

Reading George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* from an Althusserian Perspective

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Abstract

The pursuit for individual freedom and happiness has always been a central theme in humanity's progression, as evidenced by historical revolutions staged against the people's oppressors, which is, more often than not, those who are in power. However, as Jean-Jacques Rousseau mentioned in *The Social Contract*, "man is born free and everywhere he is in chains," which indicates that the thriving of a society consists of individuals giving up part of their freedom to conform to state values as to create a harmonious society. In other words, humanity's social constructs contribute to the loss of individual freedom in the name of creating a coordinated society, and in order to maintain peace, those in power will often abuse both physical and psychological violence as a means to control the masses by actively suppressing disobedient or rebellious actions and thoughts that are intrusive to the rigid totalitarian regime of the State, thereby ensuring the uniformity of ideas and behaviors in its citizenry.

Louis Althusser's "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)" introduces the Repressive and Ideological State Apparatuses, where these apparatuses encapsulate many of the central ideas of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, for instance, the novel depicts a "utopian" society through the Party's exercising of physical violence and psychological brainwashing to exert extreme control over every aspect of the state, including the government, the media, and its population etc. by using methods such as panoptical and surreptitious surveillance, the limitation of language and state sanctioned violence towards individuals who do not share the Party's ideas. This paper therefore focuses on how the Ideological State Apparatus and Repressive State Apparatus works in tandem to maintain the Party's centralized power and result in the facilitating of collective identity while eradicating freedom and individuality in the dystopian totalitarian society of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

Reflection

As a student who is privileged enough to be enrolled in a truly wonderful department in an educational institution that promotes values and ideas that inspires progression and critical thinking, words cannot express how grateful I am for the opportunity to be taught by supportive and encouraging professors. I would also like to express my profound gratitude to my supervisor Professor Grant Hamilton, who has supported me wholeheartedly throughout the entirety of my capstone project. Thank you for your patience, motivation, encouragement and enthusiasm towards my research and writing of this dissertation.

George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is distressingly relevant to the socio-political turmoil unfolding in not only Hong Kong, but also mirrors the revolutions happening in the rest of the world where the protests for equality, freedom and happiness are louder than ever. This dissertation

therefore serves as a warning to me, and hopefully to those who read it, that although we are not exactly living in the repressed society Orwell presents to us in 1984, we are still living under the control of the state. In an era where the internet, and consequently information, is accessible to most of us, it is easy to forget that the abundance of information and entertainment is society dictated and state sanctioned, and when we are lost in the pretence that we are living in a free society, we will be too distracted to notice the chains that bind us to the state itself, and in that case the question of freedom never arises. While many would argue that our world is progressing, however, in a society where the hatred for unorthodoxy runs deep, humanity's futile efforts to progress are always hindered by a state's hunger for power, and this ultimately leads to the lack of progression, or even the regression of a society. It is therefore crucial to question whether these state-sanctioned entertainment or information is reliable, or just a smokescreen so that they could stay in power.

And finally, I think it reasonable to ask ourselves in these deeply troubling times, what exactly, is the cost of freedom and happiness?