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Power and Resistance in *Animal Farm* and *Brave New World*: A Foucauldian Reading

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Abstract

This paper provides a comparative Foucauldian analysis of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) to examine the enactment of power, its normalisation and its resistance in dystopian societies. It uses Michel Foucault's ideas of disciplinary power, biopower, governmentality, panopticism, power/knowledge and subjectification to suggest that the novels are less about power as a form of repression from above and more about the 'productive and diffuse force of power' which influences behaviour, bodies, desires, identities, accepted truths. Propaganda, surveillance, fear, historical revision, linguistic manipulation, and unequal control of resources are all ways to consolidate power in *Animal Farm*. The changes to the Seven Commandments and the way Squealer has twisted the truth to suit the ruling elite show how the ruling elite is able to control memory, suppress critical thinking and legitimize domination. In contrast, *Brave New World* represents a fairly sophisticated biopolitical regime where genetic engineering, caste predestination, hypnopaedic conditioning, consumerism, sexual control, and soma produce citizens who freely embrace their assigned role. What is evident from the comparison is that Orwell focuses on the use of coercive discipline, scarcity, and ideological control, while Huxley focuses on more subtle forms of control through pleasure, conditioning, and the manipulation of desire. The paper also explores the resistance which is weakly present, such as that of the farm animals, as well as that of the man who does not care for Professor Marx, Helmholtz Watson and John the Savage, and illustrates how opposition is difficult when words and thoughts are defined and controlled by power. The study can be concluded that both novels are at the heart of current discussion on surveillance,

misinformation, biotechnology, consumer culture and behavioural manipulation; it is shown that power works best when domination is internal and made to seem essential for stability, happiness, or for the good of the collective.

Keywords: Foucault, power, resistance, *Animal Farm*, *Brave New World*, dystopia, surveillance, biopower, governmentality, disciplinary power, totalitarianism

1. Introduction

The *Animal Farm* (1945) by George Orwell and *Brave New World* (1932) by Aldous Huxley are two of the most popular and influential dystopian books in the English literary tradition. The two novels are both set in a context of totalitarianism—the fascism of Europe, the Stalinism of the Soviet Union, and the mass culture of the industrialized West—and both are powerful indictments of how power is wielded, legitimated, and reproduced in modern society.

Both novels are read profitably using the lens of Michel Foucault's theoretical work. The traditional model of power as a repressive force exercised by a sovereign authority is insufficient to describe the mechanisms of power in both novels, as Foucault's notion of power as a productive, diffuse, and capillary force—that is, a power that has less to do with repression than with the constitution of subjects, the regulation of bodies, and the management of populations—captures better. This paper takes a Foucauldian perspective to a comparative reading of the novels *Animal Farm* and *Brave New World*, and how each novel depicts the functioning of power and the possibilities of resistance. It examines the particular methods of power represented in each novel (surveillance, propaganda, language manipulation, pleasure management, biological engineering and producing truth) and the kinds of resistance imagined in each novel.

The paper takes the form of an analytical descriptive review, which brings together the two novels into a new Foucauldian synthesis as well as suggesting some new interpretations based on recent advances in Foucault's research, in the areas of surveillance and biopolitical theory.

2. Theoretical Framework: Foucault on Power, Knowledge, and Resistance

Michel Foucault's understanding of power is different from conventional political thinking that perceives power as a single and oppressive power structure that is held by a sovereign power. Foucault, however, does not believe that the power exercised by rulers is merely an imposition on passive subjects, through law, punishment, or violence. Rather, it flows through institutions, discourses, social practices and relationships. Power is productive and restrictive as it helps to influence behaviour, create knowledge, make identities and define norms of normality or truth. This relational perspective offers a valuable approach to analyzing both *Animal Farm* and *Brave New World*, where the mechanism of domination is through language, discipline, education, labour, pleasure and social conditioning.

Foucault describes the power of modern societies as disciplinary power in Discipline and Punish. There is a power to this form that aims at "docile bodies"—people who are trained and observed, classified and made to be useful, but at the same time they are also made obedient. The process of discipline is one of surveillance, normalisation, examination and the organisation of people in space. What works is that it prompts individuals to self-regulate and self-monitor. This is illustrated by Foucault's concept of panopticism: when people think that they could be observed, they start to internalize authority. The animals are kept in check in *Animal Farm* with labour schedules, slogans, ceremonies, threats, and Napoleon's dogs. Boxer embodies the subjugated body, his motto "I will work harder" and "Napoleon is always right" making the exploitation into personal obligation. However, discipline starts before birth in *Brave New World* because people are divided into castes and exist in accordance to their caste.

The idea of biopower is a Foucaultian elaboration of the notion of individual body power to that of populations. As a term coined in The History of Sexuality, Volume 1, biopower describes the mechanisms used to control biological life, in the fields of reproduction, health, mortality, sexuality, labour and population. It sees human life as quantifiable, controllable and improvable. *Animal Farm* is all about biopower, and how the pigs exercise control over food, labour, health, and survival. The animals' value is determined by their productivity and Boxer is thrown away when he is no longer productive. Biopower is systematic in *Brave New World*. It is artificially fertilized, genetically engineered, caste-produced, and

produced using the Bokanovsky Process. The World State controls life from the moment of its conception, and make life itself a tool of political stability.

Governmentality is the study of the ways in which the power directs people to govern themselves. It is the "conduct of conduct," Foucault says, as techniques that guide decision-making, habits, desires, and expectations. In *Animal Farm*, food is cut back and work is increased as sacrifices that must be made for the common good. The animals obey as they think that their sufferings are for the good of the farm. In *Brave New World*, the governmentality is achieved through pleasure, consumption, sexual liberation, entertainment and soma. Citizens replicate the system because they've been indoctrinated with the state's needs.

The connection between power and knowledge is also a key theme. According to Foucault, knowledge cannot be independent of power because the institutions that produce knowledge decide which statements are considered true. All societies develop a "regime of truth" that is a way to make authority seem legitimate. *Animal Farm*: Pigs control literacy, statistics, historical memory and the political language. When the Seven Commandments are changed, they can reinterpret what is legal and what is not, and what is good and what is bad. As a member of an elite caste, Mary's role in *Brave New World* is scientifically necessary, and work in that field is a rational pursuit. Knowledge turns into a tool that renders domination natural, objective and beneficial.

Foucault also argues that there is resistance everywhere that there is power. But opposition is caught up in the relations it is opposing. The initial rebellion is ultimately taken up by the pigs in *Animal Farm*, and later opposition is unsuccessful because the animals are uneducated, forgetful and don't know how to speak on their own. Bernard, Helmholtz, and John are against various elements of the World State, but they are not united in their resistance and are powerless to prevent the World State's continued progress. In this way Foucault's theory shows that the novel's power takes the shape of bodies, knowledge, language, pleasure, and identity, and that the challenge to power is made more difficult when domination is internalized and so becomes the norm of everyday social practices and structures.

3. *Animal Farm*: Power, Propaganda, and the Production of Truth

Animal Farm is a story of the development of a revolutionary movement into a totalitarian regime as the ideals of Animalism become twisted and manipulated by the pigs to achieve power. The novel can be interpreted as a study of how power is consolidated, legitimated and reproduced in a totalitarian society, as analyzed by Foucault.

One of the most obvious ways of exercising power in *Animal Farm* is through the manipulation of language. The pigs' slow transformation of the Seven Commandments is a form of discursive manipulation, which is a basic mechanism of power, as Foucault would have seen it.

> *No animal shall sleep in a bed (original) No animal shall sleep in a bed with sheets (altered) No animal shall drink alcohol (original) No animal shall drink alcohol to excess (altered) No animal shall kill any other animal (original) No animal shall kill any other animal without cause (altered) All animals are equal (original) All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others (final)*

The progressive violation of the commandments is symptomatic of the way Foucault sees power working, by producing truths, by creating discursive spaces in which what is thought, said and known can be determined. Control of language is control of thought: changing the language in which the animals see and experience the world changes the way the animals see and experience the world. The pigs' propagandist, Squealer, represents the production of truth as a means of power. He is good at convincing the other animals that they have faulty memories, that their privileges are essential, and that Napoleon is always right, just as power is able to create a regime of truth which legitimises the exercise of power. The animals ask the pigs why they take the milk and apples, and Squealer says:

> *'You do not imagine, I hope, that we pigs are doing this in a spirit of selfishness and privilege? …… Many of us actually dislike milk and apples. I dislike them myself. Our sole object*

in taking these things is to preserve our health. Milk and apples contain substances which are absolutely necessary to the well-being of a pig.' (Ch. 3)

Squealer's "delusion of truth" is an example of the production of truth as a form of power. The animals are unable to refute Squealer's argument because they don't know how to do so, the pigs have absorbed the process of knowledge production. Another form of power is the development of a cult of Napoleon. The poet Minimus wrote a poem called 'Comrade Napoleon,' which illustrates this:

Father of all animals! Friend of the sheep! Protector of the fold! Guide of the flock! Thou art the mightiest of all the animals! Napoleon! Napoleon! (Ch. VIII)

This process is based on Foucault's understanding of power as repressive, but also productive, creating subjects, identities and realities that help consolidate the power of the dominant regime.

The way the animal bodies are managed within *Animal Farm* is representative of Foucault's understanding of animal management via biopower. The ways in which the pigs control the other animals' work, their diet, their conditions, and their breeding can all be seen as forms of biopolitical management, working with animals as a resource to be optimized and controlled. Biopolitical management, the most extreme form of which is the exploitation of Boxer as a laboring body—worked to the absolute limit and then sent to the knacker when he is no longer productive—is the value of the body as a commodity for production, in this case, the human body as a machine. Boxer's motto 'I will work harder' and 'Napoleon is always right' is the internalization of biopolitical discipline, the creation of a docile body that submits to its own exploitation. Another way to read the difference between the pigs and the other animals in *Animal Farm* is as a biopolitical hierarchy that indicates which bodies deserve protection and which can be sacrificed. When the pigs take over the milk, the apples, the farmhouse, as their own, they give themselves the conditions they need to preserve themselves and to enjoy themselves, whilst treating the governing class as a head of a social body from which they are entitled to the use of the resources they need to enjoy themselves.

4. *Brave New World*: Pleasure, Conditioning, and the Biopolitical State

Brave New World is a dystopia where power is not as much controlled through repression and violence as it is through pleasure, conditioning and biological engineering. The World State keeps its population under control as a result of several biopolitical methods such as genetic engineering (Bokanovsky Process), psychological conditioning (hypnopaedia and neo-Pavlovian conditioning), pleasure management (soma) and the creation of a consumer culture.

The Bokanovsky Process, which involves manipulating and programming human beings to serve a specific purpose within society, is the most extreme case of biopower within either novel. The Director of the Hatcheries explains how it works:

> *'Bokanovsky's Process is one of the major instruments of social stability! Standard men and women; in uniform batches. The whole of a small factory staffed with the products of a single bokanovskified egg. Ninety-six identical twins working ninety-six identical machines!' (Ch. 1)*

The control of reproduction, the decanting of humans into castes, the termination of natural birth and the biological optimization of the population are all part of the World State's control of reproduction—Foucault's notion of power acting at the level of the species body. The World State's motto, 'Community, Identity, Stability'' summarizes the biopolitical logic that restricts the freedom of the individual so as to serve the stability and efficiency of the social order.

The conditioning methods used by the World State are a means of discipline which work in the unconscious. The Director gives an explanation of the process of hypnopaedia:

> *'Unemotional conditioning, as we call it. And it's the most powerful of all the instruments of education.' 'Thirty thousand repetitions, four times a week, for four years. Sixty-two thousand four hundred repetitions. That's the record.' (Ch. 2)*

The World State's conditioning system creates subjects that desire to be conditioned, while the methods of conditioning used in *Animal Farm* are external, and are drawn from a violent source. In Foucauldian terms, that is the fullest expression of power, one that works to the point of making resistance not only dangerous, but psychologically impossible—one that makes the constitution of desire itself.

Soma, the pleasure drug that is circulated among the World State, is a form of power that involves controlling the emotions and affects. Mustapha Mond gives a brief explanation of its operation:

> *'A gramme is better than a damn.' 'A gramme in time saves nine.' 'You've only to make up your mind to be happy.' (Ch. 3; 17)*

With soma the citizens have a chemical way of avoiding any bad experience, and so dissatisfaction, dissent and unhappiness are already taken care of before they can serve as the foundation of political opposition.

5. Resistance and Its Limits

The novels both envision forms of resistance to the totalitarian systems they portray, and they both illustrate the formidable nature of opposition in a society where power is at the level of perception, desire, and even truth.

Animal Farm has a variety of resistance methods that are unsuccessful. The first act of these animals against Mr Jones is a revolutionary moment which is taken up by the pigs. The lack of ability to express discontent, understanding what the changed commandments are, or envisioning a different way is a testament to how much power is exercised through language and knowledge.

The forms of resistance are even more limited in *Brave New World*. Bernard Marx's dissatisfaction with the social order stems, not from politics, but from upset that his own body is somehow lacking in comparison with the other Alphas. Helmholtz Watson's feeling of there being something more is an aesthetic one, not a political one. John the Savage's rejection of the values of the World State is based on

a romantic yearning for a way of life that is problematic. The most clear-cut statement of resistance in the novel is found in John's encounter with Mustapha Mond.

> *'I'm claiming the right to be unhappy.' 'Not to mention the right to grow old and ugly and impotent; the right to have syphilis and cancer; the right to have too little to eat; the right to be lousy; the right to live in constant apprehension of what may happen tomorrow; the right to catch typhoid; the right to be tortured by unspeakable pains of every kind.' 'I claim them all.' (Ch. 17)*

John asserts the right to be unhappy—a right to everything: to suffer, to experience all things human.John's right to be unhappy is a right to all things: suffering, human experience. However, John's eventual suicide is the ultimate failure of resistance, in a world where there are no other options to the World State than impossible or undesirable.

In both novels, Foucault's own idea of resistance is an essential tool for understanding the limits of resistance. According to Foucault, there is resistance in power; resistance is not separate from power, but rather is inherent to it. Foucault also acknowledges, however, that any resistance is always framed by the power dynamics it attempts to challenge, and that the prospect of real freedom is always in question. Both novels ask the big existential question of the constitution of subjectivity in the context of totalitarian power. The animals' eventual consent to the pigs' rule in *Animal Farm* is an instance of the process of subjectification—the process of creating subjects which learn to internalize the logic of their own subordination. The animals' inability to recall the first set of rules is a manifestation of the production of subjects who are complicit in and responsible for their own subjection when they fall under the rule of power. The constitution of subjectivity is more radical in *Brave New World*. The conditioning of Lenina Crowne by hypnopaedics is explained in detail:

> *'Every one belongs to every one else.' Thirty thousand repetitions, four times a week, for four years. Sixty-two thousand four hundred repetitions. That's the record. (Ch. 2)*

Lenina's repetition is an example of the complete internalization of the ideological structure of the World State. She is subject because she cannot imagine anything but a life of promiscuity, consumption and soma. In Foucauldian terms, it's the purest manifestation of power, the power that works on the constitution of desire itself.

There are important differences between the two novels in the potential for resistance. Critical literacy in *Animal Farm* could help the animals overcome the barriers of lack of education and trusting the pigs' authority. In *Brave New World*, the citizens' resistance is curtailed due to their biological and psychological conditioning, which makes it difficult to think critically. This difference arises because of the different types of power that are represented in each novel.

Language is a central theme in both novels as a means to exercise power and a means through which resistance is possible. The main way the pigs' develop control in *Animal Farm* is through language. The transformation of the Seven Commandments, the manufacture of propaganda via Squealer and the rewriting of history are all forms of power which rely on the control of discourse. An important reason for the animals' subjection is that they cannot read. If the commandments change, the animals can't confirm the change since they are not able to read. The pigs have been internalised and 'Napoleon is always right' is the boxer's response. The novel thus implies that resisting power is not simply a matter of political determination, but also of the language and thinking capacities required to formulate an alternative vision.

Resistance by means of language is even more complicated in *Brave New World*. The World State's conditioning methods are no different in their nature, they're just much more subtle, they're just on the level of language—the hypnopaedic repetitions, the slogans, the simplified word usage of the World State is all conditioning the range of thought that's available to its citizens. The World State's language is inadequate for John the Savage, because he can use another framework, the language of Shakespeare, which offers him other concepts and categories. Linguistic resistance is most clearly expressed in John's reference to Shakespeare in his confrontation with Mustapha Mond:

> *'O Brave New World,' John repeated. 'O Brave New World that has such people in it.' 'But I don't want comfort. I want God, I want poetry, I want real danger, I want freedom, I want goodness. I want sin.' (Ch. 17)*

John's demand for 'God, poetry, real danger, freedom, goodness, sin' is a demand for 'experience' which the language of the World State cannot contain. His resistance is rooted on his own grasp of a linguistic system that has been eradicated from the vocabulary of the World State, one that integrates concepts of transcendence, danger and moral complexity. This means that to oppose power does not merely need political will, but also the use of alternative language systems to allow the expression of alternative visions.

6. Contemporary Relevance: Surveillance, Biopolitics, and the Post-Truth Era

The Foucauldian interpretation of *Animal Farm* and *Brave New World* presented in this paper has a great impact on the way the power is operating in modern society. Surveillance capitalism, as described by Zuboff (2019), is a recent development of the panoptic tradition of disciplinary power, now applied to the digital sphere with corporations gathering, processing, and commercializing personal data of billions of people. The biopolitical aspects of power today are also important. All the strategies of population management that Foucault looks at and that Huxley describes in *Brave New World* are based on the same logic of biopower. The contemporary discussions about genetic engineering, designer babies and human enhancement echo the same ethical concerns surrounding the power of biopolitical intervention which are explored in the novel.

The post-truth reality of modern politics is also present in the Foucauldian theory of power and knowledge in both novels.Another thing that resonates with the Foucauldian theory of power and knowledge in both novels is that of the post-truth condition of contemporary politics. The spread of misinformation, the loss of trust in experts and the politicization of discourse – all of this is the same business of producing truth that Orwell illustrates in *Animal Farm*. The pigs' use of the Seven

Commandments, rewriting of history, and creation of "alternative facts" are signs of the post-truth tactics of modern political leaders.

When understood in the context of today's power relations, both *Animal Farm* and *Brave New World* remain relevant today as tools of analysis and resistance in the fight against the operations of power in the twenty first century. The novels both show how power is not simply a matter of the individual tyrant, but is also a structural force, working through institutions, discourses, technologies and subjectivities.

7. Conclusion

This paper has suggested that, even though the two fictional works, *Animal Farm* and *Brave New World*, are of opposite political leanings and approach the depiction of power differently, they share certain commonalities: power is a productive, diffuse, and capillary force that works by configuring subjects, regulating bodies, and managing populations. Theoretically, Foucault's theory proves useful in interpreting both novels, in analysing the way power is used in each novel and seeing how the totalitarian societies he describes correspond to the democratic societies in which the novels have been written. Having the two novels side by side shows significant differences in the nature of power they portray and in the means of resistance they envision. *Animal Farm* is about a kind of power that is exercised by external regulation, propaganda, and manipulation of information, which may be countered through critical literacy and political awareness. Huxley's *Brave New World* is power that works by internal conditioning, biological engineering, and controlling of desire, which is a power that makes opposition almost unattainable because it conditions the very nature of subjectivity. Rather, both novels illustrate how power is never absolute, that there are cracks in the system, there are contradictions, there are opportunities for resistance even in the most oppressive systems. In the twenty-first century, both novels continue to be relevant, a testament to the power of their interrogation of the workings of power. These were Orwell's and Huxley's perspectives on the mechanisms of power, in an age of surveillance capitalism, biopolitical intervention, and post-truth politics, that are as relevant and unsettling today as when they were written.

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