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Fictionalized and Real Propaganda Break Down in *1984*

War is Peace, Freedom is Slavery, Ignorance is Strength. These paradoxal statements are complete and utter truths whether in George Orwell's novel *1984*, or in the United States 2012. It is as much the truth as Big Brother is watching you, because whether in Oceania or America, your every move is observed and documented. These two artifacts have a two-fold audience, the pathetic, hopeless proles and outer-party members of *1984* and modern-day Americans like you and me. It does not matter that The Party controlled system is a fictional world, or that this is one of the most progressive and prosperous eras for America, These slogans are as much commonplaces for them as it is for us.

Though these poster would not exist except for having been featured in George Orwell's novel, the message conveyed by both is relevant today, perhaps more relevant than the mini-universe they exist in. The exigency of these pieces is that society is never free from its own imposed hierarchy, that an individual cannot be free from other's constraints; all must conform. The exigency is the same for both audiences, but only the intent for the exigency differs. When the proletariats see these posters, they are overjoyed. This is their mantra, their truth, and it is just a reminder at how well the Party takes care of them. Even outer-party members, classed above the proles, take these words and hold them close to their hearts, guiding them on how to behave. 'All must conform' was a benediction not an abhorrent. Now put these posters out on streets of

State College, New York City, or San Francisco and the intent is vastly different. It is not so much that the posters are taken out of context, but that the context itself is propped up and on display, demonstrating how ideologically repulsive it is to our way of thinking. No one wants to be under constant supervision, no one wants to be just like everyone else, and when these posters are deemed that they describe the current way of life, people revolt. To present these posters into our society, there is a subliminal message that says "Do Not Let This Happen". The sad truth behind these posters, though, is that we are well on our way to letting it. When we are the audience, these posters are a cry for help; in *1984*, they are what keep the populace going.

Earlier it was mentioned that to change the place was to change the intent, but these posters also need to be contextualized through time. *1984* is a novel, fact, but the characters are real in so much there is actual terror in reading about their way of life. They become real when meaning is attached to them, our own emotions turn them 3-d, so for the sake of the rhetorical breakdown, Oceania and its inhabitants are real. So first, it needs to be explained who they are and how they exist. The year is 1984 and it is just a normal existence in Oceania, one of the three super-countries, with the Party members commanding all and the proletariat under that command. The ideology, the political affiliation, the very essence of the community is IngSoc, English Socialism. Big Brother is president, dictator, king, god; he is an all-encompassing, all-knowing figure that is loved and worshipped by the people of Oceania.

He is a lie though. The Party controls every thought and action in the people and makes them believe what they are told, it is the power of double-think: "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.'" (George Orwell-ch.3) So the time and place in fact don't matter for

the proles, because they can be told it is no longer Oceania, it is no longer the 20th century, and they will accept it as truth. Then again the next day, when it is switched back. Ignorance is Strength because the proles are entirely dependent on the Party, and with them counting in the millions, The Party is all powerful. The time and place is subjective, the only thing that is unchangeable is the Party and Big Brother, and the only written words that cannot be altered are the Party slogans. These posters are the only constants for oceanians, their unalterable maxims, and it is with these that they are controlled.

Once again, with us as the audience, the view point wildly veers into a diametric opposite. Time and place are of upmost importance when Americans of 2012 are the targeted addressees. *1984* is nothing more than a book, a thriller written decades ago that some have read and understood its message, but most have not. If these posters were plastered over big-name cities, few would catch the meaning trying to be imparted but the majority would be clueless as to why this ‘anti-democracy’ propaganda was being employed. “Without identification there is no persuasion” (Hawhee) is a constraint and a unifier in this rhetorical situation. For those who have read the book and know of the dystopian society Orwell feared for the future, seeing these posters in day-to-day life would be a revelation. It would be an extrinsic proof because it is easy to draw parallels from his society to ours without prompting. Just seeing the words ‘Big Brother is Watching You’ brings to mind all the ways your actions are recorded and filed away. Everyone was video-taped and observed in *1984*, what is the difference from that to having Google remember your searches, your professors accessing how many times you viewed your syllabus, spam mail from years ago purchases finding their way to your door, and satellite GPS tracking your phones and therefore you? For those who have understood Orwell’s warning that is *1984*, “War is Peace, Freedom is Slavery, Ignorance is Strength” is a call to action. Yet for

those who have never read the novel, never noticed how much of their personal data is stored in the cloud, these posters make no sense.

War is peace? Freedom is slavery? Ignorance is strength? These oxymoronic statements do not make sense to the average individual. Someone, a rhetor, would have to reach past this constraint and explain why these phrases are even relevant to this day and age. For example, is it not true that a 10-year long war was just raged with our troops for the thought of someone else's freedom? Was this not war in peacetime, because it did not affect us more than them, our benefits do not outweigh theirs; it was called a senseless war from nearly the beginning, yet we continued. Also, we are a free country, a Democracy, but are we not more fettered now than thirty years ago? More and more we are slaves to consumerism, technology, and our ideologies. "It is the mark of an educated mind to entertain a thought without accepting it" (Aristotle) is what I like to imagine it used to be, friendly intellectual discourse, but now we are so involved with our own opinions that we do not merit anyone else's, we do not even associate with others who disagree. We are also slaves to social dogma, rules are upheld and conventions followed through. There is even a regression of equality with the scales harkening back to the days of pre-suffragists, superficial images and surface qualities seem to throw substance under the male-driven bus. Freedom is slavery does not seem so far-fetched anymore.

Though this closed mindedness is disconcerting, I believe the depth to which consumerism and technology rules our lives is nearly to the point of Orwell's, that is to say, frightening. "Don't you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought?... The whole climate of thought will be different...there will be no thought... Orthodoxy means not thinking-not needing to think. Orthodoxy is unconsciousness." (Orwell ch.5) This is the true horror of *1984*, that there is no escape from having no free-will, and that Ignorance is strength is

true because no one knows any better. The (hypothetical) individual who knows little of the context behind the posters who is listening to the (exampled) rhetor could point out for the last line, “Ha, try and make me believe that when I know this is the most educated time in American history, the college graduation rate is the highest ever.” True, but can it be denied that the will to learn is declining; the English language itself is degenerating. I.e. definitions of the word free “a: having the legal and political rights of a citizen...d: enjoying personal freedom, not subject to the control or domination of another” (Webster dictionary), then “Only exist in the sense of ‘the dog is *free* of lice’”. The concept of political freedom has been replaced by the word *crimethink*.” (News-speak dictionary), and “a vague word used to describe any sort of liberty. ‘the dog is *free* of lice’ and ‘I am *free* to do whatever the hell I please.” (Urban dictionary) Notice how the colloquial definition has the exact same example as the one from *1984*? War is peace, freedom is slavery, ignorance is strength, and Big Brother is watching you; even today they seem closer to the truth than was ever thought or ever should have been allowed.

The stylized approach and delivery speak volumes unto themselves as well. In *1984*, the posters are huge, everywhere, and well-maintained. Big Brother is described as “the face of a man of about forty-five, with a heavy black moustache and ruggedly handsome features.” (George Orwell ch.1) To the proles, he would be viewed as a fatherly figure, someone to look up to. To us, it has been said that Orwell’s inspiration of Big Brother was a mixture of Lord Kitchener and Josef Stalin; it seems a mingling of right and wrong. For oceanians, the proofs would have been all interconnected and it did not matter which strand was dissected, the meaning was all the same. The *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos* proofs were that Big Brother loves you, you love Big Brother; let us all do what Big Brother wants and be happy for it. A logical *logos* is practically inconceivable because there is no logic like you and I know in Oceania, their logic is

based on lies that are truths-doublethink. The *ethos* of Big Brother cannot be questioned, would not want to have questioned because that would be considered crimethink, and that is room 101 certifiable. The *pathos* proof behind Big Brother is watching you is not even considered, it is instilled upon birth and to even acknowledge it is unorthodox, it is not a proof if it just *is*.

Honestly, when I think of it as a reflection of modern times, it strikes me as a pervertification of the Uncle Sam poster 'I Want You'. The *logos* to both are that the government has a say in your life, a bigger say than thought possible. The *ethos* to the Party slogan poster is you as an individual has character, you have enough moral fiber to say that this poster is wrong, we are wrong if what it says is true and we should fight back at the injustice. *Pathos* ties in with *ethos* because the poster is an appeal to you and me, an appeal to change the future while we still can. We are not at *1984* proportions yet, but we are alarmingly close. It is an appeal to save us, I think, to save us from ourselves.

George Orwell created a world he feared for the future in 1949, his vision of 1984 is startlingly similar to 2012, and that needs to be changed. This is the rhetorical message. The error of our ways must be seen to help provide for a better future, or the future will be like the fictionalized past of *1984*. In the future, if these problems have not been addressed, we might not even know that there ever was a problem because we will be living in the same ignorance of the proles. "I would argue that rhetoric is itself the art of synthesizing contradictory social reality" (James Arnt Aune), let us hope that the reality of IngSoc rhetoric does not become the very real rhetoric of our reality.

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