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Big Brother, UniComp and the Circle: The Spectrum of Fear and Critique of Technological Developments in Dystopian Novels

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Big Brother, UniComp and the Circle: The Spectrum of Fear and Critique of Technological
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Contents

Introduction	4
Chapter 1: Technological Advancements, Technophobia and Techno-Criticism.....	7
Technological Developments in Chronological Order	7
A Brief Definition of Technophobia	9
The Techno-Criticism of Jacques Ellul	11
The Techno-Criticism of Carl Benedikt Frey	14
Concluding Remarks	18
Chapter 2: Mind Control and Surveillance: Big Brother is Watching You	19
Technology in <i>Nineteen Eighty-Four</i>	20
The Technocratic Control by Big Brother	22
Technophobia Displayed Through Winston and Julia	25
George Orwell's Techno-Criticism	29
Concluding Remarks	32
Chapter 3: Treatments and Tracking: Thank Uni.....	34
Technology in <i>This Perfect Day</i>	35
The Technocratic Control by UniComp	38
Technophobia Displayed Through Chip and Lilac.....	40
Ira Levin's Techno-Criticism	44
Concluding Remarks	46
Chapter 4: Privacy versus Transparency: Complete the Circle.....	48
Technology in <i>The Circle</i>	49
The Technocratic Control by the Circle	52
Technophobia Displayed Through Mae, Mercer and Kalden	56
Dave Eggers' Techno-Criticism	60
Concluding Remarks	62
Conclusion.....	64
Works Cited.....	69

Introduction

“Leiden students demand that university remove smart cameras from lecture halls” was a headline in *De Volkskrant*, on 7 December 2021. Both students and staff members were concerned about privacy violations because the smart cameras were able to register much more than just the number of bodies in a room. Although the cameras were not used to register specific characteristics of individual people, such as height and biological sex, they do have that option (De Jager). Students and employees of Leiden University protested and carried signs that read “Big Brother is watching you,” referring to the technocratic control of the populace in George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949). With increasing frequency, protestors use dystopian literature as a metaphor to express present-day fear of technology in the media. The headline of an article by *The Deep Dive*,¹ on 7 March 2022, read “Russia 1984: Citizens May Soon Be Completely Disconnected From The Internet” (Paull). The article describes how Russian citizens are disconnected from Western media both directly and indirectly by President Vladimir Putin’s regime. The war between Russia and Ukraine has caused “a new, dystopian iron curtain” (Paull). The situation in Russia has been compared to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by multiple sources.

Dystopian novels, such as *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, *This Perfect Day*, (1970) and *The Circle* (2013), often explore the usage of indoctrination of the masses in order to prevent protests. Frequently, the protagonists hold a critical perspective of the way in which technology is implemented as a controlling force in society and the acceptance of such practices by the cultural mainstream. The repressive technological elements within these dystopian novels are often referenced in protests because people recognise parts of these speculative descriptions of future societies in the society they live in. By conducting a close reading of such novels, through the lens of theories on the relationship between technology and humanity, it is possible to

¹ *The Deep Dive* is a Canadian website that contains articles presenting data on current events that will likely influence stock markets.

understand not only the specific repressive aspects of the fictional dystopian society, but also to recognise the close relationship between aspects of the dystopian fiction and experiences in daily life. In the here and now, readers have the potential to recognise in the fictional scenarios encountered by the protagonists of dystopian fiction their own thoughts about, and attitudes towards, the protagonists' fear of and rebellion against technological forms of control, such as the ability to influence people's thoughts through communication technology.

In the twenty-first century, governments and companies can use advanced techniques to retrieve information from citizens (Goddard). This thesis investigates how in dystopian novels the fear of technological developments is explored and expressed through the protagonists' thoughts, feelings and actions in relation to the technology in the novels. This thesis studies the portrayal of technology and fear in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Ira Levin's *This Perfect Day* and Dave Eggers' *The Circle*. This enables a study of the difference between fear of Big Brother, UniComp and the Circle in light of technological advancements that were made in the past seventy years and an analysis of the type of fear that is experienced by the characters, for example technophobia, a functional fear, or paranoia, a dysfunctional fear. This thesis argues that the authors of these three dystopian novels have respectively become more precise in their depictions of functional fear of technological control or techno-criticism, as technology has become more advanced and it has become more clear what exactly there is to be afraid of.

The first chapter studies various different perspectives on technology, one classic and influential mid-twentieth-century study, one important recent study, as well as others, such as Brosnan's study. The first perspective is from Jacques Ellul, who was an influential figure in his field and published "The Technological Order," in 1962. In his article, Ellul explains that "[t]echnique has become the new and specific *milieu* in which man is required to exist" (394). He states that since we are "[e]nmeshed in a process of technical development like our own, the possibilities of human survival are better served by more technique than less" (396). The second

perspective is from Carl Benedikt Frey, the author of *The Technology Trap* (2019). In his book, Frey demonstrates that “if there is one predominant factor underlying economic and social change over the past two centuries, it is surely the advancement of technology” (4). By comparing various sources, this chapter gives a brief overview of the technological advancements that were made during the past seventy years as well as the thoughts and fears these advancements have caused. In addition, this chapter also creates a theoretical framework for the following chapters.

The three analytical chapters present case studies of how dystopian novelists explore problems concerning privacy violation, technological control and indoctrination in an increasingly technocratic society. In doing so, these chapters focus on descriptions of thoughts and feelings of the main characters, the technological devices and the overall structure of society. Chapter one, on *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, discusses mind control and surveillance techniques and shows that the protagonist was afraid of Big Brother’s methods for invading lives and violating privacy. Chapter two explores how UniComp, in *This Perfect Day*, uses similar techniques but adds additional methods for tracking people and treating them with medication to aid the process of indoctrination. Chapter three, analysing *The Circle*, presents the reader with a protagonist who willingly chooses transparency above privacy and shows technophobia and techno-criticism through other characters. The three novels are compared in the conclusion of this thesis.

This thesis provides an insight into dystopian literature written by Western authors during the past seventy years. With this thesis I hope to show that the depictions of dystopian futures have changed through the years; while older dystopian novels have to imagine what kind of technology there would be in the future, newer dystopian novels can use existing technology and focus on the change in the culture that surrounds these devices.

Chapter 1

Technological Advancements, Technophobia and Techno-Criticism

This thesis investigates the portrayal of fear of technology in three dystopian novels. In order to do so, it is also important to classify important technological advancements. The novels that this thesis analyses were published over a period of nearly seventy years, also known as the Age of Automation; therefore, this chapter critically explores developments in communication technology from this period, as well as the effects they have had on the Western economy through, for example, the disappearance of jobs in sectors that were influenced by the coming of machinery and Artificial Intelligence. This thesis argues that the depiction of fear in these novels has become more precise because it corresponds with technological developments; therefore, it is essential to create an understanding of different types of fear. Thus, this chapter also addresses the differences between paranoia, technophobia and techno-criticism by exploring Mark Brosnan's study devoted to this subject. Lastly, this chapter discusses different perspectives on technology. This part of the theoretical framework is based on two main sources, namely, an influential article from Jacques Ellul, and a recent publication from Carl Benedikt Frey.

Technological Developments in Chronological Order

Many ground-breaking technological discoveries have been made in the twentieth century, such as the invention of the telephone, the radio, the television and the computer. The following section describes the impact of these inventions on Western society in chronological order. Firstly, at the end of the nineteenth century, the telephone was invented by Alexander Graham Bell in 1876 (Balbi 787). This enabled people to communicate through spoken conversations, which was an improvement over nineteenth century telegraphy, because communicating with others could be done faster and more directly.

While the first radio waves were sent in Italy in 1895, the first experimental radio stations went on air between 1919 and 1921 (Newby 12). The first commercial radio station was the KDKA, which was broadcasting in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 1920 (“KDKA”). Radio broadcasts were used to communicate information with a wider public, but visuals were still missing. The radio was soon followed by the first television image, which was demonstrated in 1925 by John Logie Baird, a Scottish electrical engineer (Newby 42). In 1936, the invention of the television was followed by the first national television broadcast by the BBC (Newby 43). Thus, by the end of the first half of the twentieth century, people were able to communicate with individuals through the telephone, but also address a larger audience via radio and television broadcasts.

After the invention of the television, it did not take many years for the first computer to be invented. Computers have been used since the 1940s, but these were not used by the average civilian. These first computers “lived a secluded life in large air-conditioned rooms with raised floors and locked doors in corporate or university research labs or government facilities” (MacKenzie 1). These computers were used by scientists and engineers who were “connecting relays with patch cords on an ENIAC (1940s), changing a magnetic memory drum on a UNIVAC (1950s), adjusting the JCL stack on a System/360 (1960s), or *grep*ing and *awk*ing around the *unix* command det on a PDP-11 (1970s)” (1).

Personal Computers have been in use since the 1980s, they moved “onto people’s desks in workplaces and, more important, into people’s homes” (MacKenzie 1). Mowery states that “[r]esearch on computer networking began in the early 1960s, roughly 15 years after the invention of the modern computer” (1371). Electronic mail (e-mail) has been in use since 1972 and was developed for the ARPANET, a network that “is widely recognized as the earliest forerunner of the Internet” (1372). It took time for services like e-mail to be in use by a wider

public. E-mail came in to use in different sectors during the 1980s and 1990s, such as government, universities, business and military usage.

According to Mowery, “[t]he invention of the WWW catalyzed the development of commercial content and applications by simplifying the Internet and providing a set of standard protocols for delivering a wide variety of content to almost any desktop. The manic commercialization of Internet content arguably began with the initial public offering of Netscape in August 1995” (1378). This has led to an increased usage of computers as it greatly increased their functionality.

The twenty-first century has seen an increase in the use of laptops, tablets and other portable computer devices. Additionally, the smartphone was invented, which enabled users to be connected to the internet anywhere and anytime. The smartphone created a way for people to have all the technological developments described above within the reach of their hands at all times. A smartphone can be taken and used anywhere, which allows users to use technology 24/7. Not every individual desires these possibilities, therefore, these technological developments also meant an increase in technophobia, which is addressed in the next section.

A Brief Definition of Technophobia

The Age of Automation has not only led to the implementation of new technology in society, it has also led to the arrival of a new phobia, namely, “technophobia”. This section explains what technophobia is and compares it with paranoia and techno-criticism.² The Age of Automation can be seen as a second industrial revolution in which manual labour has been replaced by computer driven machines and it “has meant diminishing opportunities for the American middle

² Besides technophobia and techno-criticism, there is also technophilia. Technophiles are people who believe in and worship technology and see it as the good that will bring humanity towards utopia. In the twentieth century a group of technophiles was called “the technocrats” and they began a socio-political movement in the United States that argued for the governance of a country by engineers as the most skilled and knowledgeable people to govern a new technological society.

class” (Frey 11). According to Isaacs, “Technophobia peaked in the Industrial Revolution” (625). A classic example of technophobes in history are the Luddites, these “were 19th century English textile workers who protested, by destroying mechanical looms, against machines that threatened their jobs” (Isaacs 625). While the Luddites were named after King Ludd, a mythical figure “reputed like Robin Hood to live in Sherwood Forest” (625), the name now carries a new meaning. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a Luddite is “[o]ne who opposes the introduction of new technology, esp. into a place of work” (“Luddite”).³ Thus, the name Luddite can also refer to a modern technophobe.

Modern technophobia, also known as “computerphobia” usually expresses itself through the avoidance of technology. According to Mark Brosnan, “[r]esistance to new technology in the form of avoidance of computers has been well documented within the literature; the term ‘technophobe’ or ‘computerphobe’ is used to describe individuals who resist using computers when given the opportunity to use them” (10). The concept of technophobia is based on anxiety caused by technology and a negative attitude towards using technological devices, such as computers. These psychological factors can cause an individual high levels of distress and prevent them from utilising electronics. There are rational fears related to computer utilisation, such as disappearance of jobs and increased exposure to radiation. Additionally, there are “irritational” fears which are often linked to technophobia.

These fears can cause excessive caution with and avoidance of computers. In a publication from 1990, Rosen and Weil describe technophobia through the following three aspects:

- (1) anxiety about current or future interactions with computers or computer-related technology;
- (2) negative global attitudes about computers, their operation or their

³ Critics of technocracy have adopted the name Luddite, or Neo-Luddite, as a banner of pride. An example of this is Theodore Roszak’s book *The Cult of Information: A Neo-Luddite Treatise on High-Tech, Artificial Intelligence, and the True Art of Thinking*, University of California Press, 1994.

societal impact; and/or (3) specific negative cognitions or self-critical internal dialogues during actual computer interaction or when contemplating future interaction. (qtd. in Brosnan 13).

The main difference between technophobia and paranoia is that technophobes are still able to function reasonably well within a technology based society, while paranoid people are unable to (Brosnan 13). For example, although conscious of the trackable information that it will leave behind, a technophobe will still use a debit card. However, a paranoid person would try to use cash as much as possible.

As briefly mentioned above, there are also rational fears related to electronics. These fears have been the reason behind the concept of techno-criticism. According to Viorel Guliciuc, one “could say, based on the advances in modern technology, that engineering has provoked dramatic changes in contemporary society; that we are living in a society of engineering. So, engineering could be of bold ethical, contextual, and cultural interest” (4). The rise of techno ethics and techno-criticism signifies “some ground fears and awareness of the human condition and future in a technologic society” (Guliciuc 4). The research that is presented in this thesis is in line with Guliciuc’s theory.

While paranoia is based on irrational fears and causes extreme behaviour, technophobia is also based on irrational fears but manifests itself in a less excessive manner. Techno-criticism and the study of techno ethics are both based on rational fears and these two are expressed through argumentation rather than behavioural change. This is discussed in more detail in the last two sections of this chapter.

The Techno-Criticism of Jacques Ellul

Since this thesis studies novels from the past seventy years, it is important to explore influential sources of techno-criticism from within this time period. The following section discusses

Jacques Ellul (1912–1994), a French philosopher and sociologist who produced an influential body of techno-critical philosophy in the middle of the twentieth century. Before publishing his article “The Technological Order,” in 1963, Ellul had written an influential book in French called *La Technique* (1954). In this book, Ellul explains that the term *technique* should be understood in its widest sense, as it is present in all areas of life. Additionally, he states that contemporary society is controlled by technique. At the time of writing the article, he was a professor in the Faculty of Law at the University of Bordeaux. In his article, Ellul studies the society he lives in and poses questions for the future of a technological society. He states that “[e]nmeshed in a process of technical development like our own, the possibilities of human survival are better served by more technique than less” (396). However, a technological society will never be able to fully eliminate “instinctive human values and powers” (397), and thus, according to Ellul, it is unnecessary to be afraid of a diminishment of social principles.

In his article, Ellul discusses whether man can master technique and whether a new society can include both technique and humanity. Although it may seem that someone who uses technique is automatically the master of it, according to Ellul, this is not the case. He explains this matter in the following manner:

We must remember the autonomous character of Technique. We must likewise not lose sight of the fact that the human individual is to an ever greater degree the *object* of certain techniques and their procedures. ... To say that man should remain *subject* rather than *object* in the technological society means two things, viz., that he be capable of giving direction and orientation to Technique, and that, to this end, he be able to master it. (398-399)

Even if there are people who are able to master technique, it still remains impossible to select someone who could be given the task to implement certain values into technology. As stated in the article, “the technical society is not, and cannot be, a genuinely humanist society since it

puts in first place not man but material things” (401). When technology takes a more prominent place in a future society, Ellul warns, human independence and ambition will disappear (402), this understanding is reiterated by Frey and Brosnan. During the past century, it has become increasingly apparent that it is necessary that someone has to intervene in order to keep control over the technological developments and technological order.

Later in the article, Ellul states that it is human beings’ shared responsibility “to occupy ourselves with the dangers, errors, difficulties, and temptations of modern man in the modern world” (403). Ellul wrote this article within a year after the Cuban Missile Crisis, when the world had believed itself to be on the brink of total annihilation by means of military technologies employed purely for destructive ends, thus, he stresses that someone needs to take action and that our whole civilisation has to be conscious of their usage of technology. Near the end of the essay, Ellul states the following:

In any case, it seems to me that we can set forth the following thesis: The further technical progress advances, the more the social problem of mastering this progress becomes one of an ethical and spiritual kind. In proportion to the degree that man extricates himself from the domain of the material, dominates it, and multiplies thereby the means of exploiting matter, the problem ceases to be one of human possibilities and limits and becomes one rather of knowing which man (or group of men) will exploit technical means, and what will be the enabling moral and spiritual qualities. (408-409)

With these remarks Ellul warns his readers for a society in which technology will be abused by people in power. In his essay, Ellul makes a remark that is also applicable to the dystopian novels that are studied in this thesis: “[i]t is only by making men conscious to what degree they have become slaves in becoming ‘happy,’ that there is any hope of regaining liberty by asserting themselves, perhaps at the cost of much sacrifice, over the Technique which has come to

dominate them” (410). Ellul’s techno-criticism addresses issues that are still very much applicable to the twenty-first century.

As Ellul explains it, all of humanity must realise that technology is no more than a complicated structure that can help reach a certain level of “comfort, hygiene, and ease” (410). Therefore, one should not dedicate one’s entire life to technology, but instead be able to refuse the usage of these electronics. At the end of his article, Ellul uses the following words to stress men’s position towards technology:

Man must be capable of questioning at every step his use of his technical goods, able to refuse them and to force them to submit to determining factors other than the technical, say, the spiritual. He must be able to exploit all these goods without becoming unduly attached to them and without becoming convinced that even his most imposing technical conquests are to be taken seriously. (411)

While Ellul wrote this article in 1962, as a contribution to a major international conference on the subject, his views are still applicable today. His techno-criticism is similar to the criticism that is expressed through dystopian literature that deals with technocratic control. Ellul’s theories and insights form an important basis for the analysis of the novels that are discussed in this thesis. Moving on to focus on techno-criticism by a twenty-first century critic and study his view on technocratic control.

The Techno-Criticism of Carl Benedikt Frey

Due to the more recent technological advancements, it is important to consider a more modern source of techno-criticism in addition to Jacques Ellul. The following section discusses Carl Benedikt Frey’s *The Technology Trap* (2019). Frey is the co-director of the Oxford Martin Programme on Technology and Employment at the Oxford Martin School, University of Oxford. In his book, Frey explains that “simplification was merely a step towards automation”

(2), as simplifying work often means replacing human labour with computers. Additionally, he describes that “nothing could be more natural than resisting a threat to one’s livelihood. For most citizens, their skills are their capital, and it is from that human capital that they derive their subsistence” (3). According to Frey, while some workers “paid the price for progress ... the vast majority of citizens in the West have accepted technology as the engine of their fortunes” (3). While it is true that working conditions have improved during the past century, one cannot get around the fact that numerous middle-class jobs have disappeared through the process of automation. Besides, not only middle-class workers but also the environment suffers from the situation. Technology needs electricity to work and most electricity is generated in ways that are harmful to the environment.

In his book, Frey discusses the effects automation has had on society. He states that “if there is one predominant factor underlying economic and social change over the past two centuries, it is surely the advancement of technology” (4). He describes technology as a new religion for the masses. People believed that there was nothing that technology could not do. Technology can be divided into two groups; labour-replacing technologies and enabling technologies. According to Frey,

Overall, technology served to make workers more productive and their skills more valuable, allowing them to earn better wages. And even those who lost their jobs to the force of mechanization had a greater abundance of less physically demanding and better-paying jobs to choose from as a consequence. In the age of artificial intelligence (AI), ... such optimism about technology can no longer be taken for granted. (5)

Frey addresses the change in structure of our society as jobs disappear and new ones become available. The Industrial Revolution brought new technology as well as “many political revolutionaries” (7). Until the end of the nineteenth century, technological developments that endangered jobs which demanded certain skills were opposed by the public. This was similar

to the Industrial Revolution, as “the losers to technology are demanding change” (12). New developments are not always welcomed into society because technology does not only create better working conditions, but causes job displacement as well.

While “several factors have shaped the trajectories of people’s wages ... over the grand sweep of history, technology has been the predominant factor” (Frey 224). Skill-based technological change causes new jobs for workers with sophisticated skills to take the place of jobs for workers without such skills. Replacing technologies put downward pressure on the wages of workers whose skills have become redundant. Thus, “computers were a key source of automation anxiety in the 1950s and 1960s” because they eliminated the jobs that were created during the Second Industrial Revolution for a less-skilled workforce (231). Frey claims that “[a]s engineers have expanded what computers can do, technological progress has continuously moved in the direction of favoring skills that require higher education, such as complex problem solving and creative thinking, because computers have taken over the more mundane tasks” (235). When “occupational skills” become redundant, workers lose the money and time they have invested into creating the human capital that was necessary for their previous job (248). Frey focuses his techno-criticism on the social effects the technological progress has on the lives of middle-class workers. He explains that “[w]hile unemployment is often cyclical and short-lived, the decline in the wages of the unskilled due to trade and technological change has been going on for several decades and will likely have more long-lasting effects on criminal activity than short-term unemployment does” (254). The situation for middle-class workers in America has become increasingly pessimistic due to the fact that “large groups in the labor market have been left worse off economically and in terms of subjective well-being” (256). However, according to Frey, “[w]e can be thankful that the Industrial Revolution was not brought to a halt by the Luddites, and like the Industrial Revolution, the age of automation has

delivered enormous benefits, especially for consumers” (293). During the past century, these benefits have caused a great improvement in the material standards of poor Americans.

Frey has devoted a chapter of his book to speculations about the future and the effects that Artificial Intelligence (AI) will have on society. As “[t]he employment prospects for the middle class crucially hinge upon what computers can and cannot do” (298–299), it is precisely these workers that will be affected by the coming of AI. It is striking to note that while computers have to be instructed to do a certain task by a programmer, AI can learn to understand a multitude of concepts on its own. Besides, “[a]s billions of people interact online, they leave digital trails that allow algorithms to tap into their experience” (303). In this way, people who are using the internet to gain knowledge are simultaneously adding to this knowledge through the trail that they leave behind. Frey states that “[a]s big data gets bigger, algorithms get better” (304). These algorithms improve as they are presented with more examples of human behaviour. Furthermore, “[l]ike steam, electricity, and computers, AI is a general purpose technology (GPT), which has a wide range of applications” (305). To name a few applications, at the present, AI is used for translation, image recognition, speech recognition, navigation and autonomous driving. There is a common misconception “that for a task to be automated, a machine must replicate the exact procedures of the worker it is intended to replace”, however, “[s]implification is mostly how automation happens” (311). In the near future, “the divide between the winners and losers from automation can be expected to grow further” (365). And “if governments gloss over the social costs of automation, their credibility will diminish” (366).

As is investigated in the next three chapters of this thesis, the technological developments of the past century, have brought on dystopian novels that deal with technocratic control from either government, companies or organisations. Frey’s theories form a useful basis for the analysis of dystopian novels as he describes the process of automation and its effects on society.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter has given a brief overview of the technological progress that was made during the past seventy years. Additionally, this chapter has discussed the differences between paranoia, technophobia and techno-criticism. Brosnan states that while paranoid people are unable to use technology, technophobes can still do this, albeit with some hesitation (13). Techno-criticism manifests itself in a more conscious use of technology and mixed feelings towards technological progress. According to Ellul, man must be able to use and refuse technology at the same time. Additionally, man must remain able to function without technology and try to stop the increasing dependence on technological advancements. In his recent publication, Frey also addresses this problem of dependence, however, he focuses on the dislocation of jobs and the shifting of social classes. While many people in the West believe that technology is the source behind their fortune, the less-skilled workers have paid the price. Through AI, the divide between the skilled and less-skilled workers will grow. As a result, governments need to treat this situation in the correct manner to prevent a social revolution. The following chapters of this thesis study the effects of technological progress on people as described in dystopian literature.

Chapter 2

Mind Control and Surveillance: Big Brother is Watching You

George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949) was written in 1948. At that time, communication was possible through telephone calls, radio broadcasts and television programmes. Computers did not exist, as such,⁴ and cameras were not much used yet for security reasons in western nations.⁵ In the process of writing his dystopian novel, Orwell imagined various new-fangled technologies and a controlling political power that misuses these technological developments. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the protagonist, Winston, and his new found love, Julia, are both portrayed as suffering from technophobia brought about by the misuse of technology as a vehicle for socio-political control. As such, the novel depicts Orwell's critique of technocratic control of the population as he describes, through his tragic protagonists, a society that suffers as a whole from an excessive amount of technological manipulation and a mechanised form of control that surrounds its citizens everywhere they go. This chapter investigates how Orwell expresses techno-criticism through the technophobic thoughts of the protagonists in his novel. Firstly, this chapter discusses the technological developments that Orwell imagined for his novel. The next section investigates how Big Brother functions as a technocratic power. The section that follows argues that the characters Winston and Julia portray technophobic behaviour because their thoughts are filled with fear of the communication technologies that surround them. The final section analyses the critique of technology that Orwell expresses in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* through, for example, the

⁴ Early "computers," like the British Colossus (1943), designed for codebreaking, should not be considered as computers in the contemporary sense of the word. The IBM 610 can be considered the first modern computer. It came onto the market in 1957 for an immense price. Olivetti's Programma 101 was issued in 1965 and was one of the first computers affordable to the public.

⁵ The first CCTV system was designed by the Soviet scientist Léon Theremin and appropriated for use by the Russian authorities in 1927. The first commercially available CCTV system in America (Vericon) came onto the market in 1949.

encoding of Big Brother's regime and its technology with allusions to practices of real-life authoritarian states of his time.

Technology in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Nineteen Eighty-Four includes technological developments that play an important role in structuring the plot of the novel and social order in the dystopian society of Oceania. Before investigating the attitude the characters have towards these new technologies, it is essential to discuss these technologies first (see also Luegenbiehl's earlier essay). One of the most important technological developments in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, is the telescreen. A telescreen is "an oblong metal plaque like a dulled mirror" (3). It "could be dimmed, but there was no way of shutting it off completely" (4). What sets it apart from the television that was invented in 1936, is that it functions like a two-way television and "received and transmitted simultaneously" (4). The telescreen is a technological device that takes away any privacy that one might desire at home or at work, as "[a]ny sound that Winston made, above the level of a very low whisper, would be picked up by it; moreover, so long as he remained within the field of vision which the metal plaque commanded, he could be seen as well as heard" (4). Winston is unable to know when he is being watched, because the Thought Police "could plug in your wire whenever they wanted to" (5). As a result, "[y]ou had to live – did live, from habit that became instinct – in the assumption that every sound you made was overheard, and except in darkness, every movement scrutinised" (5). That one can be watched at all times through a telescreen is exemplified when Winston participates in the obligatory fitness exercises in front of the telescreen in his apartment. During these exercises someone on the telescreen screams directly at him because he was not bending low enough. According to Posner, "[t]he telescreen is a powerful metaphor for the loss of privacy in a totalitarian state" (15). Unlike security cameras in public spaces and the watchful eyes of managers in office buildings, the telescreen

also takes away the privacy of one's own home. Without the ability to isolate themselves from society, citizens of Oceania also lose their space to relax, rewind and express their thoughts and feelings openly, without fear of repercussions. This constriction of lived experience under surveillance will be further elaborated on in the next section, which explores the workings of Orwell's Thought Police in more detail.

The citizens of Oceania are not only deprived of their privacy, they are also submitted to indoctrination through technocratic control. There are two developments in technique that Orwell constructs that enable the Party to control Oceania's history to a very large extent, namely, the Speakwrite and the concept of Rewriting History. The Speakwrite is an important invention that Orwell devised for his novel; it is a device that lets one speak out loud in order to create or change a written text. Winston uses this device in his job at the Records Department of the Ministry of Truth. His job is to alter paragraphs in old newspapers that are no longer in line with the constructed history that the Party creates in order to make their government policies seem consistent with the progress of events. Winston participates in Rewriting History, which is based on an important scheme the Party executes. By changing the documents that contain written records of past events, the Party can change the past.

In the novel, Winston reflects on this concept of Rewriting History and states that "[i]f the Party could thrust its hands into the past and say of this or that event, *it never happened* – that, surely, was more terrifying than mere torture and death?" (37). Rewriting History is used for the indoctrination of the masses as it erases any proof for historical facts that disagree with the Party's protocol. Newspapers can be rewritten to make it seem as if Big Brother had made a correct prediction on the development of the constant war or to update the production statuses to create the illusion that the country's economy is always doing better than it actually is. The idea behind this is that "if all records told the same tale – then the lie passed into history and became truth" (37). Although Rewriting History may sound like an impossible task, it is made

possible through the use of the Speakwrite. The concept is vital to the functioning of the Party and this is also reflected in a part of the Party slogan: “[w]ho controls the past, ... controls the future: who controls the present controls the past” (37). The idea that the execution of this Party slogan is almost effortless, is a cause for concern, both in the novel as well as for readers of the novel.

Thus, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the telescreen, the Speakwrite and the concept of Rewriting History are inventions that are corrupted by the Party, enabling them to carry out strict policies that involve manipulating thoughts and memories of citizens with no regards to their privacy.

The Technocratic Control by Big Brother

Although the regime of Big Brother would not be successful without the aid of the technological developments explored in the previous section, Oceania uses other, non-technical, forms of control. The following section investigates the concepts of Thoughtcrime, Crimestop and Doublethink as well as the workings of the Thought Police and the Spies. Ellul’s theory that the word “technique” refers not only to technological equipment but to any kind of organised system controlled by humans to achieve effects is important for the analysis of Orwell’s novel. In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell introduced the concept of Thoughtcrime. This is described as “the essential crime that contained all others in itself” (21). Thinking one single thought that is not in agreement with the Party’s protocol, is a way of committing Thoughtcrime. This concept does not only limit one’s freedom of speech, it also influences the way people can reflect on their surroundings. According to Clune, “[t]he novel describes a prohibition against the obvious, against perceiving the surface of the world” (31). In the novel, Winston writes in his diary that “Thoughtcrime does not entail death: thoughtcrime IS death” (30). As a result, he panics because his diary is filled with thoughtcrimes and he is afraid that the Thought Police

will come and read what he has written. People who are arrested by the Thought Police are often vaporized: they disappear during the night and are removed from all records. Although Winston wants to avoid being arrested, he cannot stop himself from committing Thoughtcrime.

In order to prevent Thoughtcrime, the Party initiated Crimestop: another concept that refers to the brainwashing of people. Crimestop is in fact a technique that the citizens of Oceania must use to prevent themselves from having dangerous thoughts. These dangerous thoughts can lead citizens to deny the Party's proclamations and protocol. It is important for the Party to stimulate citizens to stop thinking these thoughts as soon as possible, as one thought that is in disagreement with the Party might lead to another. Winston has much difficulty with this because not everything the Party says is in accordance with the natural order of things.

An Orwellian concept that is closely related to Crimestop is Doublethink. Clune describes Doublethink as "[t]he painstaking construction of a worldview with no connection to reality" (38). Doublethink is the concept of accepting new truths, forgetting what you knew before and, in the end, forgetting that this process took place in your mind. Through this concept, all citizens accept it when the truth is rewritten by the Party and broadcasted to the citizens as a universal truth that was never any different. Clune states that "[t]he Party's thoroughgoing abolition of history is another way of making the surface of the world strange. This abolition means that ordinary people have trouble inserting the shapes collected in their memories into a coherent life narrative" (38). Winston experiences this as well when he thinks about his childhood. He can remember some vague details but not create a complete picture in his mind. It is a distressing idea that Big Brother's regime effects not only the daily life of the citizens of Oceania, but also their private thoughts and memories.

Citizens of Oceania who cannot perform Crimestop and Doublethink are likely to commit Thoughtcrime and become a possible danger to the regime of Big Brother. In order to find out who these people are, the Thought Police use telescreens to keep all citizens under

surveillance at all times. As an effect of this, Winston does not only feel as if he is being watched when a telescreen is nearby, but also through illustrations of the eyes of Big Brother. The eyes of Big Brother are always watching him and the slogans of the party are always on his mind; “[o]n coins, on stamps, on the covers of books, on banners, on posters and on the wrapping of a cigarette packet – everywhere. ... Asleep or awake, working or eating, indoors or out of doors, in the bath or in bed – no escape” (29). Even though Winston can be fairly sure that the eyes of Big Brother on a poster in the street are not actually surveillance cameras, the feeling that he is being watched cannot leave him alone as long as he is in London.

The idea that the Thought Police is always watching Oceania’s citizens is not only caused by the presence of telescreens. This is also caused by the Party’s brainwashing of children to become spies for the Thought Police. The Spies is an organisation for children that acts almost similar to scouts, however, the children “were systematically turned against their parents and taught to spy on them and report their deviations” (140). When Winston is helping out a neighbour, he witnesses that her children are turning into Spies and thinks to himself that in a few years “they would be watching her night and day for symptoms of unorthodoxy” (26). As a result of such organisations, children are brainwashed to look for enemies of the State and betray them. A member of the Spies who denounces their own parents to the Thought Police is regarded as “child hero” by the Party (27). As a consequence, “[i]t was almost normal for people over thirty to be frightened of their own children” (27), because “[t]he family had become in effect an extension of the Thought Police” (140). Thus, the Party not only uses telescreens but also the eyes of children as a medium for surveillance.

In order to carry out the regime of Big Brother successfully, the Party uses concepts such as Thoughtcrime, Crimestop and Doublethink to control the thoughts and actions of the citizens of Oceania. The citizens are brainwashed and if this system fails and someone is able to think freely and deny the Party’s protocol, there is the Thought Police that can see everyone

at any time. Besides the usage of telescreen, the Party even employs children in the shape of Spies. As a result, there is no way to avoid Big Brother's technocratic control of Oceania's citizens. Through the concepts explained above, Orwell's novel adheres to Ellul's theory that the technological order does not only consist on the basis of technology but on techniques as well.

Technophobia Displayed Through Winston and Julia

The following section explores the thoughts the protagonist Winston has about his life, the state of Oceania and his relationship with Julia. This section argues that technophobia is displayed through three key aspects, namely, Winston's memory, his romantic relationship and his outlook on life.

One of the ways in which the Party oppresses the citizens of Oceania, is by manipulating their memories. Through the constant Rewriting of History citizens lose a sense of context around their personal memories. However, Winston is able to remember events that he is no longer allowed to remember. For example, "as Winston well knew, it was only four years since Oceania had been at war with Eastasia and in alliance with Eurasia. But that was merely a piece of furtive knowledge which he happened to possess because his memory was not satisfactorily under control" (36). Winston still has control over his memory and sometimes struggles with remaining in control of his own thoughts. He is able to do this because he is aware of the Party's indoctrination methods:

his mind slid away into the labyrinthine world of doublethink. To know and not to know, to be conscious of complete truthfulness while telling carefully-constructed lies, to hold simultaneously two opinions which cancelled out, knowing them to be contradictory and believing in both of them; to use logic against logic, to repudiate morality while laying claim to it, to believe that democracy was impossible and that the Party was the

guardian of democracy; to forget whatever it was necessary to forget, then to draw it back into memory again at the moment when it was needed, and then promptly to forget it again: and above all, to apply the same process to the process itself. (37)

The novel, describes how Winston experiences the return of old memories to his mind when an old shopkeeper shows him the room above his shop: “the room awakened in [Winston] a sort of nostalgia, a sort of ancestral memory” (100). Winston notices that “[t]here’s no telescreen” and it seemed to him that in such a room one could be “utterly alone, utterly secure, with nobody watching you, no voice pursuing you” (100). His mind shifted back to a different time, maybe even to a time he does not know from his own memories but from what he was told by his parents or an older generation. Winston knows that the Party tries to play tricks with his memory and, because he is aware of it, he is able to stop it to a certain extent. However, citizens who are not aware of Big Brother’s methods for memory manipulation are unable to resist the technocratic control.

Winston does not remain by himself throughout the novel; he meets a woman named Julia, while he is on illegal business in a proletarian neighbourhood. Winston discovers that Julia was watching him in the street and was immediately afraid that she would work for the Thought Police or as an amateur spy. When he gets home he has difficulty with thinking about everything he has seen because the telescreen is continuously broadcasting patriotic programmes, “with the voice from the telescreen nagging at his ears he could not follow the train of thought further” (107). He is nervous after seeing Julia for the first time because he is afraid that she will report him to the Thought Police. When it turns out that they are on the same side of the matter, he knows that he can trust her. However, his nerves cannot go away because he is now afraid of being discovered while they are together, as their relationship is illegal. Thus, when he travels to or from their meetings, he has to make “sure by cautious backward glances that he was not being followed” (124). Julia does know how to reassure him when they are together, she knows

some hiding spots where there are no hidden microphones. When they are alone together, Winston is able to confess that “[he] imagined that [Julia] had something to do with the Thought Police” (127). This shows that in Oceania, an individual cannot trust anybody at first glance. Although Julia has gained Winston’s trust, it does make him feel uneasy when “she talked with an open jeering hatred,” even though “he knew that they were safe here if they could be safe anywhere” (128). According to Suvin, Julia is “identified as rather mindless, though very adept at living in the moment, her only independent activity is a pursuit of pleasure as revenge against the rulers. Thus she alternates as, first, personification of sexual pleasure and private sabotage in drab Oceania, and second as nymph-like guide to a nature outside political control” (176). Winston and Julia fall in love and because of that they are willing to take some carefully calculated risks, such as talking in the street where their conversation had to be “suddenly nipped into silence by the approach of a Party uniform or the proximity of a telescreen” (134). The relationship between Winston and Julia portrays how the influence of Big Brother can make one act and think nervously about situations that would normally be focused on love and comfort, however, their relationship also shows that total control is impossible.

Another element of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* that is significant in the context of technophobia, is Winston’s outlook on life within this dystopian society. At one point in the novel he compares his situation to a game of chess: “[i]t was like trying to make a move at chess when you were already mated. Whichever way you turned, the telescreen faced you” (115-116). This thought captures the hopelessness of the situation that Winston is in and at the same time gives the reader an insight in the reasoning behind it. Winston’s desperation is partly to blame on the presence of the telescreens in each space. As there is no way to escape the telescreens, there is also no place to think clearly and no place to come up with a plan to break free from this situation. Another thought of Winston that is quite telling is the following: “Anything that hinted at corruption always filled him with a wild hope” (131). Winston lives

with such hatred for Big Brother and the Inner Party that he can only experience some hope for the future when something happens that seems to work against the system and their technological control.

Although there are moments in the novel when Winston can experience some optimism, most of the work is filled with a more pessimistic world-view. At some point, Winston is conversing with Julia and the two share the following conversation:

‘We are the dead,’ he said. ‘We’re not dead yet,’ said Julia prosaically. ‘Not physically. Six months, a year–five years, conceivably. I am afraid of death. You are young, so presumably you’re more afraid of it than I am. Obviously we shall put it off as long as we can. But it makes very little difference. So long as human beings stay human, death and life are the same thing.’ (142)

Winston is afraid that the future cannot bring him any change because human beings will not change for the better over time. He even goes as far as saying that at this point life and death are the same. The constant fear of Big Brother, the Party and their methods and devices has led Winston to a pessimistic outlook on life, which is the only sane outlook on life for someone in his position who has become conscious of how Big Brother’s regime works.

Although Winston’s memory is not completely under the control of Big Brother, he does suffer from the current situation to such an extent that he is unable to think clearly and place all his thoughts in the right context. Even his relationship with Julia is affected by their technocratic surroundings in such a way that they can never be completely at ease when they are together. Overall, Winston’s technocratic surroundings have made it impossible for him to keep a more optimistic attitude towards his life and the future of Oceania. Thus, in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Winston’s character is used to show readers that an environment filled with technology and lies has a negative influence on different aspects of someone’s life.

George Orwell's Techno-Criticism

Nineteen Eighty-Four not only describes future technocratic control of every facet of human lived experience in a dystopian society; it is also a techno-critical treatise that aims to intervene in a broader public debate concerning the nature of human-technological relations. This section discusses George Orwell's attitude towards controlling powers, the ethics of politics, and the usage of communication technology for the execution of technocratic control.

In Oceania, it remains unclear whether Big Brother is someone who really exists, or a made-up person employed by the government to act as the face behind their protocols. The country is controlled by an Inner and Outer Party; a group of people that has to focus on creating new rules of conduct. These rules are carried out through the assistance of the Thought Police and the Spies. As a way to distract the citizens from what is happening in their own country, Oceania is always at war with either Eastasia or Eurasia. Citizens believe that when they follow the rules and do their jobs, they will function as part of a bigger scheme that strives for the common good. When Winston receives a copy of the book written by Goldstein, he reads that “[w]ar, it will be seen, not only accomplishes the necessary destruction, but accomplishes it in a psychologically acceptable way” (200). The controlling power that Orwell warned his readers about is the power of an authoritarian government to edit one's way of thinking about a situation, or about life in general. The Party preaches that war is peace and as a citizen of Oceania it is impossible to object to this as one has been living amidst an ongoing war but has experienced peace throughout their life. It is important to have a government that the people can trust and that will not abuse their power. Additionally, in a time of rapid electronic development, it has become important that the government understands both the benefits and dangers that come with excessive usage of technology.

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the government runs into two problems. The first of these is that they are unable to read people's minds without their consent. The second problem is that

they are unable to kill a large number of people in a very short time without creating too much disorder in society. These problems prove that the Big Brother regime is to some extent dysfunctional as these problems portray an inhumane way of thinking. Orwell warns the readers of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* for the idea that one person, supported by an Inner and Outer Party, is able to create an unhealthy and conservative country where the citizens cannot experience freedom or true happiness.

Speculative fictions often function as a laboratory in which writers can experiment with potential scenarios of human civilisation by extrapolating real-life developments into the future (Merril 60). In Orwell's text, the Big Brother regime becomes a literary vehicle through which to study the ethics of politics. He wrote *Nineteen Eighty-Four* "at a time when new thinking in forensic psychiatry coincided with scientific breakthroughs in neurology to bring questions of criminality, therapy and mental health to the forefront of the popular imagination" (Mullen 258). According to Mullen, "Orwell the socialist suspected that a hermetic, disengaged interiority, which insisted on cognitive self-sufficiency, might reduce an individual subject's capacity for autonomous thought by cutting off access to empirical reality and inconvenient truths" (265). As previously mentioned, the Big Brother regime cuts people off from historical context which creates a distance between them and their personal memories. As a result of the combination between this distance and other methods of indoctrination, a citizen of Oceania is less able to form their own thoughts and to develop critique on the status quo. Another element of critique that Orwell expresses in his novel is pointed at the dehumanising of human beings, for example through cutting down their instincts. His work states the following: "For how could the fear, the hatred and the lunatic credulity which the Party needed in its members be kept at the right pitch, except by bottling down some powerful instinct and using it as a driving force" (140). The Party has dehumanised the citizens of Oceania and has created automatons that must experience an excessive amount of fear in order to keep them in line with the protocol. At the

end of the novel, O'Brien explains to Winston in room 101 that "[o]bedience is not enough. Unless he is suffering, how can you be sure that he is obeying your will and not his own? Power is in inflicting pain and humiliation. Power is in tearing human minds to pieces and putting them together again in new shapes of your own choosing" (279). The theory that O'Brien explains is highly immoral for a political party to carry out as protocol. Orwell wants to make it clear to the reader that removing one's capability to have autonomous thoughts, cutting down human instincts, and inflicting pain and humiliation as a way to keep citizens under control and a government running, is exceptionally unethical.

Nineteen Eighty-Four expresses Orwell's techno-criticism of post-war socio-political developments, such as the military alliance and nuclear weapons programme, in narrative form.⁶ In his novel he speculates about a future in which technology has developed in such a way that it can be used not only to humanity's benefit but it can also create a new danger. In one short passage, Orwell is able to address problems that are still relevant today:

in the past no government had the power to keep its citizens under constant surveillance. The invention of print, however, made it easier to manipulate public opinion, and the film and the radio carried the process further. With the development of television, and the technical advance which made it possible to receive and transmit simultaneously on the same instrument, private life came to an end. Every citizen, or at least every citizen important enough to be worth watching, could be kept for twenty-four hours a day under the eyes of the police and in the sound of official propaganda, with all other channels of communication closed. The possibility of enforcing not only complete obedience to the will of the State, but complete uniformity of opinion on all subjects, now existed for the first time. (214)

⁶ In his essay "Why I Write", Orwell writes the following: "Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, AGAINST totalitarianism and FOR democratic socialism, as I understand it" ("Why I Write").

At the time he wrote this, the communication techniques he describes were not invented yet. However, he was able to ponder what these developments could mean for the future and how they could be abused. In his work, Orwell explains that technological developments can lead to privacy violation and indoctrination of the masses. If there is nobody to stop the development or usage of such techniques at a point where it is still used ethically responsible, our society can develop into one that resembles the situation in Oceania (see also Jacques Ellul's essay "An Aspect of the Role of Persuasion in a Technical Society").

Orwell criticises the organisation of society through multiple aspects. He warns his readers for any way, shape or form of Oligarchical Collectivism. He addresses dilemmas that deal with psychological manipulation and the disruption of human instincts. Although he was speculating about a future that seemed far away from his point of view, his novel is very appropriate for readers of our time. All in all, Orwell criticises technological developments that can lead to mind control and state surveillance which endangers human life as we know it.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter has explored how the telescreen, the Speakwrite, and the concept of Rewriting History are used by Orwell to create an environment that has the necessary technological developments to create a dystopian society. The Party abused these inventions and disregards the privacy of their citizens and their human rights. Besides technology, the citizens of Oceania are also indoctrinated to obey concepts such as Thoughtcrime, Crimestop and Doublethink. The Thought Police and Spies represent the ever-watchful eye that rests on the people and keeps them from violating the laws. In addition to the privacy violation in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Big Brother also tries to control the memories of Oceania's inhabitants. Winston still has some power over his memory, but he is unable to think about the entire situation. The Party's regime has even affected personal relationships, which is portrayed through Winston's relationship

with Julia. The technocratic control causes them to experience stress when they think about one another and even when they are together. In total, life in Oceania has made Winston a pessimist regarding his personal future and the future of all human life. Orwell used *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as a way to share his critique towards technological developments. He shows the reader what can happen when technology gets out of hand and is abused by an oligarchical power that strives to control the minds of the people and use 24/7 surveillance as a way to ensure this.

Chapter 3

Treatments and Tracking: Thank Uni

Ira Levin's *This Perfect Day* (1970) is a dystopian novel in which the order of society largely relies on a single computer. At the time of the novel's publication, computers had been in use for about thirty years, but had not yet moved onto people's desks or into people's own homes. Levin's novel speculates how a computer, named UniComp, could come to control the whole human race and make decisions about people's jobs, their homes and even what their family life looks like. In *This Perfect Day*, Levin describes a society in which people have lost most of their human characteristics, in terms of emotional and psychological individuality, and most of their freedom. The humans in Levin's novel cannot follow their passions and do not have personal ambitions, because UniComp plans every aspect of their lives for them. They cannot let emotions guide them through important life decisions as the computer will make these decisions. Additionally, in order to uphold the status quo, the emotions of citizens are reduced by special monthly treatments and they are tracked via a system with bracelets.

A central theme in this novel is the question: what is humanity, when humanity is lost? The novel suggests that the essence of humanity is the individuality of every human being. The members of the society, which is called the Family, have no individuality and at the centre of their society lies UniComp. While the citizens consider UniComp an independent system, it is actually controlled by Wei (one of the founders) and a group called the Programmers. The novel's protagonist, Chip, experiences technophobia and has become critical of the functioning of the Family and wants to rebel against UniComp. By becoming a member of a group of rebels, he meets his wife Lilac. She motivates him to fight against UniComp. *This Perfect Day* portrays Levin's own techno-criticism as he speculates what may happen to humanity should nobody put a stop to what he believes computers can do to govern society and what humanity will let them decide in relation to its future. This chapter explores Levin's criticism through a study of

his imagined technology in combination with the chosen political system in which he placed the characters. The first section focusses on the technological developments that Levin imagines in his novel. The next section considers UniComp, Wei and the Programmers as the heart of the Family's political system, a technocratic government. The third section investigates the portrayal of technophobia through Chip and Lilac's acts and thoughts. The final section is devoted to Levin's critique of digital communication technology as well as new developments in technical medicine that is expressed through *This Perfect Day*.

Technology in *This Perfect Day*

In Levin's novel, the society is controlled by one colossal and complex computer and a group of programmers. Besides this UniComp, there are scanners, bracelets, treatments and small telecomps that Levin imagined to keep the Family in line. In *This Perfect Day*, UniComp is only described by characters who either know more than most of the members of the Family, such as Papa Jan, Wei and other programmers, and characters who doubt the functioning of the computer. One of these characters who expresses doubt, is the protagonist, who Papa Jan has given the nickname Chip.⁷ At the beginning of the text, Papa Jan wants to show his grandson Chip what UniComp really is. Chip shows his doubts because they will be breaking the rules. Papa Jan persuades Chip with his reasoning:

'Look: who does UniComp belong to?' 'Belong to?' 'Whose is it? Whose computer?'
 'It's – it's the whole Family's.' 'And you're a member of the Family, aren't you?'
 'Yes...'
 'Well then, it's partly your computer, isn't it? *It* belongs to *you*, not the other way around; *you* don't belong to *it*'. (20)

⁷ In *This Perfect Day*, everyone has a "nameber". The protagonist is called "Li RM35M4419" but his grandfather has named him Chip, which comes from the saying "Chip of the old block" as Chip resembles his grandfather (4). The name also has an allegorical meaning as chips are a part of technological devices.

UniComp was created to serve the Family instead of controlling it; however, at this point, UniComp, and the philosophy that created it, has changed human society in a negative way. When Chip is receiving reduced treatments, he is able to think about the computer and the position that humans have in the universe: “‘Pre-U members,’ he said, ‘gave up efficiency – in exchange for freedom. And we’ve done the reverse.’ ‘We haven’t done it,’ Lilac said. ‘It was done *for us.*’” (125). As Lilac states, the people that are living under UniComp’s control, are not those who decided to give up their freedom; through the treatments they are receiving, most people do not realise that their purpose in life has become to work and live efficiently instead of to strive for personal goals and happiness.

Another character who is aware of her loss of freedom is Julia; near the end of the novel, she has the following conversation with Chip:

‘You have no idea how I *resent* that damned computer!’ Chip laughed. ‘I do!’ he said. ‘That’s just the way I feel.’ ‘It’s a monster straight out of hell,’ Julia said. [...] ‘It’s a monster, all right,’ Chip said, throwing away his cigarette. ‘At least the way it is now. One of the things I want to try to find out is whether, if we got the chance, we could change its programming instead of destroying it. If the *Family* were running *it*, instead of vice versa, it wouldn’t be so bad.’ (249)

It has become ambiguous whether UniComp is operated by people or whether the people have become servants of the machine. Rawlins poses the question: “What can we fall back on if we create thinking machines that eventually outpace us” (120)? Chip, who has never forgotten what Papa Jan told him, has a less bleak view on computers than Rawlins’s question suggests. Chip agrees that UniComp is a monster but tells Julia that he has hope that reprogramming could work and that the computer could finally work for the Family. The idea that computers can be used for a different, possibly better, purpose will be dealt with in more detail in another section.

UniComp could not control the population without the help of the scanners, bracelets, treatments and telecomps. Every member of the Family wears a bracelet made from unbreakable chain. The bracelets carries a code, also known as a “nameber.” It is a personal combination of letters and numbers that make up a person’s name and identification number, hence nameber. Everywhere around the world there are scanners, these are used to give members access to certain areas, buildings, food, materials and services. The scanners can also be used to retrieve information about the person wearing the bracelet. Another way of retrieving this information, is by using a telecomp. This is a small and portable computer that is used by supervisors who check on the Family members. The bracelets are also used to carry information about a certain member’s treatments. The bracelet does not only allow or disallow a member access to the Medicenter, a member has to scan their bracelet in order to get a treatment of which the substance has been precisely calculated for them. Members that believe the treatments to be good and helpful are relieved when someone can get an extra treatment as a result of portraying strange behaviour or doubts about UniComp.

At the beginning of the novel, Chip has doubts about UniComp and wonders whether the treatments always work, thus his supervisor comes to check on him and decides that Chip is “getting an extra treatment during his lunch hour tomorrow, probably a bit of tranquilizer.” ‘Oh, what a relief,’ Chip’s mother said” (9). Later in the novel, Chip has a conversation about the treatments with other members that are receiving reduced treatments. They ask him what he believes the treatments consist of:

‘Vaccines, enzymes, the contraceptive, sometimes a tranquilizer—’ ‘*Always a tranquilizer,*’ King said. ‘And LPK, which minimizes aggressiveness and also minimizes joy and perception and every other fighting thing the brain is capable of’ ... ‘Treatments help us,’ Chip said. ‘They help Uni,’ the woman across the table said. ‘And

the Wei-worshippers who programmed Uni,' King said. 'But they don't help us, at least not as much as they hurt us. They make us into machines.' (63)

The treatments reduce exactly those aspects of human beings that create a difference between people and robots, such as emotions, passions and ambitions. Combined with the bracelets and scanners, the treatments turn the members of the Family into automatons that are regulated and supervised by UniComp.

The Technocratic Control by UniComp

UniComp and the programmers control the Family members by drugging them and brainwashing them with certain ideas, namely that there are no individuals in the Family and each member must strive to fulfil their fullest potential. According to Pitt, *This Perfect Day* describes:

a quasi-utopian society of completely contented people. There are no nations, everyone is one 'Family'. There are no individuals, and there are just eight names, four for boys and four for girls, and any other identification is by a nine-character alphanumeric 'nameber'. Choosing is frowned upon as an act of selfishness. Everyone looks the same, male and female, and everyone enjoys a communal living. (3)

People are trained to reply with "thank Uni" whenever someone thanks them for their help, as they are taught that the computer provides everything (8). In the novel, Chip meets a member, Karl, who does not follow all the rules as he is drawing illegally. Chip tells his supervisor about Karl and afterwards he has doubts about what he has done, but "he knew of course that he had been right. How could it be wrong to help a sick brother? *Not* to tell would have been wrong, to keep quiet as he had done before, letting Karl go on drawing members without bracelets and getting sicker and sicker" (51). This is an example of how the members are indoctrinated to take care of each other and in doing so act as spies for UniComp, which is similar to the way in

which the children were trained to work as Spies in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. As Chip is different from most members, he has doubts about UniComp's agenda:

To help them or not to help them? Which was wrong, which was right? He *knew* which was wrong: not to help them, to abandon them as if he weren't his brother's keepers at all. But he wasn't sure that helping them wasn't wrong too, and how could both be wrong? (77)

Chip can see the difference between what he was taught by UniComp and what he actually believes in. This is also portrayed by the fact that Chip "thought often about wanting something, wanting *to do* something" (29). However, "the whole idea of wanting one particular classification seemed silly and pre-U" (29). Chip wants to think for himself and thus struggles with UniComp's brainwashing. In *This Perfect Day*, UniComp has successfully brainwashed most of the population, however, the novel also shows that some people are able to resist this, which creates a hopeful message for the readers.

Part of UniComp's principles is that the computer strives for everyone to reach their fullest potential, as calculated by the computer's algorithms. The characters discover this when they find out that UniComp does not only control life, but also death:

'We *don't* die ...' Lilac said, and looked from Chip to King. 'That's right,' Chip said. 'We're *made* to die. By Uni. It's programmed for efficiency, for efficiency first, last and always. It's scanned all the data in its memory banks ... and it's decided that sixty-two is the optimum dying time, better than sixty-one or sixty-three and better than bothering with artificial hearts. ... Our replacements are trained and waiting, and off we go, a few months early or late so that everything isn't too suspiciously tidy. Just in case anyone is sick enough to be able to *feel* suspicion.' (118)

The technocratic control by UniComp is aimed at efficiency rather than humanity. The novel fictionalises ideas of social engineering put forward by scientists in America in the post-WWII

period.⁸ The computer decides what people do, where they live, how many children they may have, and many other facets of daily human life. UniComp's indoctrination of individuals to form an efficiently operating society does not work on everyone. In the first chapter of the novel, the reader is introduced to the concept of "incurables"; "Members who – get sick and – leave the Family. Run away and take off their bracelets" (5). Even though Chip becomes such a member, he is hesitant at first:

She stopped him and asked for his bracelet. He raised his wrist, and his bracelet was pressed tight and rubbed. He touched it; there was smoothness instead of his nameber. That and his sightlessness made him suddenly feel disembodied; as if he were about to drift from the floor, drift right out through whatever walls were around him and up into space, dissolve there and become nothing. (61)

Chip was brought up with the idea that the bracelet was part of his identity and the only way for the computer to track and provide for a members of the Family. His hesitance shows the reader how influential the indoctrination and treatments really are. *This Perfect Day* portrays a society that is governed by a computer; UniComp and the programmers use technocratic control to keep track of the members as well as indoctrination and drugs as techniques to dominate over a large population.

Technophobia Displayed Through Chip and Lilac

The protagonist of *This Perfect Day* doubts the government of UniComp and he and some other main characters portray technophobia. This section explores a fear of computers, tracking and treatments that Chip and Lilac share. The first part of *This Perfect Day* shows the readers that Chip was different from a young age. As a little boy he was already able to think about matters

⁸ These ideas are described in an essay by Alexandra Rutherford in which she "[places] the socially engineered visions of the good life promoted by the Technocracy Movement and by Skinner on an intellectual and ideological continuum to amplify and explore American attitudes toward psychology, technology, and social engineering during the middle decades of the 20th century" (290).

and wonder whether they were right or wrong. In order to stop these thoughts, he was given treatments with extra tranquilizers. When he meets Karl and discovers that he has an illegal hobby, Chip's first response was not that it was wrong and it took him some time to tell his supervisor about Karl. Chip is spotted by a group of incurables who live in his city and who have tricked the system into giving them reduced treatments. They send him a secret note that surprises Chip "with its knowledge of his past and disturbed him with its secrecy and its 'You are only partly alive'" (56). Chip was aware that he was being tracked by Uni but did not know others were spying on him as well. The idea of being only partly alive is intriguing for Chip and he waits for a note with instructions and attends a group meeting. When his treatments are reduced he quickly falls in love with Lilac, but this becomes difficult for him. UniComp tells members who their partners are and whether they can have children or not. The government tries to control all relationships between members of the Family.

Chip knew that UniComp could track him and know his whereabouts, thus, when his treatments are reduced for the second time he wants to find a way to escape. His frustration starts to grow as "[a]wareness came, more of it each day. Memory came, in sharper, more anguishing detail. Feeling came. Resentment of Uni grew into hatred; desire for Lilac grew into hopeless hunger" (166). He goes to a place on the beach where he feels no one can see him and "he stopped, and alone and naked between ocean and soaring cliffs, clenched his hands into fists and hit at the cliffs; cried 'Fight it!' at the clear blue sky and wrenched and tore at the untearable chain of his bracelet" (167). He wants to be freed from UniComp's control and the bracelet that comes with it. Chip starts to hate the bracelet as it is the tool that is used to limit his options through tracking him and denying access to certain areas. Chip's hatred for UniComp and the bracelet resembles Winston's hatred for Big Brother and the Party's surveillance system from *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The only option he has is to plan his escape from the mainland and to try to flee from UniComp's control.

During their escape from the mainland and when they arrive on the island, Chip and Lilac are still afraid of UniComp and are unable to tell what is real and what is fake. When Chip and Lilac reach the beach, they have to wait for an opportunity to cross the water and get to the island. They are unable to find a boat and are stuck in a haze, as a result Chip wonders: “What if the haze remained for days, for nights, blocking them at the very brink of freedom? Was it possible that Uni had *created* it, intentionally, for just that purpose?” (210). When they find a boat on the beach, their doubts return and Chip “frowned at the boat – so white and red and empty and convenient in the bright morning haze-free sun. ‘It’s a trick of some kind,’ he said. ‘A trap. It’s too convenient. We got to sleep and wake up and a boat’s been delivered for us. You’re right, I *don’t* believe it’” (211). They eventually get to the island safely; their boat is then stolen and they are picked up by Dover,⁹ who works for Immigrant’s Assistance. Chip and Lilac live on the island for a while and try to get their lives going in this new situation that is completely strange to them. Chip cannot get over what is happening on the mainland and wants to stand up to UniComp and free the whole population from its control and the treatments. When he has shared his thoughts with a group of other ex-members, Karl, who is now known as Ashi, replies: “‘Everything you’re saying,’ Ashi said, ‘everything you’re thinking – “fight Uni” – it’s been said before and thought before. And tried before. A dozen times’” (240). Chip does not give up his plans but starts to work hard on the preparation for his attack on Uni. Right before he leaves, Chip and Lilac ponder whether it could be possible for Uni to place spies on the island. If the island functions as a prison that Uni uses as a place to hide away incurables, it could also place some members on the island to keep everything in order. Chip thinks to himself that “[t]here couldn’t be any espions, any people around who were secretly on Uni’s side, because they would need treatments to stay that way” (264). This thought calms him down a bit and he continues his plan to attack Uni. This part of the novel shows that the element of

⁹ Like Chip, Dover’s allegorical name reveals part of his character’s function within the plot as he provides the vehicle between UniComp’s territory and the island.

doubt has never left Chip and Lilac, not even when they thought they were as far away as possible from Uni's tracking and surveillance.

When Chip arrives at the UniComp headquarters, Wei and the other programmers try to persuade him to join their side and help with the government but Chip's views are strong enough to resist these ideas. Wei tries to explain to Chip why the Family needs UniComp and the programmers:

'Of course it seems wrong at first,' Wei said, 'but the ultimate decisions *have* to be made by untreated members, and untreated members can't and shouldn't live their lives on cakes and TV and *Marx Writing*.' ... 'Why can't the Family make its decisions itself?' Chip asked. Wei chewed and swallowed. 'Because it's incapable of doing so,' he said. 'That is, of doing so reasonably. Untreated it's – well, you had a sample on your island; it's mean and foolish and aggressive, motivated more often by selfishness than by anything else. Selfishness and fear.' (306)

Chip does not fall for Wei's arguments and is not charmed by Wei's theory about perfection. Wei proposes that Chip gets his eyes fixed in order for them to be the same colour and Chip tells him that he finds this unnecessary, Wei is shocked by his response:

'an imperfection that can be remedied? That we must *never* accept.' [Wei] cut steak. '“One goal, one goal only, for all of us – perfection”,' he said. 'We're not there yet, but some day we will be: a Family improved genetically so that treatments no longer are needed; a corps of ever-living programmers so that the islands too can be unified; perfection, on Earth and moving “outward, outwards, outwards to the stars”.' (309)

In order to straighten his thoughts, Chip discusses Uni's control with other people as well. The others were clearly brainwashed more successfully than Chip. As Karl tries to persuade Chip by stating that “[a]ny system the Family set up on its own would certainly be a lot less *efficient* than Uni is” (310), Chip does not fall for this argument and continues to plan an attack on

UniComp. He hides his own thoughts and pretends to be converted by Wei; he even lets the doctors fix his eyes. At the end of the novel, Chip, by himself, blows up the computer and kills Wei at the same time. Thus, Chip's refusal to subscribe to the dominant ideology of Wei and UniComp remained strong enough to act upon it and end UniComp's control. According to Alan Sinfield, "Despite their power, dominant ideological formations are always, in practice, under pressure, striving to substantiate their claim to superior plausibility in the face of diverse disturbances" (41). As such "the social order cannot but produce faultlines [cracks of division in its surface illusion of unity] through which its own criteria of plausibility fall into contest and disarray" (45). Sinfield explains that "dissident potential derives ultimately not from essential qualities in individuals (though they have qualities) but from conflict and contradiction that the social order inevitably produces within itself, even as it attempts to sustain itself" (41). UniComp tried to use both technology and medicine to create humans who would behave like automatons, however, it turned out to be impossible to remove all human characteristics from the entire population.

Ira Levin's Techno-Criticism

This Perfect Day explores topics of technocratic control of citizens that are still relevant today and Levin shares his own critique of the development of technology with his readers by writing about a futuristic dystopia. In *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), Herbert Marcuse described how the world around him was changing in the early 1960s. His description of modern America resembles the fictional world of *This Perfect Day*, which was published in 1970:

A comfortable, smooth, reasonable, democratic unfreedom prevails in advanced industrial civilization, a token of technical progress. Indeed, what could be more rational than the suppression of individuality in the mechanization of socially necessary but

painful performances; the concentration of individual enterprises in more effective, more productive corporations. (1)

Levin depicted a world in which all individuality was lost and the complete civilisation lived in a state of unfreedom. One could even say that UniComp's way of government turns the entire world population into one big more effective, more productive corporation.¹⁰ According to Marcuse, political power in his time "[asserted] itself through its power over the machine process and over the technical organization of the apparatus" (3). This is certainly true for the government in *This Perfect Day*, as all the technological developments happen under the watchful eye of UniComp. UniComp's control can only be stopped through the demolition of the computer itself, as "[t]he government of advanced and advancing industrial societies can maintain and secure itself only when it succeeds in mobilizing, organizing, and exploiting the technical, scientific, and mechanical productivity available to industrial civilization" (Marcuse 3). Throughout the novel, it seems as though UniComp could never be stopped because it has secured itself awfully well against possible revolts. As discussed in the first chapter of this thesis, Ellul argued that technology can only be controlled if there is someone willing to stop technology from controlling humanity, and willing to deal with the consequences of this action. The ending of Levin's novel is more hopeful than other speculative novels as it ends with Chip's successful attack on Uni's headquarters.

This Perfect Day portrays a possible worst case scenario as the developments have clearly gotten out of hand; however, as it was based on actual fears it provides an accurate portrayal of 1970s technophobia. The novel portrays the negative side to becoming one Family with all its members being the same; without any form of individuality. The members lost their

¹⁰ The idea that a society can be organised like a corporation to maximalise efficiency was also shared by Skinner, whose novel *Walden Two* shows that "[a]n environment engineered to reinforce prosocial behavior provided the means of maintaining social order and creating the good life" (Rutherford 298). Skinner promoted the concept of Social Engineering as "[his] conviction that all behavior is controlled by the environment, and by genetic codes comprised of genes for behaviors that were also at one time selected by the environment, led him to advocate the need to acknowledge this control and to manipulate the environment to affect behavior in specific ways" (298).

freedom because the computer decided everything for them. Lilac even states that “Machine are at home in the universe; people are aliens” (65). Another crucial element of the novel, is that Levin not only addresses mechanical technological developments but combines these with medicine and genetics as well. According to Pitt, “[t]he genre of science fiction, as an extrapolation into the future, is often rooted in the fears of its present” (1). When Levin wrote *This Perfect Day*, in 1969, “these fears included nuclear holocaust, communist hegemony, and technophobia, in particular chemistry, genetics and information technology” (1). These three forms of technophobia are all present in *This Perfect Day* as chemistry is used for the treatments, genetic manipulation is used to “enhance” the members of the Family and the government controls the stream of information that reaches the members. Thus, Levin’s work is an excellent portrayal of 1970s technophobia as it speculates what would happen if no one controls the developments and if no one asks whether technology is still used in an ethical way.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter explored the dystopian technocratic society in Levin’s *This Perfect Day* through a discussion of the technology, government, characters and the technophobic fears that the novel is based on. Levin’s UniComp uses scanners, bracelets, treatments, telecomps and above all a complex computer to govern and control the entire world. These different elements are all utilised to turn humans into automatons that can be regulated. These regulations are based on certain ideologies, for example the idea that individuality is selfish and efficiency is society’s ultimate goal. Another technique that is used to control the people is brainwashing through the withholding of information and indoctrination at schools, at workplaces and in television programs. In *This Perfect Day*, the entire population of the mainland is dominated by UniComp and the programmers. Chip, among other characters, doubts the government and is able to resist being completely brainwashed. As Chip and Lilac have their treatments reduced by tricking the

system, the readers can read the criticism of characters that are more “alive” than the other members of the Family. They portray signs of technophobia and are often unsure what they can believe and what not. Levin’s work ends on a more positive note than other major works of speculative fiction, because Chip is able to destroy the computer. The novel addresses actual technophobic fears that were present during the 1970s as Levin speculates what would happen if those fears are realised. *This Perfect Day* acts as a critique on the growing dependence on computers, as well as the developments in the branches of chemistry and genetic engineering.

Chapter 4

Privacy Versus Transparency: Complete the Circle

Dave Eggers' *The Circle* (2013) introduces the reader to a multi-media company called the Circle. This company can be compared to Meta, the parent company of Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp. However, the Circle does not only provide one platform that combines all services available on the internet, it also develops new technology. When Eggers wrote this dystopian novel, smartphones, laptops, and social media were already being used by a large part of the western population. Eggers' novel speculates on what would happen when all these services were combined and owned by one company that could potentially control everyone's use of such digital services. Although, in *The Circle*, Eggers describes characters that are in awe of the Circle and want to be a part of it, he also describes characters that portray certain elements of technophobia. When circlers, the people who work at the company, sign up to be tracked with chips, bracelets and even cameras, not all characters are willing to do the same. The company is led by three men called the Wise Men and two of these men, Bailey and Stenton, are fully immersed in the company and only leave the campus for business trips. The third Wise Man, Ty, is almost never present as himself; instead, he walks around the campus dressed as his alter ego named Kalden. While Bailey and Stenton present Mae Holland, the protagonist, as an exemplary circler to the outside world, Kalden approaches her as well. He tries to show her the negative sides of the Circle and tells her that the Circle cannot become whole. Kalden, Mae's parents and Mae's ex-boyfriend Mercer are characters who portray technophobia and express techno-criticism in Egger's novel. In Eggers' novel, these characters emphasise the negative aspects of this possible future in which a company tries to create totalitarian control, as the Circle plans to make it compulsory to have a Circle account and be connected to all their different services, which would enable the company to control people's internet experiences and influence their lives in numerous ways. This chapter studies Eggers'

techno-criticism by exploring the function of technology, the company and the characters' relation to these controlling powers in his novel. The first section analyses the chips, bracelets, screens and cameras that are used in *The Circle*. The next section studies the controlling power of the Circle. The third section investigates the main characters and their portrayal of technophilia, technophobia, and techno-criticism. The final section focuses on the technological critique that Dave Eggers expresses through his novel. An analysis of *The Circle* shows that Eggers did not have to imagine new technology for a dystopian future, instead he focused on describing a shift in internet culture.

Technology in *The Circle*

In *The Circle*, Eggers speculates about the future of technology, especially technology that is created to simplify digital procedures but simultaneously keeps a backlog of all information that an individual puts into the system. The Circle has created a “Unified Operating System, which combine[s] everything online that had heretofore been separate and sloppy—users’ social media profiles, their payment systems, their various passwords, their email accounts, user names, preferences, every last tool and manifestation of their interests” (21). The narrator employs the simile of using different cars for different jobs to ridicule the current situation in the real world: “The old way—a new transaction, a new system, for every site, for every purchase—it was like getting into a different car to run any one kind of errand” (21). While the narrator wants to mock the concept of using different systems, the figurative language that is used portrays an unrealistic scenario as no one can use a different car for each different errand. The reader learns that the narrator might actually mock both the old way and the new way at the same time.

Besides the Unified Operating System, the Circle uses different technologies to gather more information about its users. While Levin also imagined the use of bracelets in his novel,

in which the members of the Family had to make their bracelet touch upon every scanner they came across in order to enable UniComp to track their whereabouts and activities, in Eggers' world bracelets are used in combination with chips that are to be swallowed and will remain inside an individual. The chips are supposed to settle within their bodies and will thus be with them forever. In Levin's novel, although it was prohibited, the bracelets could be removed which would free someone from UniComp's tracking eyes. The Circle has come up with a solution for this supposed problem, a circler can take off the bracelet but cannot remove the chip from within their bodies. After Mae arrives at the Circle, she has to be hooked up to the company's healthcare system. She goes to the health centre on campus and after asking her some questions "[t]he doctor held out a silver bracelet, about three inches wide" (154). Mae puts the bracelet on and, according to the doctor, she and the bracelet both have to get used to each other. The doctor then hands Mae a smoothie and after she has finished it the doctor explains the following: "you just ingested the sensor that will connect to your wrist monitor. ... It'll collect data on your heart rate, blood pressure, cholesterol, heat flux, caloric intake, sleep duration, sleep quality, digestive efficiency, on and on" (155). The bracelet and sensor are used to prevent unhealthy habits and detect illnesses when they are still in an early stage. Although it seems like Eggers' bracelet is an improved smartwatch, the bracelet in combination with the sensor creates a system that can track one indefinitely as the sensor cannot be switched off and the bracelet should not be taken off. Beckman states that the Circle "is a company working at the forefront of new technologies, developing not just the tools but also the culture in which all dimensions of life can, and increasingly are, subject to control" (538). That the company is also focused on creating a culture in which oversharing¹¹ is seen as normal, is a vital part of the novel. Eggers critiques the reversal of the order of things; instead of people using tools to increase their comfort, the tools have started to structure people's lives and determine both the

¹¹ Oversharing is "to tell people too much personal information about yourself" according to the *Cambridge Dictionary*. Oversharing is a phenomenon that often occurs on Social Media.

individual and collective lived experience. This is also what Ellul meant when he wrote about the Technological Society; a society that is structured around the use of devices. The novel portrays how other circlers convince Mae to take part in the Circle's own culture and structure her life around the Circle's devices, this will be discussed in more detail in another section.

Screens also play an important role in *The Circle* as Mae gets a new screen for every new aspect of the Circle that she has to work with. While the screens in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* worked both ways, the Circle uses separate screens for different functionalities and uses miniature surveillance cameras as well as private cameras to watch the circlers on campus and other civilians off campus. Part of the Circle's culture and work ethic entails the need to be on top of everything. The employees need different screens for each task they must perform, which is supposed to enable them to work on multiple tasks simultaneously. When Mae starts her job at the Circle, she is in Customer Experience and has a computer with a screen that shows the questions and complaints from customers. Although her job is to reply to these messages, she is soon given more screens as she also has to take active part in campus life and social media. Later, she is given more screens so she cannot only see how she is doing, but also keep track of the newbies that are working in her pod. At first she is hesitant and has some difficulty getting used to having numerous screens and thus working on several tasks at the same time. As with most aspects of the Circle, Mae does become accustomed to it over time. Performing different tasks at the same time becomes routine to her, however, this is not a positive development as it makes humans more like automatons. The element of building a routine is part of Egger's critique in *The Circle*.

Another aspect of the Circle's culture that Mae has to become comfortable with, is being surrounded by camera's and eventually wearing one herself. The Circle has developed cameras that are so small that one can easily be worn around a person's neck; doing so is called "going transparent." When Olivia Santos, a government representative, goes transparent, she states:

“You’re either transparent or you’re not. You’re either accountable or you’re not. What would anyone have to say to me that couldn’t be said in public? What part of representing the people should not be known by the people I’m representing” (210). As a result of these ideas, more people want to wear cameras to publicly broadcast their lives. The Circle starts to supply these cameras to more representatives and officials around the world. According to Beckman,

The fact that this corporation comes to stand as the one representative of such control culture can be linked to the novel’s dystopian vision where Facebook, Google, the NSA, and all the other mappers and regulators of information and desire have merged into one totalitarian entity. Indeed, just as the novel pushes, just a little, the realities of the levels of control that technology is capable of today—a necklace with a camera that will make your life transparent to all, a bracelet that is connected with a sensor in your body that measures and informs your employer of your mood, your stress levels, your hydration levels, your blood cells, your step count, and your posture—the idea of all controlling entities merging into one in the age of multinational mega companies is just a classic extra twist of contemporaneity typical of the genre. (539–540)

While Orwell and Levin had to imagine new technologies, Eggers was able to turn to existing inventions and only needed to tweak them a little to make them fit his desired specifications. The comparative familiarity of the technology in his novel, allows Eggers to focus more on the specific culture that grows up around these inventions and begins to structure the daily lived experience of the company’s employees.

The Technocratic Control by the Circle

Besides technology, slogans play an important role in Eggers’ novel; they function to implement technocratic control. The slogans will remind most readers of dystopian fiction of the party slogans from Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, as they are used to indoctrinate the

population and can contain opposing thoughts. The concept of slogans is introduced at the very beginning of the novel when Mae sees them as she enters the campus. On the campus, the “quiet red cobblestones were replaced, occasionally, by tiles with imploring messages of inspiration” (1) such as “Dream,” “Participate,” “Find Community,” “Innovate,” “Imagine” and “Breathe” (3). The connotative power of these words and phrases instil in Mae the belief that she is now becoming a part of “the only company that really mattered at all” (3). By portraying Mae’s thoughts in these words, the narrator suggests that these thoughts are the effect of propaganda and not the actual state of things as other companies, such as small businesses, also existed.

Mae is also introduced to the focus on humanity on campus; Dan tells her the following:

We want this to be a workplace, sure, but it should also be a *human* place. And that means the fostering of community. In fact, it *must* be a community. That’s one of our slogans, as you probably know: *Community First*. And you’ve seen the signs *Humans Work Here*—I insist on those. That’s my pet issue. We’re not automatons. This isn’t a sweatshop. We’re a group of the best minds of our generation. *Generations*. And making sure this is a place where our humanity is respected, where our opinions are dignified, where our voices are heard—this is as important as any revenue, any stock price, any endeavor undertaken here. (47)

The fact that Dan feels the need to explicitly state that the circlers are not automatons suggests an anxiety of the circlers actually becoming automatons. Mae is taught how to make her work more personal and how to ensure that the customers are aware that they are not talking to a robot. Dan explains that “[n]o robots work here. We never want the customer to think they’re dealing with a faceless entity, so you should always be sure to inject humanity into the process” (49). Dan’s statements can be perceived as ironic because the concept of injecting is artificial and the necessity to inject humanity reveals that the default situation is less than human. At a later point in the novel, Dan stresses the Circle’s focus on humanity in a different way: “I just

want to emphasize the *community* aspect of this job. We see this workplace as a *community*, and every person who works here is *part* of that community. And to make it all work it requires a certain level of participation” (179). The community aspect of the Circle makes it seem as though the company gives the staff members a lot of freedom, however, participation has become a requirement to work there. The requirement to participate in outside work activities suggests an inhumane work ethic at the Circle and although humanity and community seem to go hand in hand at the Circle, it takes Mae some time to get used to these aspects of her new job.

Besides revealing the dominant company culture of rigid organisation and artificially induced humanity explained above, there are more ideological notions that the Circle expresses through its propaganda. The culture that the Circle promotes is conveyed through slogans such as “ALL THAT HAPPENS MUST BE KNOWN” (68), “TO HEAL WE MUST KNOW. TO KNOW WE MUST SHARE” (151) , and “*We don't delete at the Circle*” (205). These slogans are used as a means to cajole circlers to, go transparent, for example, or to share all their medical details with the company, or to place all their photos and videos in the Circle's cloud. Readers will likely doubt the sincerity of these slogans and will not be influenced by their rhetoric into understanding them as expressive of a cultural ideal. At the same time, the reader witnesses the process of Mae's indoctrination into Circle culture and will begin to doubt her judgment of the world around her as she increasingly subscribes to the Circle's dominant ideology. At one point, Mae talks to Bailey about going transparent and Bailey says: “that everyone should have a *right* to know everything, and should have the *tools* to know anything” (288). At the meeting where Mae goes transparent, there are many circlers present and Bailey tries to influence their ways of thinking by putting new slogans on large screens: “SECRETS ARE LIES,” “SHARING IS CARING,” and “PRIVACY IS THEFT” (305). This can be seen as the second round of indoctrination that is present in the novel. It is remarkable that in terms of their rhetoric, these

slogans resemble those from *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.¹² These slogans are used to support the idea that everyone should be transparent and share all of their experiences, conversations and thoughts with the world. Especially the idea that privacy is a crime might appear very strange to readers but portrays how Mae's beliefs have altered while working at the Circle. As Mae saw the other circlers adapt to the company's slogans, it made sense to her to do the same. She was influenced both by her superiors and her surroundings to view the slogans as universal truths.

The next round of indoctrination through the use of slogans is focused on the completion of the totalitarian aspect of the Circle. For this next round of spreading thought controlling messages, the Circle falls back to its original manner of displaying the slogans as “[o]ne day, in new tiles all over campus, cryptic messages had appeared: THINK COMPLETION and COMPLETE THE CIRCLE and THE CIRCLE MUST BE WHOLE” (325). The idea that the Circle behaves as an enclosing barricade is introduced through these slogans; the title and cover image of the book already hinted at this idea. According to Beckman, “entering the narrative reveals that the title has an allegorical dimension, as the increasingly all-encompassing power of the Circle threatens to encircle all dimensions of the characters' lives, as well as the globe in its entirety” (537–538). At this point in the novel, the Circle controls not only financial procedures, social media, and tracking systems, but also influences the democratic government of the United States and world domination both economically and politically. At the end of the novel, when the circle is completed, the technocratic control of the Circle has become totalitarian.

¹² The slogans from *Nineteen Eighty-Four* were “War is Peace,” “Freedom is Slavery” and “Ignorance is Strength” (6).

Technophobia Displayed Through Mae, Mercer and Kalden

There are multiple characters who express feelings of doubt towards the technology utilised by the Circle. This section focuses on Mae, her ex-boyfriend Mercer and one of the Wise Men, who is named Ty, but who presents himself to Mae as Kalden.¹³

At first, Mae is surprised by what the Circle can do and is slightly hesitant with new technological devices and systems as she has doubts about giving up her privacy. However, she quickly leaves her doubts behind and adopts the ideology of the Circle. Mae's character development reveals what can happen to a person susceptible to propaganda such as the slogans that were discussed in the previous section. Mae's naïve attitude towards the Circle is represented well in the following description of the narrator, focalizing through Mae:

Outside the walls of the Circle, all was noise and struggle, failure and filth. But here, all had been perfected. The best people had made the best systems and the best systems had reaped funds, unlimited funds, that made possible this, the best place to work. And it was natural that it was so, Mae thought. Who else but utopians could make utopia? (31)

Although Mae seems to have a naïve personality at the beginning of the novel, she does develop some doubts about the Circle's ideology during the first half of the text. For example, when her personal details are used to display a new programme, she thinks to herself: "what had so mortified her during Gus's presentation? She couldn't put her finger on it. Was it only the surprise of it? Was it the pinpoint accuracy of the algorithms" (126)? At this point, the reader regains some respect for Mae, as she portrays some healthy scepticism of algorithms.

The reader's respect for Mae's independent mind may well be lost again, soon after, when Mae falls for the trap that the Circle has set up:

¹³ Besides these characters, Mae's parents also portray technophobic behaviour and Mae's friend and colleague, Annie, also struggles with the morals of technological control at the very end of the novel. This section will not focus on them, as their thoughts and beliefs play a minor role compared to the other three characters.

It occurred to her, in a moment of sudden clarity, that what had always caused her anxiety, or stress, or worry, was not any one force, nothing independent and external—it wasn't danger to herself or the constant calamity of other people and their problems.

It was internal: it was subjective: it was *not knowing*. (195)

For Mae, the big revelation is that she can only live without anxiety when she has the tools to know everything she wants to know. By presenting this revelation the novel presents a broader philosophical question about the human drive for knowledge and shows that an obsession with knowledge can become a form of madness. If a person becomes obsessed with knowing all, which is impossible, they will likely become paranoid, which is what is happening to Mae. She is completely taken in by everything the Wise Men tell her and the technology they show her. She might need some time to adjust, but after wearing cameras and monitors on her body for some time “she [feels] incomplete without them” (335). Just as the humans in Levin's *This Perfect Day* became inseparable from their bracelets, Mae now shares these beliefs and her indoctrination is complete.

Mercer, Mae's ex-boyfriend, is portrayed as a technophobe who has critical thoughts about the Circle's dominant culture and who does not go along with the new developments, like most characters do. One could say that despite the narrator's portrayal of his fear of and irritation with technology, Mercer is actually a techno-critic because he shares arguments against technological developments with Mae and her audience. Mercer compares a conversation with Mae to a “third-party assault” and says the following to her: “Every time I see you, there's a hundred other people in the room. You're always looking at me through a hundred other people's eyes” (132). According to him, the Circle's “tools have elevated gossip, hearsay and conjecture to the level of valid, mainstream communication” (133). This causes a shift in communication that creates a breach between users of technology and those who avoid this. To a reader it may seem that Mercer is not only addressing Mae, but also talking to the

reader directly when he says that “the tools you guys create actually *manufacture* unnaturally extreme social needs. No one needs the level of contact you’re purveying. It improves nothing. It’s not nourishing. It’s like snack food” (134). As most of the tools that are present in *The Circle* also exist, sometimes in a different shape or form, in our current society, Mercer does not only make Mae aware of the issues that these tools bring but the reader as well.

The novel comes to a point where Mercer shares his thoughts via letters that he writes to Mae. One of these contains the following message:

If things continue this way, there will be two societies—or at least I hope there will be two—the one you’re helping create, and an alternative to it. You and your ilk will live, willingly, joyfully, under constant surveillance, watching each other always, commenting on each other, voting and liking and disliking each other, smiling and frowning, and otherwise doing nothing much else. ... I also hope, though I realize how unlikely it is, that somewhere down the line, when the triumphalism of you and your peers—the unrestrained Manifest Destiny of it all—goes too far and collapses into itself, that you’ll regain your sense of perspective, and your humanity. Hell what am I saying? It’s already gone too far. What I should say is that I await the day when some vocal minority finally rises up to *say* it’s gone too far, and that this tool, which is far more insidious than any human invention that’s come before it, must be checked, regulated, turned back, and that most of all, we need options for opting out. We are living in a tyrannical state now. (370–371)

Mercer’s words can be interpreted as a warning to Mae and the other circlers, but also to people who live in the twenty-first century in general, the novel’s readers. Near the end of the novel, Mercer compares himself and the people who live like him to “refugees” and “hermits” who live off the grid, because according to him this is what will become of people who reject technological control. He states that he expects “some second great schism, where two

humanities will live, apart but parallel. There will be those who live under the surveillance dome [Mae is] helping to create, and those who live, or try to live, apart from it” (436–437). As Mercer is an important character in the novel, his techno-criticism might not only portray the thoughts of his character, but those of the author as well. The final section of this chapter discusses techno-criticism in more detail.

The last character that plays an important and interesting role in the novel is Kalden/Ty. Paradoxically, he is both an engineer and a technophobe; he shows the reader that one can shift from Mae’s side to Mercer’s side in the technological debate. His two different identities each present a different stance on technology. At first, he expresses his thoughts in a light manner as portrayed in the following conversation between Kalden and Mae: ““You really think this is a good idea?’ ‘You don’t?’ He shrugged and drained half his glass. ‘That guy just concerns me sometimes’” (217). He expresses his fears of technological progress in a more direct way in the following conversation with Mae:

‘You can’t do this. ... this is the last step towards closing the Circle, and that can’t happen.’ ‘What are you talking about? This is the whole point. If you’ve been here so long, you know more than anyone that that’s been the goal of the Circle since the beginning. I mean, it’s a circle, stupid. It had to close. It has to be complete.’ ‘Mae, all along, for me at least, this kind of thing was the fear, not the goal. Once it’s mandatory to have an account, and once all government services are channeled through the Circle, you’ll have helped create the world’s first tyrannical monopoly. Does it seem like a good idea to you that a private company would control the flow of all information? That participation, at their beck and call, is mandatory?’ ‘You know what Ty said, right?’ ‘Mae heard a loud sigh. ‘Maybe. What did he say?’” He said the soul of the Circle is democratic. That until everyone has equal access, and that access is free, no one is free. It’s on at least a few tiles around campus.’ (404)

It seems ironic that Mae, who does not yet know that Kalden and Ty are the same person, used Ty's words as a response to Kalden's arguments. Although his arguments might easily convince the reader, they can no longer convince Mae and as a result Kalden's worst fears become reality at the end of the novel. He states the following:

There used to be the option of opting out. But now that's over. Completion is the end. We're closing the circle around everyone—it's a totalitarian nightmare. ... everything [people] have done will be recorded, tracked, logged, analyzed—it's permanent. Then, when they're old enough to vote, to participate, their membership is mandatory. That's where the Circle closes. Everyone will be tracked, cradle to grave, with no possibility of escape. (486)

This idea of a totalitarian nightmare is an vital element of Eggers' speculation about the future of technology and the relationship between technology and society. Through these three main characters, Eggers is able to display multiple sides of the technological debate and express possible concerns for the future.

Dave Eggers' Techno-Criticism

The Circle acts as an instrument for the author to call the reader's attention to current societal issues¹⁴ as well as speculate about future issues that may arise as a result of technological developments. Eggers has written a hyper-real dystopian novel that focusses on morality and a shift in culture instead of imagining big technological developments. As discussed in the previous section, characters such as Mercer and Kalden play an important role in the portrayal

¹⁴ An example of a current societal issue is the influence social media has on Western population. For example, the distribution of harmful content, this "issue has become a talking point recently with the racist abuse of footballers, revenge porn and cyberflashing, and Covid disinformation being highlighted as key safety concerns for social media companies to address" (*BBC* "Tech giants"). Another current issue is the increasing number of children on social media, for example children of five years old who watch videos on TikTok, a 13+ platform (*BBC* "TikTots"). However, not only these children, but social media users in general "are vastly overconfident in their abilities to pick out truth from fiction" (*BBC* "TikTots"). *The Circle* stresses the unhealthy effects that social media culture can have on individuals and society in general.

of technophobia and techno-criticism. As Dave Eggers explores social media and technological developments that already exist, “[his] novel is a useful tool to raise awareness for our rapidly changing social codes, especially in educational contexts of media literacy” (Däwes 110). In the novel, Mae’s character is used to show the reader how one can become ignorant towards privacy violation through a form of brainwashing. The novel raises awareness for a brainwashed response towards techno-criticism. When Mercer is being chased by people, cameras and drones, he drives himself off a bridge. After this event, Bailey approaches Mae and tells her that

People wanted to help. They *tried* to help. *You* did. And certainly there would have been thousands more, if he’d let them. If you reject humanity, if you reject all the tools available to you, all the help available to you, then bad things will happen. You reject the technology that prevents cars from going over the cliffs, and you’ll go over a cliff—physically. You reject the help and love of the world’s compassionate billions, and you go over cliff—emotionally. (468)

Through his explanation, Bailey makes it seem like Mercer caused all of his problems on his own. However, as a reader one knows that most of these problems were caused by the Circle or even by Mae herself. Mercer was enclosed by the Circle and the only option to opt out was to kill himself. According to Däwes, “[t]he fact that [Mercer] is driven into a literal abyss by the outraged digital crowd may demonstrate Eggers’s dystopian cynicism, but it does not contribute to aesthetic complexity” (111). However, it does stress the absurdity of the dystopian society and emphasises the importance of an option to opt out.

Besides the necessity of the option to reject a company’s services, Eggers also highlights the need for certain rights. Kalden is used to convey this message at the end of the book:

He handed Mae a piece of paper, on which he’d written, in crude all capitals, a list of assertions under the headline “The Rights of Humans in a Digital Age.” Mae scanned

it, catching passages: “We must all have the right to anonymity.” “Not every human activity can be measured.” “The ceaseless pursuit of data to quantify the value of any endeavor is catastrophic to true understanding.” “The barrier between public and private must remain unbreachable.” At the end she found one line, written in red ink: “We must all have the right to disappear.” (490)

Kalden’s list calls the reader to consider their own usage of technology and their own rights. According to Däwes, Kalden’s character is reduced to “a wooden puppet of authorial intent when he spells out the message in detail” (111). Whereas Eggers can use both Mercer and Kalden to spread his message to a wide variety of readers. Since both characters tend to over-explain their thoughts, readers from all sorts of backgrounds will be able to follow their reasoning and understand the problems they address. Thus Eggers’ over-explaining in the novel might have been with this wide public in mind.

As the Circle shares similarities with companies such as Google, Apple, Meta and PayPal, Eggers’ novel comes across as a realistic dystopian future (Däwes 108). While not every reader might become enthusiastic about Eggers’ writing style, his message does reach a wide range of readers.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter explored the techno-criticism that Dave Eggers expresses in *The Circle* through a study of the technology, characters and company that are presented in the novel. In *The Circle*, Eggers uses existing technology side by side with devices that were invented in his novel. This enables him to focus on the shift in culture instead of focusing on imagining new technology. He combines chips, bracelets, screens and cameras to create a new culture that is based on having the right and the tools to know everything. Besides technology, the Circle utilises slogans to convey the ideology of the company’s CEOs. To complete the Circle’s totalitarian

control, the Circle does not only act as a medium for financial procedures, social media, and tracking systems, but becomes a necessary aid for voting and referenda. The circlers and a large part of the world population have accepted the Circle's slogans and ideology. Eggers uses different characters to portray different sides of the debate. While the protagonist had some doubts about the Circle at the beginning of the novel, throughout the text she becomes a technophile. Mercer functions as the outside voice of reason and portrays elements of technophobia. However, the arguments that he uses in conversations as well as his letters make him an example techno-critic. Kalden/Ty portrays the difficulty of technological debate as Ty started out as an engineer but had to create his alter ego Kalden to enable himself to share his techno-critic views as well. Eggers deploys these three characters in such a manner that the text includes both a display of how brainwashing can work in a technological society along with a demonstration of where technology is headed and what the possible dangers are. What is striking about Eggers' novel, is the focus on the shift in culture as it is simultaneously the only clear difference between *The Circle's* dystopian society and the reality of Western societies in the twenty-first century.

Conclusion

This thesis explored the spectrum of fear and critique of technological developments by analysing the thoughts, feelings and actions of characters from dystopian novels in relation to their authors' visions of a future technological order. The previous chapters have analysed the portrayal of fear and technology in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Ira Levin's *This Perfect Day* and Dave Eggers' *The Circle*. Each novel was studied in light of the technological developments of the past seventy years. This thesis has shown that the works of these authors respectively become more precise in their depictions of technophobia, techno-criticism or technophilia. This is due to the fact that technology has advanced over the years and the dystopian future that authors wrote about could be more closely related to our contemporary society.

In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Orwell shows the reader what can happen when technology is exploited by an oligarchical power that strives to control the minds of the people and use 24/7 surveillance as a way to ensure complete control. Many characters in this novel are technophobic as they express fear of being seen by the ever-watchful eye of the Thought Police and Spies that work for the Party. Orwell imagined a world in which telescreens are used as two-way televisions that can broadcast as well as act as surveillance cameras at the same time. Additionally, the Speakwrite was used to facilitate the concept of Rewriting History, which lies at the basis of Orwell's dystopian society. Furthermore, his novel describes Thoughtcrime, Crimestop and Doublethink as tools for the control and indoctrination of the population of Oceania. Winston and Julia are both nervous in general but also around each other. They do not only live in a constant fear of being watched by other people, but they also share a hatred towards the Inner Party and Big Brother. Orwell's novel portrays the characters' struggles and fears and focuses on both brainwash and surveillance techniques. Orwell's novel functions as a rational extrapolation about the implementation of modern technology to control human lives.

He suggests that surveillance technology linked to political ideology can form a threat to society.

In *This Perfect Day*, Ira Levin imagined new technological developments as well as relying on concepts that were already used by George Orwell. The dystopian society in Levin's novel is controlled by a single computer and uses scanners, bracelets, treatments and telecomps to dominate the citizens. Levin's novel does not only act as a critique of computer science, but also discusses the negative aspects of chemistry and genetic engineering. *This Perfect Day* emphasizes the community aspect of its dystopian society wherein humanity has been turned into automatons in order to create a human machine that can be regulated. Besides the inventions that are used in this novel, brainwashing plays an important role, as in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. As a result of this, the characters in *This Perfect Day* are often unable to be sure about what is true and what is not. Chip shares his doubts on UniComp's control and domination of natural processes with a small group of other so-called incurables and together they form a small alliance to resist the treatments. Chip, Lilac and others portray signs of technophobia as they feel anxious to leave the technologically engineered society. Since all members of the Family are taught to help one another, Chip and Lilac are afraid of them. In the eyes of the other members, helping Chip and Lilac means getting them arrested and treated by UniComp instead of helping them escape UniComp's control. Thus, the other members take on the role of the Thought Police and Spies from *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The novel's overall stance towards a world governed by computers is expressed through paradoxes such as the one explained above, as it portrays that in a technological society the solution to every problem is sought in more technology instead of less, an idea that Ellul had warned for in his essay. While the ending of Orwell's novel emphasises the hopelessness of the situation, Levin ends his novel on a more positive note because Chip is able to blow up UniComp.

Instead of focusing on the specific functions of new technological inventions, in *The Circle*, Dave Eggers focusses on the specific culture and daily lived experience that the adoption of these inventions in society fosters. Eggers mainly introduces existing technologies into his fictional world, with the exception of some additional advancements, such as the improvement of smartwatches and cameras, to create a culture that is fixated on having the legal right and the tools to know everything. Propaganda also plays a role in *The Circle* and is mainly present through the usage of slogans. These slogans help the CEOs of the Circle to spread their ideology with the rest of the circlers as well as the world population. Through this novel, Eggers does not only demonstrate where technological developments are headed, but also shows how social media and smart devices have changed the culture of the western society in the twenty-first century. Since everyone has to be connected to the Circle, the company's different branches can create one totalitarian entity that can control the entire flow of information, both public and personal.

The three novels that were discussed in this thesis share recurring themes, such as privacy violation, indoctrination, and resistance. Winston was afraid of the two-way televisions that surrounded him in the streets, at his work and even in his own home. The telescreens were not only used to spread indoctrination, they were also part of the Party's surveillance system. Winston wanted to rebel against Big Brother's control and tried to do so in various ways. For example, he had a secret relationship with Julia and together they tried to learn more about Goldstein and oligarchical collectivism. Chip's privacy was violated through the utilisation of bracelets that would track his whereabouts and the activities he attended. He was afraid of other members as they represented the ever-watchful eye of UniComp. Similar to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, indoctrination happened in schools and via television programmes. Chip's resistance began to take shape when he tricked UniComp into giving him reduced treatments. In the end, Chip did not want to escape the controlled society he grew up in, he wanted to destroy it. In

order to do so he had to destroy UniComp itself. In a way, Mae violated her own privacy by signing up to the Circle and sharing all her personal details with the company. Both slogans and the change in culture were elements of the company's indoctrination and domination. In *The Circle* one thing led to another and there was no way to opt out. Although Mae did not resist, Mercer and Kalden did. These two characters show the reader what elements of the Circle have taken the technological control too far and what resistance may look like. The works portray that it may seem as though the only way to improve a technological society is by adding more technology, however, as Ellul and Frey both explained in their texts, improving the technological society means to regain the ability to reject technology.

This thesis has shown the evolution of technophobia, techno-criticism, or technophilia, in dystopian literature. As new technology was invented, these novels were able to focus their portrayal of fear on different elements of technology and techniques. Something worth noting, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is mainly focused on technophobia, while the characters in *This Perfect Day* were technophobes as well as techno-critics. *The Circle* included not only characters who fear technology or criticise the culture that accompanies it, but also portrayed contemporary technophilia. The development within the literary genre goes hand in hand with technological developments of the past seventy years and the ongoing change in the culture that surrounds technology

A study of three dystopian novels has enabled me to reflect on my own usage of technology and has changed the way I see the society I live in. The three novels that my thesis has focused on show how closely the western society, that we have created ourselves, resembles a dystopian technocratic world. While I think highly of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *This Perfect Day*, *The Circle* has shown me what tech-companies are doing nowadays and how social media can become an unnecessary burden. Reading *The Circle* made me realise that in many cases there is no longer an option to opt out; in order to attend university you need to have a laptop

and a mobile phone. Besides, when attending Leiden University, it seems a student also has to accept the surveillance system that the university has installed.

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