their communities they ostensibly enjoy freedom, but upon closer observation it is apparent that the citizens who populate the compounds are granted the ability to make choices only within limits. The omnipresent security of the compounds, the CorpSeCorps, carefully monitors all who enter and exit the compound, and many of their activities suggests a sophisticated level of observation. The CorpSeCorps is not an extension of a conventional government police force however. Instead, they are an extension of the bio-firms’ power and a clear indicator that the world of *Oryx and Crake* has forgone (at least within the compounds) traditional policing that was once part of the commons, and instead replaced it with a force that is indebted to the corporate powers and ultimately serves corporate interests.

In a sense, the citizens of the compounds are lulled into a state of trust by this corporate-police force, aware that observation can be taking place, but because it is hardly invasive, the citizens feel no real fear toward a system that punishes only those who commit major transgressions. This false sense of trust is a primary example of how the concept of hegemony as defined by Gramsci functions in contemporary society. The hegemon functions by allowing even “deviant” behaviors in order to avoid the notion that every human action is monitored and controlled by the state. The subtlety of the

surveillance that is found in Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* in many ways mirrors the surveillance of the modern West, because technology has allowed for surveillance of increased complexity. The technologies that late capitalism produced have allowed for the monitoring of lives in much more covert ways, and the gaze has also expanded to record individual transactions.

For example, when Jimmy's mother decides to leave, we see the true limits for those who live in the compounds. CorpSeCorps members follow Jimmy throughout his life and question him concerning his mother's whereabouts, while ultimately tracking her down and killing her; they prove that each action of the individuals in the compounds is subject to scrutiny and, ultimately, punishment if deemed necessary. When the CorpSeCorp question Jimmy, they indicate that they have the ability to record a great deal of information about the lives of the citizens, including direct observation of the citizen's actions themselves. The CorpSeCorp produce a litany of materials showing seditionists and criminals of all varieties, and the narrative takes on a first-person perspective as Jimmy lists the items presented: "A lineup of mug shots from a Sacramento prison. The driver's license photo from a suicide car bomber. (but if the car had blown up, how had they come by the license?)" (257). The parenthetical question proves that Jimmy doubts some of the evidence placed before him, but it is clear he has no ability to question the validity of the data. Even though the evidence placed before him seems to violate his basic sense of logic, the power of the corporations, extended by the CorpSeCorp, is unchallengeable because it is intermittent and unverifiable. Jimmy, along with the rest of the members of the compounds, is quite obviously a victim of a

panoptic system when we consider his inability to escape the observation and tracking of the CorpSeCorp and the difficulty in verifying power.

Jameson's theories can also help elucidate the stratification of the society represented in *Oryx and Crake*. Atwood's sophisticated model reflects the contemporary reality of a reduced number who exercise power. In Atwood's dystopia, the compounds are the areas where the privileged few concoct new products to be sold to (or "exercised" upon) those who live in the Pleebands. Rather than force their power upon the indigent as the party does in Oceania, the powerful in Atwood's society dupe the Pleeblanders into participating in their own entrapment and eventual demise. As Stephen Dunning, author of "Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*" states, "the ungifted or unfortunate find themselves banished to the 'Pleeblands'. Life for the unprotected is brutal, in large part because of the environmental damage produced by precisely the same technology that offers protection to those who can afford it" (91).

By incorporating a vicious, self-perpetuating, capitalistic cycle, the world of *Oryx and Crake* has set up a system whereby those protected compounds are in constant competition to run one another out of business (to reduce the number of those who can exercise power) while simultaneously expanding the numbers in the pleebands upon which power can be exercised (by creating a need for the products the privileged create). In many ways this aligns with a classic Marxist analysis of capitalism, but, as Jameson suggests, our modern society, like the one represented by Atwood, has developed a form of capitalism unlike any known before. The intricate use of technology and advanced forms of media coupled with the multinational reach of contemporary hegemony have rendered modern citizens little more than unwitting

consumers, doomed to participate in their own destruction in a manner that seems to be an evolution of false consciousness, part and parcel of the evolution of capitalism.

Moreover, *Oryx and Crake* depicts the voyeuristic qualities of late capitalism by showing a world that, like our own, is consumed by images. As seen with Jimmy and Crake, individual lives become obsessed with observation—overseeing one another and devoted to observing the behavior of others. The two spend a great deal of time using the computer to be voyeurs, watching executions, pornography, and other “real” events. These realities are not created with the sole intent of instituting control; unlike those realities presented by the party of Oceania, they have the additional purpose of generating income for corporations. Because of their society’s inundation with observations—commercial, programs, and fragmented Internet information—the members of the compounds also turn their gaze upon others out of habit. As Foucault states, it is unimportant why the voyeur watches (like Jimmy’s and Crake’s voyeurism simply for entertainment); it is only important that each individual participant perpetuate the system through being both observer and observed. According to Dunning, “In the compounds, the elite rattle around like miserable, *voyeuristic* ghosts, starving in ways they cannot even begin to describe or address—living in various degrees of frustration, anxiety and *isolation*” (91) [emphasis added]. Indeed the members of the compounds have become unwitting agents in the very system that serves to oppress them, but just as Dunning suggests, the participation in the voyeurism is only one aspect of life in the compounds—the other is isolation.

While it may not seem as though Jimmy and Crake are suffering from any real isolation, as the novel portrays them spending many hours together and exercising a real,

albeit troubled, friendship, the isolation of the two fits the model of the panoptic society perfectly and reflects how the panopticon is implemented in late capitalistic societies. Just as Foucault states that “a collective . . . is abolished and replaced by a collection of separated individualities” (203), so too are Jimmy and Crake forced into separation. The two may seem to form a small “collective,” but in reality they have succumbed to the effect Foucault writes about. The majority of the time the two spend together in their youth is consumed with the use of the computer and voyeuristic pursuits. The coming together to peruse the offerings of the Internet does not bring them closer together because “they do not use these technologies to communicate, so much as to entertain and distract themselves, a point Atwood emphasizes by having them augment their voyeuristic excursions into the Internet with mind altering substances” (Dunning 91). Jimmy and Crake are not coming together as friends to share ideas and work in tandem; rather, they are still quite separated despite their togetherness. For example, when Crake attempts to help Jimmy with his math homework, Jimmy asks, “Why are you doing this? . . . Why help me out?” to which Crake replies, “I’m a sadist, I like to watch you suffer” (174). Crake often seems to keep company with Jimmy in order to display his superiority or to insult Jimmy. The games that Jimmy and Crake partake in further enforce the kind of individuation Foucault writes about. Crake has two computers in his room so he and Jimmy can play games while back-to-back. This is the perfect representation of panoptic isolation as “this image, of two friends facing away from each other, intent upon a two-dimensional visual world that mediates their relationship, captures something of both the forces that violate human communion and the results of that violation” (Dunning 92). The “forces” are those “pressures” of the panoptic system and the “results” are isolated

individuals that are the quintessential property of a panoptic society. Dunning goes on to say that “They neither look at, nor talk to, each other. In a sense, they are not present to each other at all, or perhaps virtually not present” (92). Much like contemporary society, the world of Jimmy and Crake is awash in distraction and voyeurism that may bring them physically together, but ultimately leaves them “virtually separated.”

For the intents and purposes of a panoptic system, virtual separation is ideal; this virtual separation makes it appear as though no restrictions are in place, no coupling or grouping discouraged, yet ultimately leaves the populace as separated as if it were physically quarantined. Unlike the forces that separate individuals in Oceania, which only serve the singular purpose of making the citizenry more manageable, this quarantining originates in capitalistic pursuits that seek to gain wealth and ultimately provide a distraction to the citizenry. The Internet serves the dual purpose of generating simulacra and being a panoptic device; thus it becomes a tool of both deception and perception—a producer of false desires and a method to supervise those desires.

With the citizens steeped in such faux realities and increasingly reliant on electronic interaction, it is clear that late capitalism relies on an intimate relationship between man and his technologies. While the television remains an important instrument of hegemony in Atwood’s novel, the more important electronic device is the computer. For Baudrillard the television is a central catalyst in this breakdown of reality, and we could certainly apply a similar logic to the computer. Baudrillard calls the television the “TV object” and notes that it operates as a general “proof function,” ensuring one is a legitimate member of the consumer culture (Baudrillard 117). Atwood’s dystopia depicts how the computer has joined the television as an essential device for membership in

consumer culture. However, it aligns itself with the kind of late capitalist society presented by Jameson, as the computer provides an even more expansive freedom of “choice” than the television, which is still limited by the number of channels even though the channels have burgeoned in the decades since its creation. The computer is the ultimate representation of late capitalism as it provides connections to all parts of the globe and many opportunities for capitalist marketers to present versions of reality right along side advertisements for objects that “fulfill” those realities or provide opportunities to associate the pleasure derived from entertainment with the products themselves. For instance, when Jimmy and Crake visit websites dealing with state executions, the text reads, “These sites would have spot commercials, for things like car batteries and tranquilizers, and logos painted in bright yellow on the background walls” (82). The “entertainment” the boys consume suggests to them the power of drugs or electricity, and they can, through the power of capitalism, capture a bit of this power for themselves.

Just as the computer is the primary force behind Jimmy’s and Crake’s voyeurism and detachment, so too does it play the primary role in their loss of the real and their vestment in a hyperreality. When Baudrillard states that things “are being replayed *ad infinitum*,” he means that loss of meaning is derived from infinite repetition with no true reference point in reality. The reference point is lost because of the separation between signifier and signified; the representation has become reality and not the opposite. For example, the value given to a car as a status symbol, and not as an accurate representation of the car’s quality or utilitarian aspects, represents a loss of a true reference point. Jimmy and Crake find themselves in similar situations repeatedly throughout the novel, particularly when the two are consuming pornography and other explicit, violent

material: “So they’d roll a few joints while watching the executions and porn ... If you switched back and forth fast, it all came to look like the same event. Sometimes they’d have both things on at once each on a different screen” (86). These events socialize the boys into a distorted perception of reality; just as they can conflate the different images on the screen into a single event, they similarly conflate the on-screen images with their own “reality.” Glenn Ward, in his book *Postmodernism*, describes “the experience of TV as a constant turnover of images, and the ability of viewers to zap from one channel to another” (57), and the computer functions similarly. Indeed, Jimmy and Crake lose their sense of the real because of the continued repetition of images free of reference points. Real sex and violence, along with its respective pleasures and pains, are lost upon the two young men as they have no way of discerning real from fantasy, given their virginal, antiseptic realities inside the compounds.

The effects of this early exposure to hyperreal sex and violence can be seen throughout Jimmy’s life as he passionlessly moves from one sexual encounter to the next, always sizing up his partners in terms of physicality, but incapable of making any real connection because his expectations of love and sex have been formulated by the media he consumed in his youth. Thus, the hyperreal images that are the hallmark of postmodern existence, born of limitless corporate sounding boards, have shaped Jimmy’s life as he can never find a “reality” that satisfies the one he has been sold and now expects.

Yet another incident involving Jimmy’s and Crake’s use of the Internet highlights the postmodern loss of the real. While watching executions on the web, Crake suggests that several of the incidents are staged, and he explains, “the viewers wanted to see the

executions, yes, but after a while these could get monotonous, so one last fighting chance had to be added in, or else an element of surprise.” His statement prompts a telling bit of dialogue between the two:

“do you really think they are being executed?” Jimmy said . . .

“you never know” said Crake.

“You never know what?”

“What is reality” (83).

Crake’s towering intellect provides him enough insight to be aware that he and Jimmy, as well as all the other inhabitants of the compounds, are in no position to decide what is real. Ultimately, society in *Oryx and Crake*, with its ahistorical hyperreality, so aptly described by Baudrillard and Jameson, is disturbingly similar to contemporary culture in the modern West.

The hyperreal society serves capitalistic hegemony by allowing the corporations to define lifestyles and provide products to fulfill those lifestyles. This hyperreal state is fueled by the economic reality of late capitalism, and Atwood’s dystopia reflects it as such. An example of this in *Oryx and Crake* comes in the form of Ramona, the flirtatious employee who eventually becomes lovers with Jimmy’s father. As Jimmy states, “Ramona was supposed to be a tech genius but she talked like a shower-gel babe in an ad” (25). Atwood, whose novel is rife with indictments of marketers, seems to suggest that Ramona has forgone some essential part of her own spirit, an intellectual and nuanced part, and replaced it with an image from an advertisement. Ramona’s speech may well be coincidentally like a television commercial actress, but with Atwood’s focus on business ethics and the insidiousness of marketers, the reader can assume Atwood

intends for us to pick up on this suggestion of marketing pervasiveness. No world so dominated by multinational capitalism's proliferation of images could escape the fragmentation of the subject. Ramona seems free to make a selection from the many representations of personality that corporate advertisements and campaigns present, yet this too is a form of control.

Yet another example of the corporate controlled hyperreal is Jimmy's first real job when he graduates from college. Just as Baudrillard suggests, Jimmy uses the ads he creates to produce a world of, not lies, but disingenuous realities, disconnected desire. Jimmy himself falls sway to his own seductive words: "his hair was getting sparser around the temples, despite the six-week AnooYoo follicle-regrowth course he'd done. He ought to have known it was a scam—he'd put the ads together for it—but they were such good ads, he'd convinced even himself" (252). In the world of the hyperreal, not even those directly involved in the obstruction of a reality connected to real world referents and subject to scrutiny can escape the substitute reality they create. The inability to escape possesses the dual intention of producing a profit and encouraging willful participation. The late capitalist model applies here, as Jimmy's job is to create desire out of a pastiche of words and images that brings about emotion in the public but leaves the true experience flat compared to that which is promised. Tellingly, individuals can fall victim even to a desire they created.

Another media event in *Oryx and Crake*, the "Happicuppa" incident, suggests a further corporate-induced hyperreality. The Greens, a rag-tag group of dissidents who appear to be one of the few remaining bands of citizens rebelling against the simulated world in which they are forced to live, hold a futile protest against the genetically

modified coffee that is putting small coffee growers out of business. As Jimmy and Crake watch the events on television, the narrator articulates just how the observers feel:

There was a staged media event, boring because there was no violence — only a bunch of balding guys with retro tattoos or white patches where they'd been taken off, and severe-looking baggy-boobed women, and quite a few overweight or spindly members of marginal, earnest religious groups, in T-shirts with smiley-faced angels flying with birds or Jesus holding hands with a peasant or God is green on the front. They were filmed dumping Happicuppa products into the harbour, but none of the boxes sank. So there was the Happicuppa logo, lots of copies of it, bobbing around on the screen. It could have been a commercial. (180)

This passage suggests that no real experience can be had, as the protest is only a staged media event, and marketers have so penetrated the lives of those in the novel that even rebellious gestures are perceived as marketing campaigns.

Indeed, Baudrillard would argue that even acts of rebellion are dominated by the hyperreal in that resistance to the hegemonic ideology only further reinforces it. Even if the protestors were real, they were incapable of truly resisting any of society's stereotypes or directives, as marketers have gained, or possibly dictated through "surreptitious" means, the throwing of the boxes into the harbor. What is left is an unreal experience for all those involved: the dissidents at the harbor have unwittingly assisted those they sought to resist, the television viewer has been left with misconceptions of how far his/her own freedoms extend, and the Happicuppa corporation will be left with an unreal history of its product and events that revolved around it. This mimics the idea of "reabsorbition" which Jameson suggests all creations and efforts produced during the

postmodern period will suffer—all happenings can be bent toward a perversion of history and reality for the motivation of growing share value and profits. Even resistance contributes to the postmodern condition. These circumstances suggest Juvenal's query, "who watches the watchmen," has mounting relevance to contemporary society.

¹ Sir Thomas Moore coined the word “Utopia” in his 1516 book *Utopia*. There is much debate concerning Moore’s agenda, if any, in writing the work, but it is clear that the Utopia Moore presents is not a perfect one. The use of slave labor provides an interesting parallel to the discussion between Socrates and Juvenal.

² The term “democracy promotion” has proliferated in the years since the attacks of September 11th, with various definitions of the term being posited. The term has oscillated from being seen as a promotion of freedom to an imposing of imperialism. It has become clear, however, since the term was first used to describe the second Iraq War, that it is not entirely truthful to label the conflict as such, as the original motivations for the war were never promoted this way. In light of other motivations for the conflict, it seems clear that the overuse of the term and its lack of clarity have reduced it to at best a useless platitude.

³ The television was made available to the public in the late ‘30s, although very few households owned one at that time. By the onset of World War II the technology had solidified, but the war effort silenced broadcasts in almost every country embroiled in the conflict. With the wars end, the television exploded in popularity in the West with the means to produce the technology and broadcasts regained. In 1947 commercial broadcasts and political television shows filled the airwaves. For instance, in 1947 *Meet the Press* was first broadcast and \$100,000 was paid to sponsor the Louis-Walcott boxing match.

⁴ This term is often used by Dr. Noam Chomsky to refer to the responses generated in the superstructure that ultimately seek to divert attention away from an aspect of society worth noting.

⁵ The 2005 Hurricane is estimated to have cost America 81.2 billion dollars, and was ultimately an embarrassment for the Bush administration. After having suffered politically for the mismanagement of the hurricane’s after-effects, FEMA was in desperate need to reestablish its name.

⁶ Far from being examples of hair splitting, the use of “enemy combatant” and “enhanced interrogation technique” rather than “prisoner” and “torture” allowed the United States government to side step international law outlined by the Geneva Convention. This distinction has suffered several Supreme Court setbacks in trial including Hamdan V. Rumsfeld.

⁷ This accumulation of wealth places the top ten companies’ earnings over some 25 countries. In the United States alone it is estimated the top 1 percent of individuals wield forty percent of the wealth.

⁸The Frankfurt School is the common name given to the members of the Institute for Social Research, founded in 1923 in Frankfurt, but which emigrated to New York in 1933. They attempted to reconcile Marx's theories with the changing conditions of the new century. They, like Gramsci, argued that human consciousness was not driven entirely by material conditions. Some of its notable members are T.W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse, Jurgen Habermas and Max Horkheimer.

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