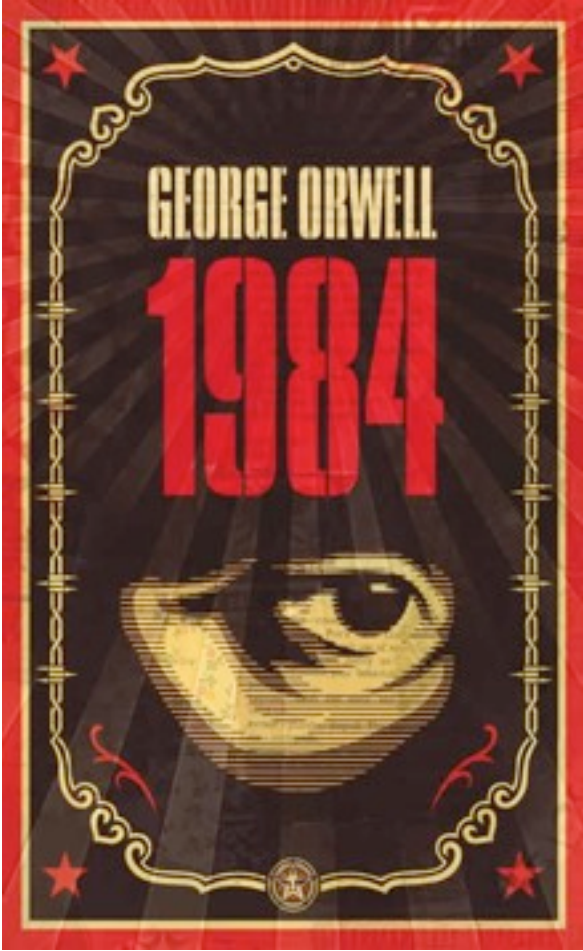


That's Entertainment: The Observation Principle from

Charlie Canning

Orwell's 1984

When George Orwell published his dystopian novel 1984 in 1949, many believed that the totalitarian state that Orwell described couldn't possibly come into existence by the year 1984.



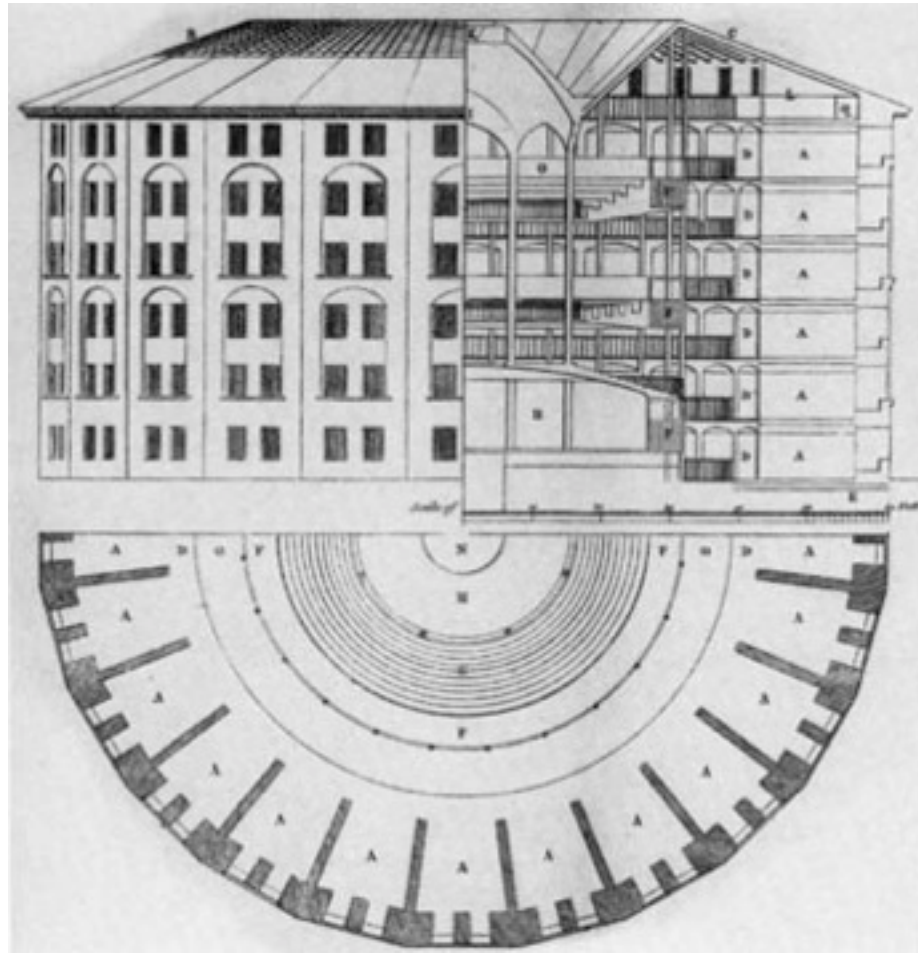
The leper colony and the

While Jeremy Bentham was the first to articulate the observation principle as a disciplinary mode of power, the critic Michel Foucault sees its beginnings in the way that the plague was handled during the Middle Ages. Before the plague, the idea was to exclude sick people from the village, town, or city; hence the leper colony.

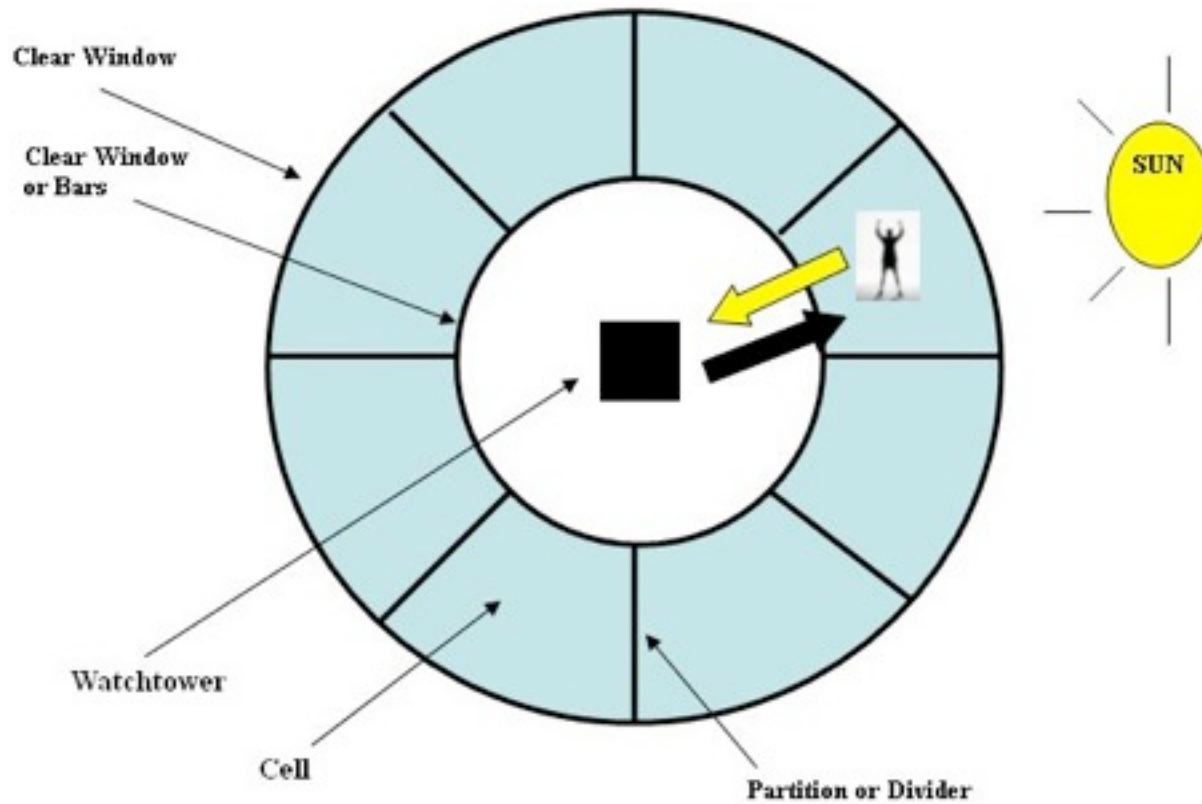
The Panopticon

In a series of letters written in 1787 and published four years later as the Panopticon, Jeremy Bentham introduced the “central–inspection principle” in the form of a design for a multi–story circular building with an observation deck in the middle and cells radiating from the center like the spokes of a wheel.

Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon



Architecture and geometry functioning as technology



The observation principle as developed by Foucault

In 1975, Michel Foucault published *Surveiller et Punir: Naissance de la prison* [Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison] three years after visiting the Attica Correctional Facility in upstate New York in the United States.

Stateville Prison near Joliet,



Round House at Fremantle, Western Australia



Observation diffused throughout society

By the late twentieth century, Bentham's architectural design for "an inspection house" had become a model of relationship between people in society: "The Panopticon ... must be understood as a generalizable model of functioning; a way of defining power relations in terms of the everyday life of men. No doubt Bentham presents it as a particular institution, closed in upon itself ... But the Panopticon must not be understood as a dream building: it is the diagram of a

Closed-Circuit TV



Data collection

In addition to what Foucault termed “hierarchical surveillance,” there was “continuous registration, perpetual assessment and classification” or what we would characterize as data collection. (220)

Delivery of new technologies for observation and control

Both Orwell and Foucault predicted that the technologies of the future would increase the panoptic effect on individuals.

Recent technology

“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.” (Orwell 211)

Observation as entertainment



Elizabethan sport



Public hangings in the U.K. until 1868



Lynching in Marion, Indiana in 1930



Photograph from Bettmann/Corbis

Suffering as mass

The main difference today is not that people enjoy watching suffering – we've always enjoyed that – but that so many of us are becoming the unwitting purveyors of it. We're on the air and we're broadcasting suffering and ridicule.

Cell phone cameras and amateur
video



Broadcast Yourself™

CCTV surveillance as



Social networking sites such as
Facebook

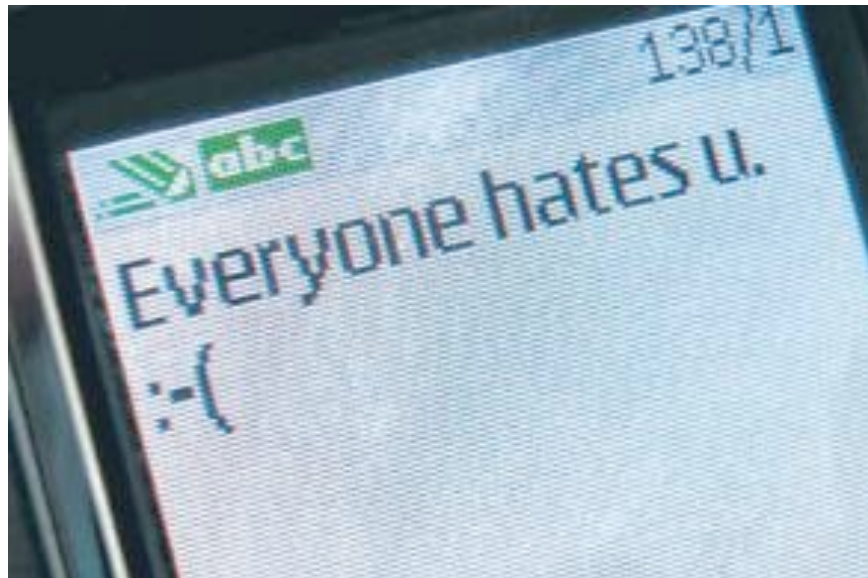
The Facebook logo, consisting of the word "facebook" in a white, lowercase, sans-serif font, centered on a solid blue rectangular background. A small registered trademark symbol (®) is located at the end of the word.

facebook®

Ridicule as power and control

To laugh at someone, to mock or ridicule a person is an exercise in power and control. To avoid being ridiculed further, the person will attempt to modify his behavior, hence the control. But this goes beyond control. The “minute technical inventions” that Foucault wrote about are now diffused throughout society as entertainment. We no longer have to go to the coliseum or the village green to see the show. Suffering as entertainment is playing on our computers, even our

A text, a blog, or a video clip can
kill



Conclusion

