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Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four and the Case Studies of Stalin and
Ceaurescu

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- I. The Orwellian Perspective on Power
 - Language Abuse (Separation of Thought and Word)
- II. Stalin's complex apparatus of mind control
- III. Personal experience under the Ceaurescu's dictatorship

I

Orwell could detect the presence of power and the desire for it in minimal amounts and under camouflages that are concealed from most people.

In the last stage of his career he has preoccupied by the evils of totalitarian power.

1984 pictures life thirty years hence under Ingsoc (English Socialism), a unit of Oceania, one of the three super-states in a permanent war for world hegemony. In the movie (1949) as well as in the book (1948), the piling up of detail upon detail of a shuddering, sickening, gripping spectacle of a human society is depicted stripped of the last shreds of community.

Nineteen Eighty-Four is the story of Winston Smith, a member of the outer Party, and his downfall which starts at the moment of

first doubt crossed his mind. He works in Minitrue, the Ministry of Truth; he corrects past record when the present fails to bear out party predictions, deletes the names of men who have been “vaporized” and writes articles in ‘Newspeak, which is the official language of Oceania.

Smith tasks are central to the state, for the party slogan is: ‘Who controls the past controls the future, and who controls the present, controls the past.’

Ingsoc’s Newspeak is designed to express the life of Oceania in the most fitting way to make all other modes of thought impossible. It contains words such as *artsem* (*artificial insemination*), *Minitrue* (Ministry of Truth) and *Minipax* (*the ministry of peace*) .

The Newspeak contains subtle concepts like *crime-stop* (halting one’s expression just before it becomes dangerous) as well as the basic concept: *doublethink* (*the ability to accept two contradictory expressions at the same time as true*)

Members of the Inner Party invent ‘doublethink’ in order to manipulate the larger group, in the Outer Party, who are not always capable to understand such nuances and rarely master the full technique. The *proles* , eighty-five percent of the population, are incapable of any real thought.

All groups are capable of hate, which is constantly whipped up either by spectacle of mass hangings in the public square or by the image of Emmanuel Goldstein, the betrayer of the revolution. The fear created by the threats of Goldstein is overcome only by Big Brother, whose kindly black-mustachioed face appears on the screens to efface the threatening Goldstein.

Winston's eyes are opened to the techniques of manipulation and the party's purpose by O'Brien, a member of the Inner Party who gives him a book which reveals the secret history of the party.

In the end Winston is betrayed by O'Brien, who in reality is one of the heads of *Thoughtpol*. In a chapter unmatched in recent literature for the unrelenting description of inquisition and torture, Winston betrays Julia and himself. He not only confesses but finally comes to love the party and Big Brother.

The week Orwell's novel was published, the Sunday Times reported the call for a rival to *newspeak*: "model English," a new universal language 'with sentences having one word order and no idioms, with words having one meaning, one pronunciation, one spelling, one form and with letters having one sound and one shape.' This idea for this "model English" was invented by a University of Washington Sociologist, who saw the need for a law-abiding language.

The Orwellian Newspeak lexicographers delete terms from the dictionary so that each word would have only one meaning, and that meaning would be compatible with the party line. Their goal is to make impossible any thought in conflict with the line.

The secret of the inner party is that it has mastered the usage of pure power.

The economy of the state is always a war economy. The head of the government is Big Brother, he of the ubiquitous face, whose all seeing eye follows one wherever there is light. The strong arm of power is the Thought Police; the greatest sin against the state, *Crime think*.

Once the secret of pure power is learned, Orwell suggests, the human being becomes completely malleable.

O'Brien is able easily to dispose of Winston's arguments against Big Brotherism by asserting that power is the reality of life. The arrests, the tortures, the executions, he says, will never cease. The heresies of Goldstein will live for ever, because they are necessary to the Party. The Party is immortal, and it lives on the endless intoxication of power.

In the end, Winston willingly inclines to obey O'Brien, and in the point of no return (becomes malleable). The corrosion of the will through which human freedom is worn away is well illustrated through the telescreen (the ubiquitous eye), which receives and transmits simultaneously, is fitted into every room of every member of the Party. The telescreen can be dimmed but not turned off, so that there is no way of telling when the Thought Police have plugged in on any individual wire.

Is this our world-to be? Is this Socialism? Or is the creation of a central intelligence agency in any country of the world, with the power to plant agents in every voluntary association in the country (including trade/labor unions) or in people's houses (by recruitment of informers)? The imaginary country Oceania is a metaphor for the 'enemy of the People' which justifies any dictatorial/arbitrary action of the government. It is the 'enemy' that didn't even exist but was invented to justify decision making control of minds and actions of the party.

One of Orwell's best strokes is his analysis of 'double-think', drilled into the party members, which consists of the willingness to

assert that black is white when the Party demands it, and even to believe that black is white, while at the same time knowing very well that nothing of the sort can be true. Thought marked by the acceptance of gross contradictions and falsehood, especially when used as a technique of self-indoctrination: “*Doublethink... is a vast system of mental cheating*”, “ says Orwell.

Although it might seem improbable that 1984 could exist in the 1980s, let me draw upon my own experience to illustrate that the impossible wording and ‘doublethinking’ of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was (and often still is) present in every sector of the ex Soviet and Romanian society. Nor is it a technique available exclusively to Soviet or Romanian citizens only.

II. Stalin and The Totalitarian Linguistics

Let me start with Stalinist Russia where real Newspeak was generated and evolving and has been successfully replicated in the Eastern European countries, those ‘behind the Iron Curtain’ drawn by Stalin after W.W.II.

Stalin (originally Joseph V. Dzhugashvili, the successor of Lenin) succeeded in creating during his rule from 1922 to 1953 a myth making system that rivals that of Big Brother’s power. Stalin’s system of mind control was so effective that millions of Russians were staged and paraded in front of him eulogizing him as being godlike – and all the nation trembled at his feet.

Since the time of Nero, the Roman king who liked spectacles which involve masses of people acting as one, social uniformity , all

dictators were fond of parades. Stalin's propaganda chief Andrei Jidanov knew and brought to perfection the organization of the parades.

Stalin, or the paterfamilias, was praised through the press, radio, cinema, music and the performing arts. Stalin was experimenting in mind control by designing an Orwellian nation of idol worshipers, who were cut off from outside influence, told and told again that Stalin was good, the source and provider of all things and the one who loves them.

Maxim Gorki, the Head of the union of the writers, was called upon to perfect Stalin's Language machine. In the documentary film "Monster: Portrait of Stalin in Flesh and Blood" Maxim Gorki is shown asking the writers not to write poorly, because writing "poorly is not to praise Stalin and his achievements."

One of Stalin's theatrical "achievements" was at the White Sea Baltic Canal, where one of his notorious labor camps was located and where "performers" (prisoners on forced labor) were carefully orchestrated in staging penitent work as happy labor to influence the thinking of visiting writers. Thus Gorki could exclaim: "Labor sets the prisoner free." One can recognize here the Orwellian language:

"FREEDOM IS SLAVERY"

"IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH"

"WAR IS PEACE"

These were three slogans of the party in "1984".

After viewing and believing this pathetic charade (at the White Sea Baltic Canal), the visiting writers glorified the righteousness and decency of the Soviet justice system. Perhaps they were influenced

by the fear as they had witnessed the fate that would otherwise be them. Poets and writers who resisted, opposed or doubted Stalin's "perfection" were sent to rot in the gulags (labor camps in Ljubianka and Siberia). Therefore every word written or uttered in public was pure orthodoxy.

Stalin's mind control apparatus also turned westward. Famous writers like G. B. Shaw, H. D. Wells, A. Gide, R. Roland arrived and received a heroes welcome to Russia. They were shown the grandiose facade of communism and not its shabby underside.

Stalin was a masterful manipulator of his image as he set out to perform all the spectacles and by extension we might think that he was the incarnation of Big Brother even to the mustaches.

III. My personal experience or the Romanian version of 1984

Well before the composition of Nineteen forty-eight, however, totalitarian countries had produced what were, in effect, workable versions of Newspeak. The totalitarian linguistics can often do (up to a point) by non-violent means what the instruments of the torture chamber do by violent ones. Thus, while wisdom is often hidden in the meaning of the words, so is error.

Just over Russia's border, In Romania, under the Ceausescu dictatorship (1965-1989), the language of the state became what we secretly called a "wooden languag," a meaningless speech deliberately ambiguous and evasive so as to confuse the masses.

Romania was for years the private estate of the Ceausescu family (30 members in the government), much as Trujillo's former

Dominican Republic and the Somoza's old Nicaragua were ruled by nepotism.

In the Romanian variation of state terror, the nation could progress only under socialism; the party represents not the international working class but the nation. Party membership requires total devotion and loyalty to the leadership. The Communist Party hierarchy standing over the state and society, became a mass organization subordinate to the state. Party and state functions became much more extensively merged than in the Soviet Union. Romanians had to swear loyalty to both state and party.

The strongest fusion was at the top. Ceausescu was at once General Secretary of the Party, President of state, President of the State Council and Chairman of the National Defense Council on Socioeconomic Development. His personality cult was the strongest in the communist world exceeded only by that of Kim Il Song in North Korea.

To understand what Ceausescu meant for the Romanians, however, I have to concede his merit at the early stages of leadership. Ceausescu won popular support when he refused to take Romania into the Soviet run COMECON (Council for Economic Assistance), claiming that becoming subservant to COMECON was inadmissible for a Communist state, offensive to the pride as well as injurious to the Romanian economy. Ceausescu also asserted a limited independence in defense and foreign policy. He declined to let Romania participate in joint military maneuvers on Romanian soil and restricted military integration into Soviet military activity.

The critical rise to power for came in 1968, when he refused to join in the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. Ceausescu, who had succeeded the deceased Gheorghiu-Dej in 1965, proclaimed that Romania would forcibly resist invasion: the Communist Party thereby became truly popular and the cult of the personality of Ceausescu was born.

Nevertheless nationalism and authoritarianism came together in forced industrialization in the Stalinist manner; Ceausescu's brand of socialism consisted in the devotion of the maximum percentage of the national product to investment. There had been no retreat from central planning in industry or agriculture.

A strong myth-building machine was set in function by the designers of public celebrations. Parades became ritualistic eulogies of the Communist Party and songs and poems were all dedicated to "the brave, beloved 'conducator' Nicolae. As center of a small elite of loyalists who run the country, his image was everywhere, and the banners proclaimed not only, or not primarily the Communist Party but the name of Ceausescu. The servile writers and poets who supported Nicolae, were then sent on trips abroad and were guaranteed momentary immunity.

The infamous Romanian 'Securitate' performed as the 'Thoughtpol': this 'eminence-grise' was ever-present and patrolled almost every street. Informers told the 'Securitate' who was listening to the radio 'Free Europe' and what professors were teaching in school. The irony of the term like 'Securitate' or Security is intuitively relevant to our lives. By the end of the regime computer-kept records could be revised with an ease that Winston Smith would

not have been able to imagine. Members of the Security were invested with the cutting edge of technology' and were arbitrarily arresting anyone who was suspicious or had been "reported". Writers, potential leaders or defectors were brutally tortured, imprisoned, or mysteriously "vaporized". Much of the technology of the fictional 1984 was in all Nicolae Ceausescu's years in power.

As in 1984 Ceausescu ordered that TV monitors should be placed on each corner of major streets in central Bucharest so that the military could intervene in an effective and timely way to prevent any popular uprising. Groups of more than 4 people were prohibited by law, unless under government control. Complete isolation from exterior influence was imposed as a measure of 'protection' of the Romanian nation from the imperialistic powers.

TV was limited for 25 years to a sole national channel, reported with spurious accuracy false statistics, systematically distorting the people's ability to understand the miscontrolled economy. Nicolae and his wife Elena were shown as a happy presidential daily visiting towns, villages, and fields with the peasants. They were shown reviewing the 'socialist achievements' in the factories, holding kids in their arms and expounding mealy-mouthed slogans about government benevolence and personal sacrifice made by the officials the pain they underwent for the Romanian people. Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu were so megalomaniac that painters, carpet wavers and sculptors were ordered to imprint the Ceausescu's images everywhere. Elena C's wardrobe contained as many dresses as that of Evita Peron. The couple had a palace in every city/resort of the country.

In their daily speeches the Ceausescu's were more Romanian than all Romanians, all science was 'Romanian', gymnastics and soccer were best Romanian, as were bread, butter and salt, everything good was Romanian. Ceausescu Nicolae became the supreme leader - who was told his people what to eat (food was rationed), what to wear (depending on the weather,) and how many children a family should have (abortion being punished with imprisonment).

The Palace of the People, built with enormous sacrifices by Ceausescu's order and in his 'honor' is still the second enormous building in Europe after Versailles.

After 1975 all foreign journals and magazines were banned from entering the country. Among the weekly laws promulgated by Ceausescu, one prohibited answering foreigners' questions. Foreign visiting relatives had to stay only in controlled hotels. This law was an absolute aberration for philology students or professors as no communication was possible in other languages than Romanian.

The academic milieu and curricula was infested with Marxist ideology. The following terminology dominated all life: "the new man", "revolutionary", "socialist competition", "multilaterally developed society". People addressed each other as 'comrades'. The continuing influence of socialism on the language of intellectuals and scholars was evident also in the textbooks, in every discipline. To Marx especially we owed the substitution of the term "society" for the "state." This circumlocution suggested that the actions of individuals can be regulated by some gentler and kinder method of direction than coercion. As a result, the Communist system rooted out civil society.

Having antagonized some professors which were using this “wooden language” of communism, I came under the scrutiny of the “Securitate and even dared to laugh in the face of a Security officer who was assigned to read the mound of absurd decrees newly promulgated by the government. My tenure at the University was henceforth compromised, and I resolved to flee Romania, an illegal act in itself.

Caught at the border with ex Yugoslavia, I was incarcerated for one year (1986-1987). Ironically there was no social stigma to being jailed because the whole country was considered “The Jail.”

After Ceausescu was toppled in a coup by a clan of his acolytes during a parallel popular revolution in 1989, I was finally allowed to complete my degree in philology at the University of Cluj-Napoca.

The infernolike atmosphere of the 1984 story is cunningly created and it calls to my mind images of urban industrialized cities tailored after Ceausescu’s mind in the 1980s.

Both my personal experience and the ending of Orwell’s novel are meant to be a warning against the extremes to which totalitarian spirit can carry us, so that we will understand dangers involved wherever power moves under the guise of order and rationality.

The Hierarchy of the Orwellian Society in 1984

