

### **Spatiality Studies – A brief overview**

It is my aim in this paper to view Orwell's novel through the lens of *Spatiality Studies*, an approach stemming primarily from the work of Michel Foucault in the 1960s and 70s, which sought to view spaces, both contemporary and in a historical context, in terms of their "simultaneity, juxtaposition and dispersion" (Foucault, "Of Other Spaces"). Foucault's ideas were developed further by Henri Lefebvre and more recently by geographers, most notably Edward Soja and David Harvey. Foucault's theories have been extensively applied by those working in the field of human geography, to help understand the contemporary emergence of difference and identity (whether cultural, social, political or economic) as a central issue in larger multicultural cities. In particular, there has been interest in Foucault's notion of heterotopias, or spaces of otherness, which can function as a means of escape from authoritarianism and repression. More recently, Kevin Hetherington (1997) has extended the idea further and defined heterotopias as "spaces of alternate social ordering", within the confines of an external world where different rules apply. Another influential strand of Foucault's thinking has been his comparison of modern society with Jeremy Bentham's "Panopticon" design for prisons, whereby a single guard can watch over many prisoners while the guard remains unseen. Foucault's contention is that a "carceral continuum" runs through modern society, such that at every level humans are keeping each other under surveillance (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*).

## Introduction

The dystopian future envisaged by Orwell in his novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is particularly disturbing since it involves the complete destruction of those fundamental aspects that make an individual human. In the words of O'Brien:

In our world there will be no emotions except fear, rage, triumph, and self-abasement. Everything else we shall destroy – everything. . . . There will be no loyalty, except loyalty towards the Party. There will be no love, except the love of Big Brother. There will be no laughter, except the laugh of triumph over a defeated enemy. There will be no art, no literature, no science. . . . There will be no distinction between beauty and ugliness. There will be no curiosity, no enjoyment of the process of life. All competing pleasures will be destroyed. . . . If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face – forever. (NEF 306)<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, at the heart of this process of dehumanization is the systematic destruction of language so as to ensure Party orthodoxy by reducing the capacity to think.

In this paper I intend to analyse the reduction of the space of language in Orwell's novel, both as a system operating within the mental space of the individual, and as a socio-geographical space wherein discourse may, or indeed may not, take place.

Crang and Thrift, in their introduction to the book *Thinking Space*, make the following assertion:

Just as there is no pristine 'thought' about the world that does not require the mediation of language, and conversely no world that is not already spoken or written, . . . so we also need to consider the relationship of space and language. (Crang and Thrift 4; original highlighting)

Perhaps the most unsettling aspect of Orwell's dystopia is the notion that an artificially created language, *Newspeak*, could be adopted so as to "*diminish* the range of thought" (NEF 343) and make rational conversation an impossibility. The book's protagonist, Winston Smith, is told by Syme, a "specialist in Newspeak" that "by the year 2050, at the very latest, not a single

human being will be alive who could understand such a conversation as we are having now” (NEF 61). In such a world, individuals would not have the linguistic capacity to fully fathom the spaces in which they found themselves, thus easily accepting the geographical and social constraints on their lives, which, indeed, are already in evidence in the Oceania of 1984, where Winston lives and works in cramped conditions, socially restricted in his movements.

According to Lefebvre,

[e]very language is located in a space. Every discourse says something about a space (places or sets of places); and every discourse is emitted from a space. Distinctions must be drawn between discourse *in* space, discourse *about* space and the discourse *of* space. (Lefebvre 132)

The present essay will focus mainly on the first of these distinctions, that of “discourse in space”, and the way in which space can impose quantitative and qualitative limits on the discourse emitted within it.

To Lefebvre’s list could be added *the space of discourse*, specifically, the way in which the shape and size of a language may influence the thought processes of its speakers. I intend to look especially at the way in which Newspeak seeks to dehumanize the individual and reduce identity.

In his discussion of the relationship between space and language, Lefebvre quotes Nietzsche, who likens language to

[a] mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms – in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people. (Nietzsche 46-7)

Lefebvre adds that “Language in action and the spoken word are inventive; they restore life to signs and concepts that are worn down like old coins” (Lefebvre 138).

*Nineteen Eighty-Four*, on the other hand, portrays a world where Nietzsche’s “mobile army” is being systematically decimated to the point where the language is so altered that it can no

longer provide any meaningful link with the past and cultural identity is therefore destroyed. Orwell turns Lefebvre's notion around such that words themselves are "worn down like old coins" and the newly minted Newspeak prevents signs and concepts from being restored to life, as the philologist Syme explains to Winston: "Every concept that can ever be needed will be expressed by exactly *one* word, with its meaning rigidly defined and all its subsidiary meanings rubbed out and forgotten" (NEF 60).

Crang and Thrift suggest that language should be seen as "an evolving or emergent system" (5), in line with a modern view of "*space as process and in process*" (3).

Particularly influential in this contemporary perspective on the space of language has been the work of the Russian philosopher Bakhtin, whose theories of language see it as a dynamic, socio-historical act of communication between Self and Other. Holloway and Kneale describe this *dialogical theory of space* as a "philosophy of open-endedness and becoming" (71) wherein the Self completes the Other. According to Bakhtin:

I am conscious of myself and become myself only while revealing myself for another, through another, and with the help of another . . . *To be* means *to communicate* . . . *To be* means to be for another, and through the other for oneself . . . I cannot become myself without another. (Bakhtin, *Problems* 287)

Holloway and Kneale assert that "To reach a point where the opportunity for continuing dialogue is denied is a position that doesn't exist in Bakhtin's thought" (71).

However, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, it is precisely the denial of such dialogue that is fundamental to the Party's control. Later in this essay, I wish to further examine Bakhtin's dialogics of space and see how in Orwell's novel, individuals are denied the freedom to create a sense of Self through communication with the Other, which is one of the most unsettling aspects of the dystopia.

Using "conceptual tools" borrowed from Geography Studies, Fátima Vieira (2005) applies a systematic spatial approach to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In a synchronous study of the novel, she analyses the protagonist, Winston Smith, considering three spaces of simultaneity: *physical space* (involving description of the space of the body), *geographical and social space* (analysing

the space occupied by the individual's body and how it connects with other physical spaces) and *psychological space* (the mental space of the subject, seen in his dynamic relationship with physical places and other individuals).

I wish to extend this analysis to include the *space of language*, which is indeed connected to each of the spatial distinctions examined by Vieira. I aim to show how the reduction of the space of language is at the heart of Orwell's dystopia and that when and where it is not delimited, spaces of resistance can exist, albeit temporarily.

### **The socio-geographical space of language in *Nineteen Eighty-Four***

I here intend to explore the space of language as a space wherein people engage in communication with each other, looking at how their possibility to do so freely has been severely curtailed in the world of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and at how Winston and Julia's affair is a conquest of this space. I wish to end this section by looking briefly at the socio-geographical space of language through the lens of Bakhtin's dialogical theory of language.

One of the principle means by which the Party is able to exert power over each individual is the *telescreen*, "an oblong metal plaque like a dulled mirror" (NEF 4), located within every space occupied by Party members and providing an ever present instrument of surveillance.

This is very reminiscent of the 'all-seeing' eye of the "Panopticon", which Spatiality theorists have used as a symbol of surveillance in a social context. I wish to compare a famous quotation from Foucault with an extract from Orwell's novel to show that there is a clear parallel:

Bentham laid down the principle that power should be visible and unverifiable. Visible: the inmate will constantly have before his eyes the tall outline of the central tower from which he is spied upon. Unverifiable: the inmate must never know whether he is being looked at at any one moment; but he must be sure that he may always be so. (Foucault, *Discipline* 201)

There was of course no way of knowing whether you were being watched at any given moment. How often, or on what system, the Thought Police plugged in on any individual wire was guesswork. It was

even conceivable that they watched everybody all the time. But at any rate they could plug in your wire whenever they wanted to. (NEF 5)

The Orwellian surveillance is then, like the Panopticon, both visible (the telescreen is ever present within the spaces occupied by Party members) and unverifiable. The 'tall-central tower' of the Panopticon is replaced by the "oblong metal plaque" of the telescreen, whose one-way transparency is emphasised by its being described as "a dulled mirror" (NEF 4).

Thus, the key to the success of the telescreen is the very fact that the individual can never be sure that he is being observed, an uncertainty forcing him to constantly monitor his own movements and even facial expressions. However, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the idea is extended further such that the telescreen is also the all-seeing ear:

The telescreen received and transmitted simultaneously. Any sound that Winston made, above the level of a very low whisper, would be picked up by it . . . You had to live – did live, from habit that became instinct – in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard. (NEF 5)

It is thus clear that Big Brother is not only watching you at all times but listening to you, as well. This, of course, has major repercussions on the space of language, as freely flowing, unguarded conversation is no longer possible. Right from the beginning of the novel, we get an impression of individuals living and working in isolation, their opportunities to speak with each other strictly regulated. We see this readily in the description of Mrs Parsons, who knocks on Winston's door to ask him to help fix her blocked sink. Even in the apparently innocuous small talk between neighbours, there is a sense of constant unease and Mrs Parsons has "a habit of breaking off her sentences in the middle" (NEF 25). She is wary even of how she speaks to her own children and, of course, later in the novel we discover that she indeed has every reason to be nervous of them, since her husband is reported to the *thought police* by his very daughter who, with an ear-trumpet to the bedroom door, catches him saying "down with Big Brother" in his sleep. The comic satire is tempered by the fact that Parsons is the last person that we, and indeed Winston, expect to be guilty of *thoughtcrime*, since at every appearance he constantly

speaks only about his apparently limitless enthusiasm for the Party and his boundless energy to serve it and praise it. The words uttered in his sleep reveal that at a subliminal level he is aware of the awful reality of life, but that he has developed a style of speaking during his waking life as a means of blocking out this reality. His endless descriptions of his involvement in official functions and events constitutes a very narrow kind of conversational speech that does not permit any exchange of ideas other than those in support of party orthodoxy. Elsewhere the narrator describes these kind of exchanges with Party members as “creaking camaraderie oiled by gin” (NEF 95).

The example of Mr and Mrs Parsons shows, then, how the perpetual fear and paranoia induced by the presence of the telescreen delimits the space of language. Anyone who lets their guard slip is liable to be arrested, even those who apparently speak in full support of the system. Another case in point is Winston’s colleague Syme, whose conversation in the work canteen at the Ministry of Truth is full of praise for the Party but reveals that he knows too much about its motivations, leading Winston to suppose that one day his friend ‘will be vaporised’ (NEF 70), which is, of course, what does eventually transpire.

The opportunity for conversations of any depth or meaningfulness, beyond the mundane is thus virtually impossible. The snippets of conversation we hear are often about the lack of basic amenities, the shortage of razor-blades, problems with the plumbing, and so on. It is apparently the Party’s wish that by perpetuating these shortcomings which affect people’s daily lives, so individuals will be more engaged in dealing with ways to overcome them than in discussion about the true source of the problem.

Opportunities for potential conversation with other Party members are also restricted by the nature of the socio-geographical spaces in which people operate. In Winston’s workplace at the Ministry of Truth, within a large hall each person sits within in a separate cubicle without having any verbal contact with one another or any firm idea of what particular job each is involved in. The only kind of communication that takes place is in the form of the abbreviated and emotionless instructions which land on the desktop from the pneumatic tube. We are given a description of a fellow worker across the hall:

a small, precise-looking, dark-chinned man named Tillotson was working steadily away, with a folded newspaper on his knee and his mouth very close to the mouthpiece of the speakwrite. He had the air of trying to keep what he was saying a secret between himself and the telescreen. He looked up, and his spectacles darted a hostile flash in Winston's direction. (NEF 48)

There are several references in the novel to such bespectacled Party operatives whose eyes are not actually visible, further evidence that the window to natural conversation is closed.

The opportunity to talk freely or at any length is also denied the workers during their meal breaks. The work canteen is described as a "low-ceilinged" space "deep under ground" and "deafeningly noisy" (NEF 56), a hellish sort of place indeed, accentuated further by the "sour metallic smell" and disgusting food. It is almost as though it is deliberately kept unpleasant so as to deter anyone from lingering there and potentially talking to anyone for any length. Furthermore, the telescreen emits frequent announcements which interrupt any conversation and lets out "a piercing whistle" when it is time to return to work.

There is, therefore, a prevailing sense that freedom to converse with fellow 'comrades' has been severely limited. Yet, it is not altogether impossible to find spaces wherein the natural flow of language can flourish, as is demonstrated by Winston and Julia's rebellious act of carrying on a love affair in the midst of such repression, albeit an act which they both know is punishable by death.

Vieira has described Winston's rebellion as a "spatial conquest" (95), since he and Julia occupy socio-geographic spaces which are strictly off limits to Party members. The clearing in the wood outside the city, the belfry of the ruined church out in the deserted countryside and the room above Mr Charrington's shop in the prole quarter; all these offer the possibility of an albeit temporary utopian life within the dystopian world that surrounds them, or spaces of heterotopia as Foucault would call them ("Of Other Spaces" 22-27) – spaces within which there is an "alternate social ordering", as Hetherington defines them (Hetherington 9), and which, according to Vilas-Boas, "question the present and aspire to transgress its limits" (Vilas-Boas 104)<sup>2</sup>. Vieira considers an appreciation of these heterotopian spaces to be crucial for any spatial approach to Orwell's novel.



I wish to add that these spaces of resistance also constitute heterotopian spaces of language, within which Winston and Julia are free from the limitations that ordinarily prevent natural discourse from taking place. Their love making is “a political act” and “a blow struck against the Party” (NEF 145), but so too is their freedom to speak. Julia’s first declaration of her feelings for Winston is the “I love you” written on the piece of paper that she hands to him in the corridor at work. It is in itself a conquest of space, since the words stun Winston so completely, invading the closed space of his cubicle where no communication between individuals is permitted. The scrap of paper reflects the fragmentary, temporary nature of their relationship, stunning Winston completely during its brief existence before entering the memory hole and burning in the furnaces beyond. The image of this piece of paper “folded into a square” and soon to become ash is echoed later in the “small square of dust” (NEF 157) which Julia scrapes together on the floor of their “hiding place” in the church tower, wherein she draws a map indicating how Winston should arrive at their next rendezvous. Once again we see their space of communication literally as a tiny physical area, here delimited by the dust which they are destined to become.

Until they can be together more regularly in the “sanctuary” of the room above the junk-shop, communication between them is similarly sporadic and made up of fragments of conversation.

In the street it was usually possible to talk, after a fashion. As they drifted down the crowded pavements, not quite abreast and never looking at one another, they carried on a curious, intermittent conversation which flicked on and off like the beams of a lighthouse. . . . Julia appeared to be quite used to this kind of conversation, which she called ‘talking by instalments’. (NEF 147)

It is telling that their space of language is likened to a lighthouse, since it represents a beacon of light and hope amid the surrounding darkness, each snatch of conversation a victory against the Party. It is a space which is then fully occupied when they are together in the church tower and “the gaps in their fragmentary conversation” are “filled up” (NEF 149). The lovers physically fill the space of their resistance, most notably the room above Charrington’s

shop, with their presence and with objects that Party members are ordinarily deprived of, such as proper tea and coffee, scent, and the glass paperweight, an object of beauty from a forgotten past. Similarly, their space of language is filled to the brim as they are able to talk freely for hours. The ultimate fragility of this space for free and unguarded dialogue is brutally enforced when it later becomes clear that all the while their conversations have been monitored by the telescreen hidden behind the steel engraving of St Clement's church. Their entrapment is further hinted at in the rhyme begun by Charrington, and eventually completed by O'Brien, "Oranges and Lemons' say the bells of St Clement's", whose last line becomes a metaphor for their eventual capture; "Here comes a candle to light you to bed, Here comes a chopper to chop off your head". It is a cruel irony that the apparently innocent language of a children's rhyme from a bygone age is in fact evidence that the brutality and destructive power of the Party is present in the room from the very first moment.

We have seen how the reduction in the socio-geographical space of language has a great dehumanizing effect on people. This concurs with Bakhtin's assertion that "*to be means to communicate*" (Bakhtin, *Problems* 287; emphasis in original); that "if we cease being addressed by the environment and the others around us, we simply cease to be" (Holloway and Kneale 75). According to Bakhtian thought, language is made up of individual "utterances", ranging in length from single words to the longest of written texts. What gives meaning to an utterance is its relation through dialogue with other utterances, such that each is delimited by "a change of speakers" (Bakhtin, *Speech Genres* 71). Holloway and Kneale illustrate this idea further:

. . . the dialogical utterance can be exemplified through the communicative act between Self and Other as two situated interlocutors. The articulated utterance of the Self from its inception is always placed in relation to that of the Other via the referencing, understanding and awareness of the Other's past, present and potential future utterances. (Holloway and Kneale 76)

It is the very absence of this dialogical flow that makes the world of Airstrip One seem so grim and soulless. We see this in Winston's solitude at the beginning of the novel and the way he begins his diary:

He was a lonely ghost uttering a truth that nobody would ever hear. But so long as he uttered it, in some obscure way the continuity was not broken. It was not by making yourself heard but by staying sane that you carried on the human heritage. He went back to the table, dipped his pen, and wrote:

“To the future or to the past, to a time when thought is free, when men are different from one another and do not live alone – to a time when truth exists and what is done cannot be undone: From the age of uniformity, from the age of solitude, from the age of Big Brother, from the age of doublethink – greetings!” (NEF 32)

Winston senses that overwhelming instinctive desire to reach out to the Other and by so doing make sense of his own Self.

Ultimately, of course, it is the constraining power of *doublethink* that has the upper hand, and following O’Brien’s methods of persuasion, Winston is forced to concede the truth in the Party slogan “Who controls the past controls the future: who controls the present controls the past”. Any understanding of what the Other may have said in the past, may be saying at the present moment or may say in the future is impossible when *doublethink* renders meaningful dialogue impossible. In his conversations with O’Brien at the Ministry of Love, Winston’s attempts to conduct a rational dialogue with his tormentor are futile, as “whatever he said, the swift answer crushed him like a bludgeon” (NEF 305). The Party’s control of the space of language is absolute, such that Winston eventually comes to believe that two and two can be five.

There is a further way in which Bakhtian ideas about the space of language are negated in the world of Nineteen Eighty-Four. The utterances deployed by a speaker are the embodiment of a certain world-view or *positionality*. As Holloway and Kneale explain, “The diversity and manifold variety of these different points of view or ideologies, in competition and conflict, is termed heteroglossia (many-languagedness)” (77).

In practice, when an individual Self engages in discourse, his position is made clear by his “speech genre”, that is, by his way of talking, which is in turn recognised and evaluated by the

Other. Each of these speech genres constitutes one of the many languages of heteroglossia creating “the *polyphony*, or many voices, of the social world” (Holloway and Kneale 78).

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the future world envisaged by the Party is one which could be described as *monoglossia* in that only one type of speech genre will be allowed to prevail, namely that which, spoken in pure Newspeak, will represent utterly Party orthodoxy and “make all other modes of thought impossible” (NEF 343).

Even in the world portrayed in the novel we see evidence of a narrowing of the ability to recognise and evaluate different “speech genres”. This is revealed when Winston speaks to the old man in the prole quarter. Their conversation takes place in a pub, a place which ordinarily in our world would be filled with a rich and diverse polyphony of voices. Winston wants to question the man about his memories of the past to see if they square with those he has gleaned from a children’s history textbook borrowed from Mrs Parsons. Though it may indeed be true that the old man’s memory is so fragmented that it is “nothing but a rubbish-heap of details” (NEF 105), which causes Winston to feel that they are “talking at cross-purposes” (NEF 104), it is also true that Winston is unable to evaluate properly the man’s speech genre, since his solitary experience of the world is so far removed from that of the proles that he is unable to recognise the natural humanity emanating from the man’s utterances. He even toasts Winston with the words “‘Ere’s wishing you the very best of ‘ealth!” He mentions his sister-in-law’s funeral as an occasion when he wore a top hat, but Winston seems unable to empathise with the old man. Reeling off a long description of what he has learned from the history books, Winston is literally unable to ‘make’ conversation and by so doing, cannot enter into the old man’s world-view and appreciate his ‘position’, to use Bakhtin’s term.

### **The mental space of language in *Nineteen Eighty-Four***

Until now I have focused on the space of language in terms of the socio-geographic spaces where it can or, indeed, cannot take place – in other words, the space for language. I now wish to look at the mental space of language, that is the albeit abstract space within the human mind, which over the course of a lifetime is ordinarily filled with the language the individual acquires in order to express his needs, desires and thoughts. In Orwell’s novel we see the

systematic reduction of this mental space of language through the adoption of Newspeak, an artificially created language whose aim was to limit the individual's ability to think and thus provide the ultimate means of mind control and conditioning.

As its name suggests, Newspeak is a new language, albeit developed from English, which was thereafter rendered Oldspeak in the new parlance. Through the ingenious reduction of the lexicon, such that the same word would serve as verb, noun, adverb or adjective, and could be further modified using a comprehensive system of affixation. Newspeak was thus deliberately designed to contain as few words as possible and thus "its vocabulary grew smaller . . . every year" (NEF 352).

We are introduced to Newspeak right at the beginning of the novel in a footnote (NEF 6) which explains that it "was the official language of Oceania" and directs the reader to the book's Appendix "for an account of its structure and etymology". Thus, it is very clear that Orwell wants the reader to be aware from the start of the Party's desire to control thought through the reduction of language.

We are told, in the Appendix, that Newspeak "had been devised to meet the ideological needs of Ingsoc" (NEF 343). During one of their sessions at the Ministry of Love, O'Brien explains to Winston that these 'ideological needs' were essentially the seeking of power entirely for its own sake" (NEF 301) and that such power "is in tearing human minds to pieces and putting them together in new shapes of your choosing" (NEF 306). Though referring to the inevitable destruction of Winston's self, O'Brien's words can apply also to the wholesale destruction of language envisaged by the adoption of Newspeak.

The very first word of Newspeak that we come across is *Ingsoc*, which the Appendix indicates is an adaptation from the Oldspeak *English Socialism*, only that it is much more than just a political system and, in fact, encapsulates in its two syllables all potential routes to truth and reality, be they religion, science or any other form of knowledge or belief. The *Principles of Newspeak* reveal that "there was, indeed, no word for 'Science', any meaning that it could possibly bear being already sufficiently covered by the word *Ingsoc*" (NEF 353). Newspeak was, thus, specifically designed so that single words could cover whole areas of thought, such that it would reduce "the temptation to take thought" (NEF 352). Indeed, such is the extent of this

reductionism that Winston's colleague at the Ministry of Truth, Syme, who is working on further ways to reduce the language, asserts that "Newspeak is Ingsoc and Ingsoc is Newspeak" (NEF 61).

It is curious how the word *Ingsoc* is first revealed, with a description of a poster which "torn at one corner, flapped fitfully in the wind, alternately covering and uncovering the single word INGSOC" (NEF 4). There is something in this image of the dual existence of two realities in Oceania; one on the surface which is literally a tattered and war-torn reality of people subjected to deprivation and the crushing power of the state, and the other a deeper reality felt in the mind by those party members who have learned not only to accept this hardship but to cherish it, through a process of *doublethink*, as part of their love for Big Brother and party orthodoxy, indeed their love of *ingsoc*. This ability not only to comprehend but unconsciously accept both realities is fundamental to the Party's continuing hold over the minds of its members, and such "reality control", as Winston refers to it, is encapsulated in the single Newspeak word *doublethink*. Winston resists by holding onto the reality that he experiences with his senses and which exists in his memory. His first act of rebellion is to begin writing his diary with the words "from the age of doublethink – greetings!" (NEF 32).

The first time in the novel when we get to see a stretch of Newspeak is in the fourth chapter of Part I, which describes Winston's workplace in the Records Department of the Ministry of Truth where he is engaged in editing and indeed rewriting news reports, as part of the Party's continual effort to erase events as it saw fit, in tune with its slogan "who controls the past controls the present" (NEF 284). One of Winston's tasks is to rectify Big Brother's Order for the Day in an issue of the *Times* from the previous year. The message he receives is partially written in Newspeak and instructs him to rewrite the report *fullwise*, or in full, since it contains references to *unpersons*. This latter word is one of the most chilling in the Newspeak lexicon in that it refers to 'non-existent persons', that is, those who have disappeared following arrest and detention, or have been 'vaporized'. Not only do these individuals no longer exist in the present, following their death at the hands of the Party, but they are soon also to become erased from the past so as never to have existed. They might still exist as a memory, but for those like O'Brien who are adept in the art of *doublethink* even this memory can be erased. Throughout

the novel, the word *unperson* hangs over Winston, as both he and the reader know that he will eventually become an *unperson* himself.

Winston actually engages in the task of erasing Comrade Withers from the report with a certain relish, not because he agrees with the policy, but since such “delicate pieces of forgery” released him from the tedium of his routine, like a “mathematical problem” solved through “knowledge of the principles of Ingsoc and your estimate of what the Party wanted you to say” (NEF 51). We learn that Winston is indeed so good at this type of work that “he had even been entrusted with the rectification of the *Times* leading articles, which were written entirely in Newspeak” (NEF 51). The Appendix begins by explaining that these articles were a “*tour de force* which could only be carried out by a specialist” (NEF 343). On the one hand, that he is entrusted with such “an intricate and responsible job” reveals Winston to be a skilled manipulator of both Old and Newspeak, and as such useful to the Party. Yet, it also demonstrates that he is ultimately, too clever and simultaneously poses a threat to the regime. In their conversation in the subterranean depths of the miserable staff canteen, Syme indeed detects that Winston does not have “a real appreciation of Newspeak” and calls his pieces for the *Times* “translations” since they betray that in his heart he would “prefer to stick to Oldspeak with all its vagueness and its useless shades of meaning” (NEF 60). Syme accuses his ‘friend’ of not grasping “the beauty of the destruction of words”. In a sense he is advocating the “beauty” of the destruction of beauty, in this case the beauty inherent in natural language, and this is underlined in the Appendix which mentions that the “process” of making “a political or ethical judgement” was “assisted” by “the texture of the (Newspeak) words, with their harsh sound and a certain wilful ugliness which was in accord with the spirit of Ingsoc” (NEF 352). As we see elsewhere, it is indeed Winston’s awareness of beauty in nature and art that also makes him an enemy of the Party. The fanatical zeal with which specialist philologists like Syme destroy words, with all their inherent beauty and links to a distant past is echoed in the smashing of the glass paperweight in the room above Charrington’s shop when Winston and Julia are arrested.

One of the messages delivered to Winston through the pneumatic tube in his work cubicle contains another word which perfectly exemplifies the reduced nature of Newspeak. The slip of

paper informs Winston that the reporting of Big Brother's speech in the news bulletin he is to rewrite is *doubleplusungood*. We are told that this would be rendered as "extremely unsatisfactory" (NEF 51) in Standard English. When Syme enthuses to Winston about "the destruction of words", calling it "a beautiful thing" (NEF 59), he explains that "a word contains its opposite within itself" and uses the word *good* to exemplify his meaning. He calls on Winston to admire the "beauty" in reducing "the whole notion of goodness and badness" to "only six words", namely, the root word *good*, its antonym *ungood* and the use of the affixes *plus* or *doubleplus* to replace "vague useless words" like "excellent" "splendid" (NEF 60).

Orwell, clearly wants the reader to appreciate the nature of this new language, for not only are we directed early on to the Appendix for a full account of the *Principles of Newspeak*, but much of its essence is outlined by Syme in his zealous appraisal of the Eleventh Edition of the Newspeak Dictionary. Thus, it is Syme who first reveals that "the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought" (NEF 60). The irony is that Syme himself exhibits anything but a narrowing of his range of thought. As a compiler of the new dictionary he understands the "how" but is also all too familiar with the "why". His enthusiasm for, as he sees it, perfecting the language – "the Revolution will be complete when the language is perfect" (NEF 61) – is no doubt driven by his own personal hand in the "process" of "cutting the language down to the bone" (NEF 59), like a butcher taking pride in wielding the knife. Yet it is this arch sense of knowingness that will ultimately lead to Syme's downfall. Such is his appreciation of the concept of language reduction that he is forced to add "as an afterthought" that "it was B.B's idea originally, of course" (NEF 60). He further gives himself away by enthusing that in the future Newspeak will alter the "whole climate of thought" such that "there will *be* no thought, as we understand it now" and that "orthodoxy is unconsciousness" (NEF 61). So fully conscious is he of the Party's intentions that Syme's unorthodox behaviour is tantamount to an act of *thoughtcrime* and Winston knows that for seeing "too clearly" and speaking "too plainly" Syme will one day be "vaporized" (NEF 62), which is of course what does eventually come to pass.

It is ironic, therefore, that the very people who are capable of designing the new language are, despite their zealous efforts, themselves a threat to the Party for they comprehend too well its motives. We get the impression that it suits the Party to have Newspeak designed only to



then promptly do away with its creators, since the language will become so prevalent that knowledge of its origins and etymology will be unnecessary and it will have become merely a tool to control Party members.

O'Brien would, thus, no doubt believe that Newspeak is the linguistic "boot" stamping down on and shrinking the mental space of language – "for ever". He affirms that "we (the Party) control life, at all its levels" (NEF 308), and thus the vitality of human thought freely expressed through language is the level of life that Newspeak seeks to decimate.

And yet this is not what happens. The Appendix is written from some unspecified future perspective, at a time when Standard English is clearly flourishing once more. It looks back on the world of 1984, explaining that Newspeak was envisaged to have "finally superseded Oldspeak by about the year 2050" (NEF 343). The clear failure for this to happen is emphasised by the fluid clarity of the writing itself and by the sentence "relative to our own, the Newspeak vocabulary was tiny". The fact that we are directed to the Appendix as early as the fourth page of the book, shows that Orwell is keen for the reader to be aware that the brutal future foreseen by O'Brien will not come to pass.

Syme tells Winston that before long all the great literary works of the past will have been destroyed – "Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Byron – they'll exist only in Newspeak versions, not merely changed into something different, but actually changed into something contradictory of what they used to be" (NEF 61). The Appendix ends by referring to this same transformation of works of literature, adding that "these translations were a slow and difficult business" and the main reason for "so late a date as 2050" being chosen for the "final adoption of Newspeak" (NEF 355).

We are given an indication of the difficulty in achieving this endeavour when we learn that the poet Ampleforth has, like Winston, been caught by the thought police. His work at the Ministry of Truth involves the production of certain of the so-called "definitive texts" which Syme alludes to, in reality "garbled versions" of those "poems which had become ideologically offensive but . . . were to be retained in the anthologies". With his "talent for juggling with rhymes and meters", Ampleforth, like Syme, has the necessary linguistic skill to produce what the Party requires, but his knowledge of what is being suppressed and indeed replaced is what

leads to his arrest. He complains to Winston that he had to include the word "God" (NEF 265) in a reworking of a poem by Kipling in order to fit the rhyme scheme, clearly unacceptable to a party who denied the existence of a higher being.

After Winston's dream of the Golden Country with its beautiful natural landscape, he wakes up "with the word 'Shakespeare' on his lips" (NEF 36), a further hint that somehow the literature of the past cannot be destroyed.

The Appendix explains that following the eventual adoption of Newspeak any unorthodox thought "should be literally unthinkable, at least so far as thought is dependent on words" (NEF 343). Orwell does not give any explanation as to why the regime of 1984 ultimately fails, but there are suggestions that this notion of human thought being more than words alone may have something to do with it. Reflecting, in the canteen, on the overwhelming sense of the dreariness and discomfort inherent in "the physical texture of life", Winston considers that "always in your stomach and in your skin there was a sort of protest, a feeling that you had been cheated of something you had the right to" (NEF 68). There is a sense that perhaps there is something indomitable about the human spirit that will always prevail.

### **The physical space of language in *Nineteen Eighty-Four***

Finally, I will look at how the physical space of language in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and how the adoption of Newspeak would even impact on the biological mechanisms involved in the act of speaking.

We learn in the Appendix that the Party only expected Newspeak to have fully replaced Oldspeak "by about the year 2050" (NEF 343). However, even in the world of 1984, we see evidence of individuals who are already speaking in fluent Newspeak in order to communicate their assimilation of Ingsoc, if not also their assimilation by Ingsoc, as their speech appears to be an almost unconscious stream which sounds like the "quacking of a duck" (NEF 63), referred to in Newspeak as *duckspeak*. In the canteen, a young man on a neighbouring table is "talking remorselessly away" (NEF 62) in this way and spouting forth a torrent of pure orthodoxy. It seems to Winston that the man is more like a dummy talking than a real human being and "it was his larynx" that was speaking rather than his brain. The Appendix indeed reveals that this

was precisely the Party's intention and that "ultimately it was hoped to make articulate speech issue from the larynx without involving the higher brain centres at all" (NEF 352). It further explains that the short compound words making up Newspeak were themselves designed such that the equal stress given to the first and last syllables would produce a "gabbling style of speech" that was virtually "independent of consciousness". The satire is at its harshest when we then learn that the intention was that equipped with the tools of Newspeak, "a party member called upon to make a political or ethical judgement should be able to spray forth the correct opinions as automatically as a machine-gun spraying forth bullets" (NEF 352).

The intention indeed seems to be to create a new race of beings who are not truly human beings at all. The original name of the book is *The Last Man in Europe* and O'Brien addresses Winston as the "last man" and "guardian of the human spirit".

The *duckspeaker* in the canteen is described as "an eyeless creature with a quacking voice" and certainly comes across as one of this new breed of aliens. Similarly, Winston describes how a certain "beetle-like type proliferated in the Ministries", men with "short legs" and "very small eyes" that "seemed to flourish best under the Dominion of the Party" (NEF 69) Newspeak is central to this horrific notion of the dehumanising of the Party members.

## Conclusion

*Nineteen Eighty-Four* is essentially a dystopian warning as to the dehumanising effect of totalitarian power. The reduction of the space of language is part of the way in which personal and cultural identity are systematically reduced. Orwell is clearly seeking to satirise the linguistic manipulation of regimes such as Stalin's Russia, with its party slogans and state propaganda. However, his invention of Newspeak is just as much a satirical attack on the way language was being used much closer to home in 1940's Britain.

In his "Politics and the English Language"<sup>3</sup> Orwell champions the cause of plain English and condemns the 'slovenliness' of modern English, which has become full of 'bad habits'. He is particularly scathing of political writing, stating that "orthodoxy, of whatever colour, seems to demand a lifeless, imitative style" (Orwell, *Essays* 355). His description of a politician standing

on a platform giving a speech is precisely that of the duckspeaker in the canteen in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

. . . one often has a curious feeling that one is not watching a live human being but some kind of dummy: a feeling which suddenly becomes stronger at moments when the light catches the speaker's spectacles and turns them into blank discs which seem to have no eyes behind them. And this is not altogether fanciful. A speaker who uses that kind of phraseology has gone some distance toward turning himself into a machine. The appropriate noises are coming out of his larynx, but his brain is not involved as it would be if he were choosing his words for himself. If the speech he is making is one that he is accustomed to make over and over again, he may be almost unconscious of what he is saying, as one is when one utters the responses in church. And this reduced state of consciousness, if not indispensable, is at any rate favourable to political conformity. (Orwell, *Essays* 356)

We see here the template for the ideas that would result in the notion of *duckspeak*, meaning to speak without thinking. The *Appendix* explains that the Party upheld all those who spoke in this way:

Provided that the opinions which were quacked out were orthodox ones, it implied nothing but praise, and when 'The Times' referred to one of the orators of the Party as a *doubleplusgood duckspeaker* it was paying a warm and valued compliment. (NEF 352)

*The Principles of Newspeak* envisage a world where the link between language and thought is severed completely. This final stage of the reduction of language, which Steven Blakemore suggests 'can be called "nospeak"' (349), is predicted to be in force by the year 2050, a time when 'the death of language would make the possibility of rebellion impossible: for rebellion has first to be realized linguistically (355).

Jean-Jacques Courtine asserts that "language is the living memory of man and offers him space for inner resistance" (70). Winston's rebellion begins inside his head, where he thinks he is safe from the Party's ever watching gaze. "Nothing was your own except the few cubic centimetres inside your skull" (NEF 32). Such is the pressure he feels with so many

*ungoodthinkful* ideas crowding his head, that he is compelled to physically manifest the rebellious words in his head on the paper of his diary, filling half a page by repeatedly writing the line "DOWN WITH BIG BROTHER" (NEF 21). Courtine likens language to a body whose words, or signs, are like "social parasites" which the Party seeks to eradicate. Language is a threat to the totalitarian state and just as individuals are purged of their unorthodox thoughts, so "signs must be purged and purified of their meaning" (Courtine 70). Explaining to Winston how the Party had previously dealt with *thought criminals* like himself, O'Brien says that "by the time we had finished with them, they were only the shells of men" (NEF 292). He promises that eventually Winston himself 'will be hollow', proffering that 'we shall squeeze you empty, and then we shall fill you with ourselves' (NEF 293). We can see, therefore, how the Party seeks to remove the space of language completely, like a surgeon wielding his knife, as if lancing a boil and squeezing the imperfection from the body. Just as Winston is given injections that aid him into actually believing for a moment that he can see five fingers instead of four, so the Party will ultimately inject the hollow space of language with Newspeak, a form of language purged of all impurities so that there is no room for ambiguity or shades of meaning, such that it can only produce pure *goodthink*, for which perhaps we should read 'nothink', and the speaker will be able to freely perceive that two and two make five.

The eventual dehumanising effect of Newspeak is to be enhanced by radical social changes planned for the future. O'Brien tells Winston that "we have cut the links between child and parent; between man and man, and between man and woman" (NEF 306). Thus is envisaged a world where children are ultimately not brought up by their parents and would not learn language conventionally but presumably directly from the state power.

We see this idea paralleled in Bentham's social theories, of which Orwell may not have been aware, but which curiously echo his satirical vision of a world where thought control through language and education is a possibility. Foucault elaborates on Bentham's 'panopticism' in his *Discipline and Punish* (1977):

The Panopticon was also a laboratory; it could be used as a machine to carry out experiments, to alter behaviour, to train or correct individuals. To experiment with medicines and monitor their effects. . . . To

try out pedagogical experiments – and in particular to take up once again the well-debated problem of secluded education, by using orphans. One would see what would happen when, in their sixteenth or eighteenth year, they were presented with other boys or girls; one could verify whether, as Helvetius thought, anyone could learn anything; one would follow ‘the genealogy of every observable idea’; one could bring up different children according to different systems of thought, making certain children believe that two and two do not make four or that the moon is a cheese, then put them together when they are twenty or twenty-five years old; one would then have discussions that would be worth a great deal more than the sermons or lectures on which so much money is spent; . . . (203)

Reconstruction or, rather, purification of the space of language can thus be seen as the means by which a vast project of social engineering is to be carried out. The individual of this future society will have every link cut between himself and those things which we consider vital in shaping his very humanity; parents, history, cultural identity and natural language.

As Courtine points out, Orwell’s invention of Newspeak was a parody of *Basic English*, an international language experiment devised by C. K. Ogden, which was essentially a “syntactically simplified English of 850 words” (Courtine 71). Syme’s comment that “we are destroying words – scores of them, hundreds of them” (NEF 59) echoes Ogden’s assertion that “the primary principle of *Basic*, which made the reduced vocabulary possible, is the elimination of the verb” (Ogden 5). Orwell, though initially interested in the experiment, had grown disillusioned with it. Interestingly, Courtine (73) reveals that Ogden was concerned that the whole vocabulary of *Basic English* should “be visible at a single glance” (Ogden 18) and, influenced by Bentham’s notion of an all-seeing eye of surveillance, he had already conceived of an even more abbreviated language consisting of no more than 500 words which he appropriately named *Panoptic English*.

It must not be forgotten, of course, that Orwell was quite definitely not predicting the actual future 1984 but satirising his own present. It is a point made succinctly by Bernard Crick who draws out attention to the last sentence of the Appendix: “It was chiefly in order to allow time for the preliminary work of translation that the final adoption of Newspeak had been fixed for so late a date as 2050” (NEF 355).

Crick notes that “the satirist implies that demotic language and literature cannot be controlled” (Crick 147). It is perhaps, ultimately, then Orwell’s view that a future of the sort he describes could never in fact take place, on account of the indomitable spirit of the proles, who are the one group whose space of language has not been reduced. Winston’s belief that “if there is hope, it lies in the proles” (NEF 80) is, therefore, just as central to the novel as the image of the boot perpetually stamping on a face. When walking in the prole quarters and observing the evident humanity of the people he saw there, speaking freely and unfettered by the Party’s restraints on movement, he ponders:

What mattered were individual relationships, and a completely helpless gesture, an embrace, a tear, a word spoken to a dying man, could have value in itself. The proles, it suddenly occurred to him, had remained in this condition. They were not loyal to a party or a country or an idea, they were loyal to one another. For the first time in his life he did not despise the proles or think of them merely as an inert force which would one day spring to life and regenerate the world. The proles had stayed human. They had not become hardened inside. They had held on to the primitive emotions which he himself had to re-learn by conscious effort. (NEF 191)

Certainly, in terms of the language that we see used by the proles, it is apparent that their humanity is very much in evidence. Winston describes having gone to the cinema and seen a war film featuring the bombing of a refugee ship and a shot of a child’s arm being blown off. A prole woman has to be forcibly removed by police for protesting and Winston records in his diary that “nobody cares what the proles say” (NEF 11), but, nevertheless, he transcribes the essence of what she had said: “they didnt oughter of showed it not in front of the kids they didnt it aint right not in front of the kids it aint” (NEF 11).

These words are reminiscent also of those that Winston remembers were spoken in an air-raid shelter by a grieving old man who kept repeating, “we didn’t ought to ‘ave trusted ‘em. I said so, Ma, didn’t I? That’s what come of trusting ‘em. I said so all along. We didn’t ought to have trusted the buggers” (NEF 39).

Through plain language transcribed in its colloquial originality, these excerpts illustrate the core human values of dignity, respect and trust, which Winston comes to realise have remained alive in the proles, and which O'Brien coldly explains have been eradicated amongst the Party. It is, of course, ironic that according to O'Brien "humanity is the Party" and the proles are "helpless" and "irrelevant" "like the animals" (NEF 309). Instead, it is the members who have become dehumanised.

The washer woman in the yard also seems to show the sheer power of the human spirit. She sings a song produced as *prolefeed* for the masses, but is able to inject it with a passion and beauty that touches Winston profoundly. The Oldspeak words produced randomly by a *versificator* are allowed to shine forth through her voice.

We have seen how Bakhtin sees language as a discourse between Self and Other, and that our identity is dependent on where we have come from and where we are going, in constant dialogue with those around us as well as those who have come before us and will come after us. Our humanity stems from the resulting "heteroglossia" of speech genres and our awareness of each other's differences. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four* we see a disturbing world of "monoglossia", with no shades or variation. It is a world where the space of language has been so reduced that it threatens to turn people into creatures not unlike ants or beetles in a vast colony, loyal only to the Party and loving only Big Brother.

Ultimately, Orwell's novel is a warning about what could happen if we were to allow the reductionist principles of Ogden's *Basic English* to be used by a power-mad dictator, such as the world has indeed seen in the form, for example, of Josef Stalin. It reminds us of the need to preserve our freedom of speech and ensure that the space of language can remain as wide open and unconstrained as possible.

I have found that applying a spatial approach to the novel allows us to appreciate it from a new perspective. By viewing the tyranny of Big Brother's regime as a reduction of the geographical space in which individuals are free to speak, as well as a reduction in their very ability to speak through systematic destruction of language, we are able, more clearly, to consider the space occupied by the proles as a heterotopia, operating within the prevailing



dystopia, and thus recognise that Orwell ultimately believed that such a nightmare vision could never in fact come to pass.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> NEF hereafter is used to indicate references to the 2000 Penguin edition of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

<sup>2</sup> Translated from the original Portuguese, "As heterotopias (...) questionem o presente e aspirem a transgredir os seus limites".

<sup>3</sup> Originally published in Horizon, London, 1946.

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