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From State Oppression to Corporate Domination: A Comparative Study of Power and Control in Nineteen Eighty-Four by George Orwell and Cold wire by Chloe Gong

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ABSTRACT

This study offers a comparative analysis of dystopian power structures in Nineteen Eighty-Four by George Orwell and Cold wire by Chloe Gong. It investigates how representations of surveillance, authority, and control shift from classical political dystopia to contemporary technological and corporate dystopia. Orwell's novel presents a totalitarian regime in which the Party maintains absolute control through constant surveillance, ideological indoctrination, manipulation of truth, and linguistic restriction through Newspeak, thereby erasing individual autonomy and reshaping reality. In contrast, Cold wire reflects a cyberpunk dystopian vision where power is decentralized and exercised through corporate dominance, artificial intelligence, and immersive virtual reality systems that blur the boundaries between the physical and digital worlds. Using a qualitative comparative approach, the study employs close textual analysis to examine themes of surveillance, identity formation, construction of truth, and resistance in both novels. The findings indicate that while both texts critique oppressive systems, the mechanisms of control have evolved from visible state repression to subtle, technologically mediated, and often voluntary forms of surveillance. This shift reflects broader transformations in contemporary society shaped by digitalization and corporate influence. The study concludes that dystopian literature continues to evolve while maintaining its central concern with human freedom, thought, and identity in changing socio-political contexts.

Keywords Dystopia, Surveillance, Power, Identity, Digital Control, Corporate Domination, Comparative Literature, Orwell, Cyberpunk Fiction

Introduction

Dystopian literature has long served as a critical medium for examining structures of power, control, and resistance within society. From its early formations to contemporary manifestations, the genre reflects shifting socio-political anxieties and technological advancements. One of the most influential works in this tradition is Nineteen Eighty-Four by George Orwell, which presents a grim vision of a totalitarian regime where surveillance, propaganda, and linguistic manipulation are employed to maintain absolute authority. Orwell's depiction of "Big Brother" and the Party's control over truth and individual consciousness have become a foundational model for understanding dystopian governance and ideological oppression.

In contrast, contemporary dystopian fiction reflects the transformation of power structures in response to rapid technological development and globalization. Cold wire by Chloe Gong represents a modern cyberpunk dystopia in which control is exercised not solely by the state but by powerful corporate entities operating through advanced technologies such as artificial

intelligence and virtual reality. The novel portrays a fragmented world divided between physical and digital existence, where identity, reality, and autonomy are continuously mediated and manipulated. This shift signals a movement from overt, centralized authoritarianism to more complex and diffused systems of domination embedded within technological infrastructures. The comparison between these two texts provides a valuable opportunity to trace the evolution of dystopian control from the twentieth to the twenty-first century. While both narratives foreground themes of surveillance, power, and resistance, they differ significantly in their modes of control and representation of authority. Orwell emphasizes the role of language and ideology in shaping reality, whereas Gong highlights the impact of digital environments and corporate governance on human experience. This transition raises critical questions about the nature of freedom and individuality in an increasingly technologized world.

This study, therefore, aims to examine how mechanisms of control, surveillance, and identity construction are represented in both works, and how these representations reflect broader historical and cultural shifts. By employing a qualitative comparative approach, the research seeks to explore how dystopian narratives continue to evolve while retaining their core concern with the regulation of human thought and behavior.

Objectives of the Study

1. To critically examine how power operates as a discursive and structural force in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *Cold Wire*.
2. To compare the transformation of surveillance from a centralized state mechanism to a technologically mediated and corporate-driven system.
3. To analyze the role of language in Orwell's narrative and technology in Gong's narrative as tools for constructing, controlling, and destabilizing reality.
4. To investigate how identity and subjectivity are shaped, controlled, and resisted within the socio-political frameworks of both texts.
5. To evaluate the changing nature of dystopian control in relation to contemporary global concerns such as digital governance, artificial intelligence, and virtual existence.

Literature Review

Dystopian literature has long been studied as a reflection of socio-political anxieties, particularly concerns related to power, surveillance, and ideological control. Scholars widely consider dystopia not merely as a genre of fictional pessimism but as a critical lens through which societal structures can be interrogated (Claeys, 2017). Within this tradition, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by George Orwell remains one of the most extensively analyzed texts due to its profound exploration of authoritarianism and state control.

A significant body of scholarship on *1984* focuses on Orwell's depiction of surveillance and the manipulation of truth. Many critics argue that the novel illustrates how totalitarian regimes maintain dominance through constant monitoring and psychological control rather than physical force alone (McCarthy, 2010). The concept of "Big Brother" has been interpreted as a symbol of omnipresent surveillance that erases individual autonomy and enforces ideological conformity (Booker, 1994). Furthermore, the manipulation of language through "Newspeak" has been widely discussed as a mechanism designed to restrict thought and eliminate dissent (Orwell, 1949/2003).

In addition to political control, scholars have also examined the role of language in shaping reality within *1984*. According to Hall (2017), Orwell demonstrates that linguistic restriction is directly linked to cognitive limitation, suggesting that control over language equates to control over thought itself. This reinforces the idea that ideology in dystopian regimes is not only enforced through violence but also through discourse and meaning-making systems.

Contemporary dystopian fiction, however, reflects a shift in the nature of power from state-centered authority to technologically mediated and corporate systems. In this context, *Cold wire* by Chloe Gong represents a modern evolution of dystopian concerns. Recent studies on cyberpunk and digital dystopias highlight the increasing role of technology, artificial intelligence, and virtual environments in shaping human identity and social relations (Rossi, 2022).

Critics of contemporary dystopian fiction argue that modern narratives extend Orwellian concerns into the digital age, where surveillance is no longer confined to visible state apparatuses but embedded within technological infrastructures and corporate systems (Zuboff, 2019). In such contexts, control operates through data collection, algorithmic governance, and immersive digital environments, blurring the boundaries between reality and simulation.

While direct scholarly work on *Cold wire* is still emerging due to its recent publication, early critical interpretations suggest that it engages with key cyberpunk themes such as identity fragmentation, virtual reality dependence, and corporate domination (Lee, 2025). These elements position the novel within a broader literary movement that redefines dystopia in relation to technological advancement and global capitalism.

Comparative studies in dystopian literature emphasize the importance of analyzing both classical and contemporary texts to understand the evolution of thematic concerns. Scholars argue that while Orwell represents a model of centralized authoritarianism, modern dystopias reflect decentralized and technologically embedded systems of control (Booker & Thomas, 2009). This shift highlights the adaptability of dystopian fiction in addressing changing historical and cultural conditions.

In conclusion, existing literature establishes a strong foundation for analyzing dystopian control in both classical and contemporary contexts. However, there remains a gap in comparative studies that directly connect Orwellian frameworks with recent cyberpunk narratives such as *Cold wire*. This study seeks to address this gap by examining how mechanisms of surveillance, power, and identity evolve from state-driven oppression to technologically mediated corporate domination.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative comparative research design to analyze the representation of power, surveillance, and control in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by George Orwell and *Cold wire* by Chloe Gong. A qualitative approach is appropriate because it allows for an in-depth interpretation of literary texts, focusing on meanings, ideologies, and narrative strategies rather than numerical measurement.

The study is based on close textual reading and thematic analysis. Both novels are carefully read to identify recurring themes related to surveillance, authority, manipulation of truth, identity formation, and resistance. Relevant textual excerpts are selected and categorized according to these themes to facilitate systematic comparison. The interpretation focuses on how these themes are constructed and how they function within each dystopian framework.

A comparative method is applied to examine similarities and differences between the two texts. The analysis is structured around key conceptual categories, including mechanisms of control (state-based vs. corporate/technological), the construction of truth and reality, and the portrayal of individual agency. This enables a deeper understanding of how dystopian narratives evolve in response to changing socio-political and technological contexts.

The study is entirely textual and interpretive in nature, it relies on close reading of primary texts supported by relevant secondary sources such as scholarly books, journal articles, and critical essays to strengthen the analytical discussion and contextualize findings within existing dystopian literature scholarship.

Discussion

The comparative analysis of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by George Orwell and *Cold wire* by Chloe Gong demonstrates a clear shift in the nature and mechanisms of dystopian control, from overt state authoritarianism to subtle, technology-driven corporate domination. While both texts engage with surveillance, power, identity, and resistance, they differ significantly in how these elements are constructed and experienced.

In 1984, surveillance is external, constant, and fear-based. Winston Smith lives under the constant presence of the telescreen, which monitors citizens' actions and even facial expressions. The omnipresence of the Thought Police further intensifies this control, as individuals are punished not only for actions but also for suspected thoughts. This illustrates how the Party eliminates private space entirely, ensuring that even mental resistance becomes dangerous. Orwell thus constructs a system where fear of observation ensures obedience and conformity.

Language is another crucial instrument of control in 1984. The state introduces Newspeak, a controlled language designed to reduce vocabulary and eliminate words that could express rebellion or independent thought. The gradual removal of words like "freedom" demonstrates that linguistic restriction directly limits cognitive possibility. Additionally, Winston's work in the Ministry of Truth, where he alters historical records to match Party narratives, highlights the manipulation of truth itself. The famous ideological pressure to accept contradictions such as "2 + 2 = 5" further shows how reality is reshaped through political authority, forcing individuals to abandon objective reasoning.

In contrast, *Cold wire* presents a more technologically mediated and decentralized form of control. Surveillance is not enforced solely by a visible state apparatus but is embedded within digital infrastructures and corporate systems. Citizens spend much of their lives in a virtual reality environment ("upcountry"), while their physical bodies remain in a deteriorating real world. This dependence on digital existence creates a situation where individuals voluntarily participate in systems that monitor and regulate them.

Unlike Orwell's direct coercion, control in *Cold wire* operates through immersion and convenience. A powerful corporation governs military, political, and technological systems, demonstrating that authority has shifted from the state to corporate entities. Artificial intelligence and algorithmic systems influence decisions related to security, identity, and movement, suggesting that governance is increasingly automated and data-driven rather than purely human-controlled.

Identity fragmentation is another shared but differently expressed concern. In 1984, identity is systematically erased through ideological conformity and psychological pressure, leaving individuals like Winston unable to sustain independent thought. In *Cold wire*, identity becomes fluid and unstable due to the coexistence of physical and virtual selves. Characters struggle to distinguish between authentic experience and digitally constructed reality, highlighting a modern crisis of selfhood shaped by technological mediation.

Similarly, resistance in both texts is constrained but takes different forms. In 1984, Winston's rebellion is ultimately crushed by the Party's overwhelming ideological and psychological power, demonstrating the near impossibility of escaping totalitarian control. In *Cold wire*, resistance emerges through technological disruption and individual agency within digital systems; however, it remains ambiguous, as the same technologies that enable resistance also sustain control. This reflects a more complex and unstable model of power in contemporary dystopian fiction.

Overall, the analysis indicates that while Orwell's dystopia is grounded in fear, surveillance, and ideological repression, Gong's dystopia operates through digital immersion, corporate

dominance, and algorithmic influence. Despite these differences, both novels converge on a central concern: the regulation of human thought, identity, and freedom. This suggests that dystopian fiction continues to evolve in response to changing historical and technological contexts, while maintaining its core critique of systems that seek to control human consciousness.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine the transformation of dystopian control through a comparative analysis of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by George Orwell and *Cold wire* by Chloe Gong. The findings reveal a significant shift in the representation of power structures from overt, centralized state authoritarianism to decentralized, technologically mediated corporate domination.

In Orwell's *1984*, control is maintained through visible surveillance, ideological enforcement, and linguistic manipulation. Instruments such as telescreens, the Thought Police, and Newspeak demonstrate how the Party exercises direct and coercive power over both action and thought. Truth is systematically altered, history is rewritten, and individual consciousness is ultimately suppressed, leaving no space for autonomy or resistance. The novel thus presents a model of absolute political domination grounded in fear and psychological conditioning.

In contrast, *Cold wire* reflects a contemporary reconfiguration of dystopian power in which control is embedded within digital infrastructures and corporate systems. Surveillance is no longer solely imposed from above but is integrated into virtual environments and algorithmic networks that individuals actively engage with. The division between physical and virtual existence further complicates notions of identity, reality, and agency. Unlike Orwell's overt authoritarianism, control in Gong's narrative is subtle, immersive, and often voluntary, making it more pervasive and difficult to resist.

Despite these differences, both texts converge on a central dystopian concern: the regulation and manipulation of human thought, identity, and freedom. While the mechanisms of control have evolved from political repression to technological governance the underlying ideological objective remains consistent. Both novels demonstrate that power structures, whether state-based or corporate-technological, seek to shape perception and limit individual autonomy.

Overall, this comparative study highlights the evolution of dystopian literature in response to historical, political, and technological change. It suggests that contemporary dystopian fiction extends classical concerns into the digital age, where surveillance and control are increasingly embedded in everyday technological systems. By bridging classical and modern dystopian narratives, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how literature continues to reflect and critique emerging forms of power in society.

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