

## **The Architecture of Control: Technology as an Instrument of Oppression in Dystopian Fiction**

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### **Abstract:**

This study aims to examine the role of technology as a form of control in Cold War-era dystopian novels. Our society is governed by technology, such as computers, robots, and other scientific tools. Dystopia represents a future world where oppressive societal control and the illusion of perfection are maintained through bureaucratic, corporate, technological, and totalitarian means. The protagonists often feel trapped and seek escape. The selected novels for analysis are George Orwell's *1984* and William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. In both, characters and society are pushed into a different state of existence. This research explores how technology influences the worlds depicted in these works. Written during the Cold War, both novels depict dystopian societies where technology—either imposed by governments or adopted by individuals—sustains societal disorder. The literature warns of the potential evil and power inherent in technology, emphasising the threat to humanity's free will and individual thought. Since progress is associated with technological advancements, these stories are set in the future, highlighting societal and technological development. Consequently, dystopias are often found in Science Fiction, which enables authors to explore hypothetical future scenarios and their impacts.

**Keywords:** Dystopian, Cold War, Oppressive, Totalitarian, Technology, Science Fiction.

### **Introduction**

In 1903, Victorian novelist George Gissing expressed a deep distrust of science, viewing it as a relentless foe of humanity that erodes life's simplicity, beauty, and goodness. He believed it masked barbarism as civilisation, darkened minds, and hardened hearts (253). While Gissing's critique primarily targets technology in its most extreme forms, this perspective was widely held, especially among twentieth-century literary intellectuals, many of whom C. P. Snow described as natural Luddites. This scepticism significantly shapes dystopian fiction, a modern genre that emerged alongside technological advances and serves as a warning about their potential dangers. During the Cold War, a period of intense societal conformity and resistance, literature reflected these tensions. Novels such as *1984* and *Lord*

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*of the Flies* depict societies manipulated by technology—either by governments or individuals—to sustain oppressive states amid societal chaos.

A close analysis of novels and discussions reveals that technology can dominate and shape people's lives, diminishing their sense of individuality. The literature warns of the dangers posed by technological power, suggesting that humanity risks losing free will and independent thinking. This study will examine how dystopian novels such as George Orwell's 1984 and William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* reflect the societal fears and tensions of their respective periods. Some scholars argue that the Cold War heavily influenced cultural and philosophical themes (Hammond 662). The frequent focus on Cold War issues shows how literature mirrors societal concerns. The analysis centres on British literature from after WWII until the beginning of détente in 1969, a period marked by the nuclear arms race and ideological competition between the US and the Soviet Union, embodying the conflict between capitalism and communism. To understand technology's role in dystopian stories, the relationship between it and creative expression will be explored in each case. In all the novels, characters respond to repression differently; however, they generally do not use technology to fight back. Instead, their devotion to free thought and expression serves as a form of resistance against technological control. Through writing and reading, characters discover forbidden avenues of free thought that threaten their regimes.

The selected British novels include Orwell's 1984 and Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. In 1984, technology plays a pivotal role, with a society under relentless surveillance by "Big Brother" to maintain control. Telescreens in homes and workplaces act as both cameras and monitors, compelling citizens to watch government broadcasts. The threat of the "Thought Police" discourages independent thought and encourages obedience. Censorship is a constant in Oceania, especially for Winston Smith, who edits records at the Ministry of Truth to align with the party's narrative. This censorship mirrors the control seen in *Fahrenheit 451* and highlights the influence of the written word. These methods help explain why Oceania is considered "invulnerable to progressive change" (Resch 139). Winston's effort to keep a diary in a stream-of-consciousness style shows how expressive writing enhances awareness and insight. These social structures support the idea that "not-state power corresponds to 'individual freedom,'" and that "not-party dictatorship [relates] to 'moral community'" (Resch 144).

Golding's *Lord of the Flies* uniquely examines technology compared to other novels. A group of boys stranded on a remote island try to survive without adult aid after their plane crashes. Following a prolonged global nuclear war, adults are preoccupied and unable to assist the boys for several months. On the island, the boys appear to start fresh, but their initial ideas focus on various electronic devices. The first sign of adaptation occurs when Piggy's glasses are used to start a fire, making fire their most valuable and advanced technology. As the story unfolds, the boys split into two groups: one believes that keeping

the fire as a signal will save them, while the other relies on hunting pigs with sharpened tools to survive. Their different technologies symbolise their divisions. Jack, once a choirboy turned savage, realises his camp cannot survive without fire, essential for warmth and cooking. He and his followers attempt to steal Piggy's glasses to start a fire, even willing to kill for them, indicating the island's descent into savage mania. The novel shows how the savage camp eventually overcomes the rational, rule-following group, leaving only Ralph alive. He probably would have been killed, too, if adults had not arrived during the final hunt.

#### **Technology as an Instrument of Oppression in 1984**

In George Orwell's novel *1984*, technology permeates every facet of society, with telescreens found in homes, workplaces, and public spaces. Winston believed the Thought Police might be constantly monitoring everyone (Orwell 3). These screens control daily routines, beginning with age-specific exercises in the morning. They also oversee the two-minute hate, where citizens shout at propaganda, mostly directed at Goldstein, their supposed enemy. The primary function of the telescreen is its all-encompassing surveillance — it can see, hear, and even detect a person's heartbeat. Every eye movement and muscle twitch is monitored, making it impossible to fake emotions like admiration or love for the Party and Big Brother.

With telescreens fully integrated into life, society must accommodate their behaviour accordingly. Oceania is portrayed as being "invulnerable to progressive change" while encouraging submissiveness instead (Resch 139). There is no freedom of belief, and the style of life is strictly restricted. Big Brother is truly always watching, observing and monitoring. Fear of encountering the Thought Police keeps society away from independent thought, turning individuals into nothing more than vessels of Party politics and propaganda. With such aspects, *1984* becomes "not a science fiction prophecy but a powerful warning of the danger to human freedom inherent in the use of technology to achieve and maintain political power" (Bernstein 26). This very notion is key to understanding the power relations of the Cold War, in which nuclear arsenals played a leading role in the exercise of control.

Censorship extends beyond telescreens and interactions with the Thought Police. Winston Smith works for the notoriously named Ministry of Truth, which maintains a complex system of altered documents and texts. When current realities conflict with records, previously published articles and speeches are altered. For example, Oceania has never had a stable ally, so Winston and others rewrite history to make it seem as if they have always fought the same enemy. Similarly, during the Cold War, the United States often concealed its crucial wartime alliance with the Soviet Union. After World War II, international alliances changed. Once the Soviet Union's role against Nazi Germany was no longer needed, fears grew, and U.S. officials shifted toward a pro-British, anti-Soviet stance (Reynolds 215). Both superpowers aimed for security, fuelling an ongoing rivalry that heightened East-West tensions (Reynolds 215). This rivalry turned former allies into foes until the Soviet Union's collapse.

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These processes are also used with production quotas. When chocolate rations are cut, the past is altered to suggest they were always at that level. Winston Smith rewrites history when boot production falls short, making it seem as though production exceeded expectations. This system ensures Big Brother and the Party always appear correct and that living standards seem to improve under their rule. To perform this work without doubting the Party, employees and society adopt 'doublethink'—holding two contradictory beliefs simultaneously. For instance, believing that two and two make five if the Party claims so. This involves self-deception, often overriding intuition, to meet Party demands. Through doublethink, Party members can believe they are fighting a different enemy each day, while claiming they have fought the same since the war began. They reshape reality to align with Party politics, rather than adjusting Party policies to reality.

In 1984, failing to engage in doublethink results in a 'thought crime,' any thought deemed illegal by the Thought Police or the Party. The society lacks both freedom of speech and thought, as any expression of individuality is forbidden. Such crimes are extremely dangerous because, as Orwell notes, “you might dodge successfully for a while, even for years, but sooner or later they were bound to get you” (Orwell 19). The threat of thoughtcrime fosters profound isolation, driven by a fear of intimacy and affection towards anyone other than Big Brother. People live in a state of “locked loneliness,” where even a fleeting glance becomes a “memorable event” (Orwell 18). Thanks to advanced telescreen technology, such crimes are easily detected.

Society is so immersed in isolation that marriage becomes a test to show the Party there is no emotional connection between partners, since “the Party was trying to kill the sex instinct” (Orwell 66). Instead, couples must view marriage solely as a means of reproduction and advancing the Party's goals. They must commit to raising their children according to Party standards. While it may look like a stable family, this is deceptive. Children are encouraged to eavesdrop on their parents to confirm they adhere to Party rules, and if they do not, they eagerly report them for arrest. Winston felt sympathy for his neighbour, whose children seemed to terrify her, believing that “another year, two years, and they would be watching her night and day for symptoms of unorthodoxy” (Orwell 24). From birth, children are conditioned in schools or clubs to prioritise the Party above all else. Anyone who disobeys the Party on any point becomes its enemy—and consequently, their own enemy.

Under such leadership, it is unsurprising that technology is used solely for oppressive purposes. Its repressive function was so effective that it halted technological progress, as “scientific and technical progress depended on the empirical habit of thought, which could not survive in a strictly regimented society” (Orwell 189). Society is continuously monitored by telescreens and microphones around Oceania, suppressing any ideas of innovation. Besides surveillance, technology also manifests in society through the seemingly endless war. This war often persists not over genuine disputes among the three superstates but simply

for the sake of war itself. Consequently, the population is constantly overwhelmed by fear and anxiety. Bombings occur regularly throughout the novel, though predominantly in the Prole districts.

The war acts as a potent instrument for the Party. It constantly offers society a common enemy—though this enemy often shifts and ultimately becomes irrelevant—thereby uniting people against a perceived threat. This emphasis helps prevent internal conflicts, as everyone recognises a greater force working to suppress them. As a result, people are eager to support the Party, viewing it as their protector and provider. Since Oceania is shielded from the chaos of the front lines, its citizens easily believe they are winning the war. Uplifting success stories boost morale and strengthen trust in the Party. Whether these stories are real or fabricated, possibly created by a Ministry of Truth employee like Winston Smith, is irrelevant in the context of doublethink.

The enemy's face is only seen through propaganda and displays such as war-criminal parades. They likely do not truly know if their enemy differs from themselves. It is also possible that the Party is behind the bombings in Oceania. These bombs rarely target the city centre; instead, they hit poorer Prole districts where the Party's reach is weaker. Frequent bombings make the Proles so accustomed that Winston Smith, passing through, seems unaware of danger until a Prole warns him and helps him escape. This heightened alertness and the clear divide between the Proles and others like Winston Smith emphasise the specific threat they face.

Why does Oceania's enemy focus on attacking the impoverished Proles instead of the core activities of the Party? From a strategic standpoint, it is unlikely they would target the uneducated and poor masses. Winston Smith begins to suspect who might be orchestrating these attacks. It seems plausible, even likely, that the Party itself may be responsible for bombing its own citizens. These assaults serve as constant reminders of the ongoing war and its threats. The Proles face direct danger, while high-ranking Party members watch from a distance. Ultimately, society is convinced that it needs Big Brother's protection from this week's enemy, achieving the regime's goals. Due to the complexity of such operations, it is understandable that Winston Smith failed to overthrow the Party. Society has succumbed to "frightening techniques of mind control: from the ever-present posters of Big Brother with eyes that follow you, to the telescreen's invasive surveillance in the privacy of bedrooms" (Bernstein 26). The Party's control is so all-encompassing that it exploits individuals' deepest fears. Winston's inability to escape the rats in his nightmare—prepared by O'Brien—emphasises that loyalty to the Party is essential. Maintaining this loyalty relies heavily on their oppressive technological power.

### **Technology as an Instrument of Oppression in *Lord of the Flies***

William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* stands out among dystopian novels. It takes place not in a society under political oppression over time, but on an island where a group of

boys are stranded after their plane crashes. With no food, security, or adult supervision, they are isolated from societal norms. Although raised in English society, they abandon some practices when they conflict with survival instincts in the wild. The chaos stems from the technological warfare that has ravaged the world. On a plane evacuating from England, war has turned their homeland into a dangerous place, leading to the crash. They later see an atomic bomb explode in the distance, highlighting the ongoing atomic conflict elsewhere. Such weapons have shattered societal bonds, forcing children apart from their families for safety. These weapons target everyone indiscriminately, reflecting the destructive power of the bombs dropped in Japan.

The island's abandonment has resulted in limited access to modern technology. The boys must rely on primitive tools for progress and survival. Initially, they are hindered by their prior dependence on devices such as the radio, which they can no longer use. Their plans to escape depend on resources they lack on the island. It is only when Ralph, the leader, realises they need fire to move forward that they begin to strategise. However, they are unsure how to ignite a fire without matches. Once they believe the woodpile is ready, "Ralph and Jack looked at each other while society paused about them" (Golding 40). Unexpectedly, Piggy, the group's unpopular and whiny boy who wears spectacles, becomes crucial for survival. They manage to start a fire with his glasses, which become their most vital technology in their makeshift society, enabling them to access fire.

Since the boys depend entirely on the glasses for their fire, the glasses in turn control them. The fire allows them to cook hunted meat and serves as a signal for ships and planes. For their survival or rescue, the fire—and thus the glasses—are their only hope. This reliance on a single tool becomes oppressive, influencing their behaviour while they are on the island. Eventually, Ralph and Jack clash over leadership: Ralph wants to keep the fire burning as a signal, while Jack, having lost his civility, prefers hunting for food and believes their energy should go toward that rather than maintaining the fire. Their disagreement leads to a split, with Ralph and Jack establishing camps at opposite ends of the island, showing their inability to cooperate or compromise.

Jack quickly realises that, despite their disagreement and separation, he and his hunting group still need fire to use the meat they have gathered. They raid the other camp, taking fire and inviting others to join the hunters. However, when Jack and his group seek fire again, their approach is less courteous. They decide they must keep Piggy's spectacles permanently. Quietly, they approach Ralph's remaining followers and slip into Piggy's shelter. After Jack and his hunters retreat, Piggy reveals that they stole his spectacles, destroying Ralph's hope of maintaining a signal fire. This act shows how the spectacles, the group's most valued tool, symbolise authority and power over the group. The debate over their purpose—whether to signal passing ships or for cooking—reveals their conflicting

priorities. Unable to reach an agreement, their fragile society collapses, leaving the survivors deeply divided.

Ralph and Piggy remain more civilised, respecting the conch shell, which represents order. Meanwhile, Jack becomes increasingly barbaric. He has a strong instinct and “perceives almost intuitively the use of mask, dance, ritual, and propitiation to ward off-and yet encourage at the same time—the fear of the unknown” (Oldsey 94). Jack covers his face with paint, allowing him to blend into the island’s wilderness so he can hunt pigs without alarming them with his pink cheeks. With paint on his face, Jack “capered toward Bill, and the mask was a thing on its own, behind which Jack hid, free from shame and self-consciousness” (Golding 64)—his identity shifts, freeing him from his former choirboy self. Jack also develops a tool that Ralph does not use—spears for hunting pigs. The hunters make spears from sticks found in the woods, sharpen them, and practice throwing with accuracy. He and his hunters chant together, “Kill the beast! Cut his throat! Spill his blood!” inciting violence among the boys (Golding 152). Even Ralph joins the hunters at one point. Their chanting is so hypnotic that when Simon runs to them, revealing the identity of a dead man in the trees, they kill him without understanding.

Simon emerges as a significant character in the novel, not merely as another death but as someone who challenges both Ralph's civility and Jack's savagery, giving him a unique role. While Ralph learns politeness from the adult world, Simon represents authentic morality. Described as “a lonely visionary, the clear-sighted realist, logical, sensitive, and mature beyond his years” (Oldsey 95), he is calm, reserved, and has a stronger connection to nature than others. This bond, while different from Jack’s, is equally primal—both are drawn to the wilderness in ways that cannot be learned in their English lives. His kindness to even the youngest boys underscores his inherent goodness. When Jack's hunters erect a sow’s head on a spear as an offering to the feared beast, Simon finds it and names it the Lord of the Flies, a biblical name for Beelzebub, symbolising the devil. Nearby, Simon hallucinates, believing the head speaks to him, taunting him and implying that “the Beast was something you could hunt and kill” (Golding 143). The head whispers that the true beast is within each of them. This realisation leads Simon to understand that the figure hanging in the trees is not a beast but a dead man with a parachute. He tries to warn the others but is brutally killed. His death signifies the murder of the only morally upright and kind-hearted individual among them, as Jack, Ralph, and the others succumb to their fears, evil impulses, and hatred.

However, the savagery does not end with Simon’s death. Jack’s camp had either persuaded the other boys to join or eliminated them. Piggy was killed while trying to uphold the conch's importance, appealing to Jack and Ralph’s sense of reason by arguing that civility and order were better than the savagery they were descending into. He asks if it is nobler to “be a pack of painted Indians... or to be sensible like Ralph” (Golding 180). He further questions, “Which is better, law and rescue, or hunting and breaking things up?” (Golding

180). In doing so, Piggy demonstrates his rationality. However, his pleas proved futile. Roger, another boy, dislodges a boulder, shattering the conch that Piggy valued so deeply and knocking Piggy off the mountain, killing him.

Now alone and without companions, Ralph escapes into the jungle, forcing him into hiding. Jack ignites a large fire that engulfs the island, aiming to lure Ralph out so he can kill him. However, before Jack succeeds, Ralph encounters a naval officer on the beach. The boys initially entertain the officer, but soon realise the true chaos on the island. If the officer had not arrived at that moment, Ralph might have been murdered by the savage Jack. The boys have abandoned all civility—the conch, symbolising order and rules, has been destroyed. The kind Simon and the rational Piggy were both murdered. Their most advanced tools—spectacles, spears, and fire—have contributed to tearing the group apart.

### **Conclusion**

Across all the novels analysed, humans consistently sacrifice parts of themselves to the dominating force of technology, which they have created. Those in control of technology hold power over society. Technologies such as telescreens and mechanical hounds serve to monitor individuals and maintain relentless surveillance. Fear plays a key role, keeping society obedient and aligned with the technocratic elite. Technology oppresses human nature, fostering a society so frightened of its own secrets that people turn against each other. Anyone perceived as different or suspicious faces swift exclusion. In 1984, nothing is sacred—children spy on parents, and even spouses are permitted only to reproduce for the state. Genuine affection, often linked to family, is eliminated because showing it would challenge the suppression of individualism.

In *Lord of the Flies*, technology's role is mostly on an individual level, affecting society indirectly rather than through surveillance. Its presence and use drive the boys toward madness. On the island, they rely on glasses and hunting tools to survive. The glasses, their only means of starting fires, symbolise authority and provoke violence. Ultimately, the integration of technology into human life leads to dystopian societies like those in the novels. Possessing technology grants power, which is exercised without hesitation. In the story, the boys' initial unity around the fire quickly shifts to division: one group aims to keep the fire alive, while the other concentrates on hunting. Only Simon remains separate—independent and wary of the group's direction—representing individualism and introspection in stark contrast to the mob mentality of the others.

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