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Illusion of Control: The Struggle for History and Humanity

The recent security leaks concerning the American government have created an Orwellian milieu within contemporary society, for the power of Big Brother, once looming in the background, has now been propelled to the forefront of society's consciousness. With these leaks comes a questioning of government, of the 'truth' it tells and the extent of the pervasiveness of their surveillance. As the coverage of governmental institutions is being pushed to the spotlight, groups such as WikiLeaks and individuals like Edward Snowden are attempting to create a transparent history, to see "the improvement of our common historical record and the support of the rights of all people to create new history" (WikiLeaks). These leaks are part of an attempt to create a history no longer controlled by Big Brother, but one that has been authored by the collective. This contention creates a power struggle for the control of history. It is within this setting, this atmosphere of surveillance and questioning, that contemporary texts are arising and to which they are responding.

The contention found at the heart of the recent security scandals, a struggle between institutions and individuals within society to author history, is played out within contemporary texts. Rather than presenting a progressive history, these texts expose the suspension of history, for the focus has been turned to the pre-narrative, the Event itself. Through the continual replay, reexamination, and revaluation of the pre-narrative, these texts expose the malleability and multiplicity of society's structures and unearth the existence of multiple authors struggling for

control over identity, truth, and reality. Within contemporary society, the author adapts these hollow events to fit the narrative he or she wishes to tell, questioning the foundations that society is based upon and who has ultimate control over the Event itself. This culminates in exposing the risk of humanity's existence, for whoever controls the Event—the reality, truth, and individuality of everyone within society—controls humanity. The very essence of humanity, or the human narrative of individuals exerting their right to self-ownership while engaging in a collective society, is comprised of the pre-narrative. By eliminating the possibility of individuality, stripping away the right to the self, and removing a reality to collectively engage in, humanity ceases to exist. The human narrative can no longer be written.

First examining theoretical work on this struggle in order to establish a lens to view present society, I will then analyze texts that continue the *1984* discourse: Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck's *Lives of Others* and Haruki Murakami's *1Q84*, which depict the Orwellian atmosphere of contemporary society. Next, I will look at texts that depict the consequence of this struggle for the authorship of history on the near future of contemporary society, examining Vernor Vinge's *Rainbows End* and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*. Through this analysis, the significance of the struggle for the authorship of history within contemporary society and its effects on the future will expose the fragility of humanity's existence within today's society.

On the cusp of the millennium, Jean Baudrillard publishes an article, "Paroxysm: The End of the Millennium or the Countdown," arguing that at this monumental moment within the human timeframe, history has stalled. Rather than continue the progressive history typical of the 20th Century, the society moving into the millennium is making "the past itself a clone, an artificial double" (Baudrillard). This doubling of the past occurs by a society "trying to run the events of the century back through the filter of memory, not in order to find a meaning for

them—they have clearly lost that en route—but in order to whitewash them, to launder them” (Baudrillard). Rather than move forward, society reconstitutes the events of the past to fit the current narrative. To whitewash events, to adapt them to fit the present, exposes the meaninglessness of present society, for events constituting it, both past and present, “have no meaning because they can have all possible meanings” (Baudrillard). Lacking a grounding truth, losing all inherent meaning, the Event becomes hollow. At the origin of this emptying of meaning, of losing history, lays a struggle for power that is plaguing the post-millennium world.

This struggle for power, for control over history, should be seen through the lens of a conspiracy theory. Today, the distinction between the official truth and an alternative truth, a ‘conspiracy theory,’ is no longer absolute; it is this blurring that has forced the delay in the progression of history. Conspiracy theories arise to “expose some remarkable and hitherto unknown ‘truth’ about the world” (Byford 21), which directly reflects the aims of those in contemporary society who question the official narrative— of groups like WikiLeaks who hope to expose the hidden truths that institutions, such as governments and global corporations, have kept from the public. The ‘conspiracy theories’ of today wish to expose the ‘real’ story, to expose past events as they truly were and alter how they are interpreted and placed within the grand narrative of history. In doing so, they attempt to take away the power institutions have on history’s narrative, arguing for the creation of a collective narrative.

This suspension has created a history that has become a form of hypertext fiction: a form where “the expansion of the narrative discourse often includes the generation of multiple story possibilities by the stacking of competing stories on the same or conflicting narrative detail” (Abbot 530). No longer a single progressive narrative, histories are layered upon each other with multiple authors repeating and altering events to fit within their narrative. In allowing for this

transformation, society becomes “culturally, even globally, more participatory, less keenly focused on the end of the story, more prone to want to cruise around and even do things in the multiple inner spaces of narrative” (Abbot 531). Contemporary society consists of multiple realities with different authors simultaneously co-existing. Attempting to rewrite the official narrative, as Haruki Murakami argues in his interview with Deborah Treisman, by “setting the actual past beside a past that might have been, exchanging certain elements of each with the other, and blurring the boundary line between the two, we can transform memory into something that is more collective.” Individuals are engaging in the creation of a hypertext history to regain authorship over history. It is this hypertext adaptation of history that permeates into contemporary texts, allowing writers to expose the consequences of this malleable history on the pre-narrative.

With contemporary society mirroring a conspiracy theory and history suspended as the struggle from the pre-narrative continues on, the previous official narrative is fighting to regain control over history. In this struggle for power, the authors of the official narrative force contemporary society into the world of *1984*. In order to regain control, Big Brother must govern all aspects of time— past, present, and future, for “Who controls the past. . . controls the future: who controls the present controls the past” (Orwell 30). With this control over time comes the power over knowledge, truth, and thought. Controlling the Event of the present, Big Brother controls all within society, molding their citizens into agents whose sole function is to continue the party’s narrative. Big Brother abolishes all room for contention. Evoking Bentham’s panopticon, with “no way of knowing whether you were being watched at any given moment” (Orwell 2), the threat of surveillance forces citizens to adapt their actions to ensure the Party’s

approval. Through monitoring and controlling all of its citizens, Big Brother guarantees the continuation of its narrative.

This control permeates to the level of thought. Directly expressed in the ideology of *doublethink*, “of holding two contradictory beliefs in one’s mind simultaneously, and accepting both of them” (Orwell 190), this form of ‘reality control’ forces citizens to blindly accept the power’s narrative and depiction of events. Creating orthodoxy in thought, the belief that everything created by Big Brother represents the accurate reality, “means not thinking—not needing to think. Orthodoxy is unconsciousness” (Orwell 47). Any expression of individual consciousness is a *thoughtcrime*— individual thought itself goes against Big Brother’s narrative. Losing the tools of thought, citizens are unable to think or act against Big Brother. Individuality and self-expression are eradicated, transforming citizens into automatons.

This sociopolitical setting creates a community of the walking dead. Big Brother and its narrative create a community of people who, like Winston Smith, the protagonist of *1984*, know that “He was already dead” (Orwell 24). The essence of humanity has been eradicated. This discourse established by Orwell is the lens needed to understand *Lives of Others* and *1Q84*. Engaging in this discourse, von Donnersmarck and Murakami are transposing the Orwellian milieu of *1984* onto contemporary society. Depicting the power struggle over the narrative, both texts examine the plight of the individual and their lack of space in Big Brother’s narrative. To see if the death of the individual is the fate of contemporary society, the texts *Lives of Others* and *1Q84* examine ways for individuals to regain agency while remaining in the official narrative, and in doing so, attempt to understand if the human narrative can occur within the official narrative of Big Brother.

Von Donnersmarck's 2006 film, *Lives of Others*, exposes one possible outcome for control over history's narrative through its depiction of the struggle between individuals and institutions. Set in 1984 in East Berlin, the German Democratic Republic (GDR) uses the Stasi to continually monitor "politically incorrect behavior among all citizens of East Germany" (Sony Picture Classics), in order to eradicate all forms of resistance. To retain absolute control over society, however, the GDR also needs to maintain authorship over East Berlin's history. To do so, to perpetuate its ideology, the GDR needs to officially eradicate all sentiment against its authority.

To maintain control over East Berlin's narrative, the Party controls the thoughts of its citizens, engaging in the Orwellian notion of *thoughtcrime*, and uses fear to suppress rebellious feelings. While conducting a forty-hour interrogation, Stasis official Wiesler exposes the party's control over thought, for "You think we imprison people on a whim? No. . . If you think our humanistic system capable of such a thing, that alone would justify your arrest" (*Lives of Others*). Questioning the workings of the system means questioning the system as a whole; to think against the state is to act against the state. When bugging Dreyman's apartment, a playwright who is under suspect for anti-GDR sentiments, his neighbor Frau Meineke observes the operation. Forcing her to accept this act, to engage in the Party's 'orthodoxy of the unconscious,' Wiesler, the Stasi official in command of the operation, threatens her by saying "One word of this to anyone, and Masha [her daughter] loses her spot at the university. Is that understood? . . . Send Mrs. Meineke a gift for her cooperation" (*Lives of Others*). Bowing to this threat, through fear and coercion Meineke is removed of both her ability to think and her personal agency; forced to act in accordance with the GDR, she becomes a state-controlled

automaton. Using fear and coercion, the GDR forces its citizens to forgo individual thought, to mentally submit themselves to the narrative of the GDR.

Those unwilling to accept the ‘orthodoxy of the unconscious,’ burdened by free will, are either othered, thrown outside society’s structure, or brought into the narrative through psychological torture. With “expectations from ‘its people,’ which it [the Party] laid down in the form of programs, plans, directives and clear restrictions The conceptual eradication of human individuality allowed the Ministry for State Security . . . to categorize the ‘others,’ whom it interrogated and spied on, in order to transform them into objects of its hatred” (Sony Picture Classics). Any who do not become an automaton of the state are stripped of their agency. This is exemplified through the Party’s plans for Dreyman when incriminating evidence is found regarding his anti-GDR sentiments. Classified as a type four artist, a ‘hysterical anthropocentrist,’ Anton Grubitz, a high level Stasi officer, argues for:

Complete isolation and no set release date. No human contact the whole time, not even with the guards. Good treatment, no harassment, no abuse, no scandals, nothing they could write about later. After 10 months, we release. Suddenly, that guy won’t cause us any more trouble. Know what the best part is? Most Type 4s we’ve processed in this way never write anything again. Or paint anything, or whatever artists do. . . . And that without any use of force. Just like that” (*Lives of Others*).

In removing Dreyman from society and eliminating all potential modes of expression, the Party abolishes his individual power. Through psychological torture, the GDR removes the tools that enable citizens to speak against the party; the ‘politically incorrect’ no longer have the capability to question the Party’s narrative.

This control permeates so deeply into society that even those attempting to create their own individuality, to express resentment against the Party, cannot break themselves away from it; the narrative and truth of the Party is too strong. This is exemplified in the relationship between Captain Wiesler and playwright Georg Dreyman. Both men attempt to expose the hollowness of the GDR's narrative to regain a sense of self, yet both remain within the narrative controlled by the GDR. By themselves, they are incapable of regaining the authorship of their own narratives, their own identities.

With no space for individuality within the GDR's narrative, Wiesler is incapable of building his own identity; the only option is to align himself to the Party's identity. Adopting this ideology, fusing his narrative to the GDR's, Wiesler becomes a specialist in interrogation. He fully embodies their ideology through his every act. For example, by enacting out the notion of common ownership, Wiesler insists on eliminating class markers within the Stasi office. Sitting at tables used by lower ranking officials, he claims, "Socialism must start somewhere" (*Lives of Others*). Building himself out of another's identity, he has eradicated all hope of an individual narrative.

Upon learning that his operation was enacted so a high-level official could remove Dreyman as a romantic rival, Wiesler begins to realize the hollowness of the party's ideology and narrative, forcing him to see the hollowness of his own identity. Wiesler built his identity using the GDR's ideology, but when it proves false, he too proves to be false. Despite being dissatisfied, he cannot build a self. While previously existing within the Stasi narrative, his sole object was to ensure the progression of their narrative; the individual Wiesler did not exist. To find a space within the narrative, he posits himself into Dreyman's narrative. As von Donnersmarck claims in his interview with Dave Davies, Wiesler "Realizes his loneliness as he

experiences the lives of these artists,” moving him to fill his hollowness of identity through another character. He reads Dreyman’s books and listens to his every conversation, casting himself in the ideology and character of Dreyman. Becoming entrenched in Dreyman’s narrative, Wiesler chooses to protect Dreyman’s life over his own, solidifying the non-existence of his own narrative. After removing the evidence connecting Dreyman to an anti-Stasi act, Anton Grubitz claims, “There’s one thing you should understand, Wiesler. Your career is over. Even if you were too smart to leave any traces. You’ll end up in some cellar, steam-opening letters until you retire. That means the next 20 years. 20 years. That’s a long time” (*Lives of Others*). Through this act, he eradicates his own narrative in the hopes of preserving another’s, fully removing himself of his own identity.

Wiesler’s connection to the Stasi allows him to see the hollowness of his own narrative, yet Dreyman does not realize how his identity and narrative have been assumed by the GDR’s, and how, unknowingly, he has given up the authorship of his own identity. A state sponsored playwright, friend of GDR politician Margot Honecker, and recipient of a national award, he has been overcome by the state ideology, truth, and narrative without his own awareness. Only through his girlfriend, Christa-Maria, who has been consumed by the Stasi narrative [having an affair with a high level official to ensure that she can continue acting] can Dreyman see his own lack of identity. As Christa-Maria exposes, to survive, to have a space within the GDR’s narrative, “Don’t I need this whole system? What about you? Then you don’t need it either. Or need it even less. But you get in bed with them, too. Why do you do it? Because they can destroy you, too, despite your talent and your faith. Because they decide what we play” (*Lives of Others*). Dreyman gives himself over to the GDR’s narrative to preserve his career, but in doing so, he has unknowingly forfeited his individuality and individual narrative.

With his lack of agency exposed, the realization that he, like Winston Smith, is symbolically dead, Dreyman attempts to reclaim his self by revealing the hollowness of the official narrative. Dreyman wishes to present a revised history to contest the old. He attempts to show the true terror of a governing body controlling the record of history, that “If the Party could thrust its hand into the past and say of this or that event, *it had never happened* – that, surely, was more terrifying than mere torture and death” (Orwell 30). Once he realizes the GDR’s power in the present allows them to control the past as well, Dreyman wishes to expose this terrifying dominance over history. To accomplish this, Dreyman presents the one statistic the government does not publish: the number of suicides within East Berlin. Not only do they eliminate the one number which works against their grand narrative, which shows the dissatisfaction with the current system, but also in an attempt to completely remove this resistance, “In 1977, our country stopped counting suicides. They called them ‘self-murderers.’ But it has nothing to do with murder. It knows no bloodlust, no heated passion. It knows only death, the death of all hope. When we stopped counting, only one country in Europe drove more people to their death: Hungary. We came next, the land of ‘Real Existing Socialism’” (*Lives of Others*). To control their citizens, either through the creation of automatons or the othering of its people, the GDR has eliminated all hope within the country and refuses to record the effects. Rather, they augment the ‘truth’ to depict a functioning Socialist country. Through his publication, Dreyman attempts to expose the official record as false, presenting his own formulation of the pre-narrative to create a new history for East Berlin.

Questioning the veracity of the GDR’s narrative, this anti-Stasi work inadvertently removes Dreyman’s agency. Despite exposing the hollowness of the Stasi narrative, it perpetuates the very narrative it works to abolish. Coerced into informing on Dreyman’s role in

the article's publication, Christa-Maria, overcome with guilt, commits suicide shortly after.

Dreyman's article advances the cycle of lost hope; attempting to correct the narrative, the article forces othering to occur and perpetuates the GDR's narrative. Also, trying to protect him, Wiesler records Dreyman as writing an anniversary piece, celebrating the GDR, when Dreyman is writing the anti-GDR article. With this, not only did Dreyman's article have the opposite effect to what he desired, but also Dreyman further loses his agency, losing authorial role in his piece. In doing so, Wiesler continues the ideology of the party and their control over Dreyman's narrative; his life's official record has removed his name from his work. His attempt at individuality has left him hollow. This failure in agency, combined with Christa-Maria's suicide, breaks Dreyman; he loses all rebellious spirit. Despite being free from Stasi prison, his will has been broken. With "Nothing to believe in" (*Lives of Others*), broken and alone, Dreyman cannot write throughout the rest of the GDR regime.

The GDR's control over Dreyman's narrative and identity ends when Dreyman is incapable of watching an adaptation of one of his plays; written during the Stasi regime, it is readapted and performed after the wall falls, yet Dreyman is incapable of reliving this moment; he will not repeat the pre-narrative. Just after refusing to support this reinterpretation of the past, Dreyman learns of the surveillance efforts to monitor him. Asking the lead Stasi officer, "Why was I never under surveillance? Everyone else was. Why not me," he learns that he and Christa-Maria "were under full surveillance. We knew everything about you. . . . Every inch was bugged" (*Lives of Others*). This revelation moves him to see the different realities that were occurring within his life, allowing him to discover the reality he wishes to follow. Realizing that he was not his life's primary author, Dreyman attempts to gain authorship over his own life after reading Wiesler's fabricated records. Only by doing this is he capable of controlling his own

narrative, only after this can he begin writing again. While before he wrote either for the will of the state or to strike against it, now he writes to express his own self. By refusing to join in the reinterpretation of the Event, he is engaging in a progressive individual history.

Lives of Others suggests that the only way for society to regain control over history is through the destruction of the current power; that for the human narrative to continue, to prevent individuals from becoming automatons, a new social contract between individuals and their government must be established. After the wall has fallen, writing his novel, *Sonata For A Good Man*, Dreyman can express himself within his works, rather than be used as a mouthpiece for the government. Wiesler, initially building himself out of the ideology of the regimen and then repositing himself within Dreyman's character, is only capable of acting on his own will after the wall has fallen. Closing the film, Wiesler purchases a copy of Dreyman's novel; when asked if it should be gift-wrapped, Wiesler expresses a sense of self with the response, "No, it's for me" (*Lives of Others*). Von Donnersmarck's film ends with hope; that humanity can survive, that collectively individuals can retain their sense of self, yet the only way to do so is through a revolution, through the complete destruction of Big Brother.

While *Lives of Others* cannot imagine a space for humanity within a narrative authored by Big Brother, Haruki Murakami's *1Q84* presents hope for the survival of humanity within Big Brother's narrative. Within *1Q84*, the pervading power of Big Brother cannot be destroyed. Rather, for humanity to survive a collective identity within society is needed; through this, individuals will find space within Big Brother's narrative. Drawing off of the depiction of Big Brother within *1984*, Murakami presents the significance the eradication of individuality has on humanity. Looking at how 'power' consumes characters, how individuals are removed of their own narrative and agency, the control of 'power' permeates to all aspects of society. This

contention for control between institutions and individuals over the pre-narrative is represented by a struggle between the Sakigake commune, who directs the *IQ84* society, and Aomame and Tengo, two individuals working to undermine the commune's narrative. Despite depicting the permeating power of Big Brother and its lasting effects on individuals, Murakami offers some hope that through a collective identity people will no longer be the walking dead within Big Brother's narrative, but have a sense of agency.

The significance of the authorship of history is exposed by Tengo, who throughout the text is editing a novel about the reality of the Sakigake commune; he shows the threat the Little People, the leaders of the Sakigake Commune and the representation of Big Brother within *IQ84*, have on individuals. Tengo claims the largest crime against the collective is "Robbing people of their actual history is the same as robbing them of part of themselves. It's a crime" (Murakami 322). Big Brother, continually laundering past events, is removing the identity of its people. Memory of individuals "is made up of our individual memories and our collective memories. The two are intimately linked. And history is our collective memory. If our collective memory is taken from us—is rewritten—we lose the ability to sustain our true selves" (Murakami 322). To rewrite history is to remove the part of an individual's identity that is created by society. In doing this, Big Brother kills part of its citizens. Exposing the fragility of humanity, with its existence hinging on the existence of a stable history, Tengo shows the threat the Sakigake commune has on this society.

This threat is being actualized within *IQ84*, for people's individual narratives and histories are being eradicated to accommodate the narrative of Sakigake. Spawned from the Takashima commune, where its leaders are "making mindless robots. They take the circuits out of people's brains that make it possible for them to think for themselves. Their world is like the

one that George Orwell depicted in his novel. I'm sure you realize that there are plenty of people who are looking for exactly that kind of brain death. It makes life a lot easier" (Murakami 153), the Sakigake commune engages in the same ideal through religious channels. Sakigake began to replicate the creation of automatons in its members, for as its leader, called The Leader, claims "Most people are not looking for provable truths. As you said, truth is often accompanied by intense pain, and almost no one is looking for painful truths. What people need is beautiful, comforting stories that make them feel as if their lives have some meaning. Which is where religion comes from" (Murakami 550). Capitalizing on the fact that individuals are choosing to give up their agency to remove pain from their lives, willingly engaging in the 'orthodoxy of the unconscious,' the commune creates automatons that further their narrative. This contributes to the notion that the people are already dead, that there is no "difference between a person being alive and being dead. . . . *Maybe we just decide, for convenience's sake, to insist on a difference*" (Murakami 772). Removing thought and free will, completely aligning oneself to another's narrative, transforms the people into the walking dead, eradicating the essence of humanity.

For the people existing in *1Q84* outside of the commune, this eradication of individual narrative is, for the most part, occurring unknowingly; people are transforming into the walking dead and it is this process that Aomame and Tengo are attempting to reverse. For Aomame and Tengo, the novel begins in 1984, but they quickly transposed to a new reality, the reality controlled by the Little People, called 1Q84. For Aomame, a physical trainer dedicated to killing abusive men, this change is made apparent after slipping through an abandoned emergency exit. Emerging from this exit "*the world I knew either vanished or withdrew, and another world came to take its place. Like the switching of a track. In other words, my mind, here and now, belongs to the world that was, but the world itself has already changed into something else*" (Murakami

133-4). The reality Aomame previously participated in has been eliminated, replaced by a new structure. To exist in this new reality, however, means to accept this reality's altered history. In 1Q84, "*Police officers were issued new uniforms and new pistols. The police and a radical group staged a wild gun battle in the mountains of Yamanashi. These things occurred without my being aware*" (Murakami 265). The Sakigake commune engages in the Orwellian malleability and power of the past in 1Q84, that "The past was erased, the erasure was forgotten, the lie became the truth" (Orwell 66). Adapting the past, Sakigake reforms the historical narrative to retain control over the present, demanding this new narrative be considered truth.

This new reality demands its citizens to accept the altered history as a truth to be followed. All citizens must practice *doublethink*; Big Brother wants its citizens "to *know* that black is white, and to forget that one has ever believed in the contrary. This demands a continuous alteration of the past" (Orwell 189). Despite knowing certain things cannot be true, citizens in this society must accept whatever reality Sakigake depicts in order to survive. This demand for complete submission, the complete acceptance of Big Brother's narrative, is most apparent through the alteration of the Earth's narrative; that now, "two moons were clearly floating in the sky side by side—a yellow one and a green one" (Murakami 246). This reality has a distinct gap between past and present, yet despite knowing that there cannot be two moons in the sky, Aomame "had no choice for now but to recognize this as the one and only reality and use all her strength to ride it out. *I'm not afraid to die*, Aomame reassured herself. *What I'm afraid of is having reality get the better of me, of having reality leave me behind*" (Murakami 443). Aomame fears being left out of history's narrative; that by not accepting the pre-narrative, no matter how absurd, she will be cast off, unable to participate in society. To remain within society's narrative, one must internally align one's self to Big Brother's narrative.

The power's demand for *doublethink* is also expressed in Tengo, who adapts the Little People's reality to his person as well. Becoming entrenched in this new world, for Tengo "this was no longer a fictional word. This was the real world, where red blood spurts out when you slice open your skin with a knife. And in the sky in this world, there were two moons, side by side" (Murakami 999). Despite initially encountering this world as fiction, recognizing the absurdity of an Earth that has two moons, it has now taken hold of his life and must be accepted as truth. No matter how absurd, questioning this new reality poses a threat. To remain physically unscathed, to be preserved in history's narrative, all citizens of this society must accept the rewriting that occurs. They must accept that Big Brother has fettered them to its narrative, eradicating all individual interpretations.

The lack of individual agency is overtly represented in Aomame's interactions with The Leader, Sakigake's religious leader. Initially believing that she is killing The Leader for molesting young girls, Aomame learns that it was he who sets up this meeting, that he wants her to kill him. Unable to fulfill his duties as the religious connection between the commune members and the 'Little People' causes The Leader massive physical pain, and to remedy this, The Leader manipulates Aomame's narrative to fit his own. Rather than punish him for his crimes, in killing him, "*That way, in effect, his body would be released for all pain. Instead, I'm spending all of my energy to ease the pain that he is feeling in the real world*" (Murakami 548). The vengeance she wished to enact cannot be fulfilled. She wants to kill The Leader, yet he wished to be killed: "What you want is also what I want" (Murakami 554). He wished to die and Aomame must provide him his death. No longer in control of her narrative, she has been turned into a tool for someone of higher power and influence.

Aomame's lack of personal narrative is further exemplified in the effects this killing has on her. Inadvertently fusing her narrative to The Leader's, Aomame's identity has been subsumed. Knowing that she would need to go into hiding after killing The Leader, she initially "was not opposed to losing her identity. If anything, she welcomed it *A reset of my life: this may be the one thing I've longed for most*" (Murakami 465). Thinking that she was working against Big Brother's narrative, that she would create a new space for her to assert her own narrative, Aomame hopes to gain agency and individuality through killing The Leader. Through her alignment with The Leader's wishes, however, the new start does not occur. Rather, she too is now 'dead', left out of the Little People's narrative. After going into hiding, "In this brand-new, spotless condo, she felt like an anonymous person, stripped of memory and individuality" (Murakami 620). Disassociated from both the narrative of 1984, 1Q84, and removed of an individual narrative, Aomame occupies no space and is prohibited from existing.

Wishing to avoid this complete eradication of self, Aomame attempts to rewrite her narrative and reclaim control over the pre-narrative. To do so, Aomame, attempts to go back up the emergency stairwell that forms the entrance and exit to the reality of 1Q84—to leave 1Q84 and reenter 1984. Replaying the pre-narrative, Aomame hopes to enter a world where she has more agency. Aomame attempts to completely remove herself from the control of the Little People, giving her the ability to rewrite the narrative of her life. The Little People, however, will not allow this, for "in the world of 1Q84, the emergency stairway no longer existed. **Her exit was blocked**" (Murakami 715). The powers controlling 1Q84 will not allow her to exit, ensuring the destruction of Aomame and all forces that would create an alternative narrative to their own.

It is only through her relationship with Tengo that Aomame is able to reclaim control over the pre-narrative and climb back up the emergency exit. In combining their narratives, they

are able to break from the control and narrative of the Little People, believing that “*No matter what happens, no matter what I have to do, I have to make it real, not make-believe. No—the two of us, Tengo and I, have to do that. We have to make it real*” (Murakami 1147). Together, Aomame and Tengo are able to reshape the event that drove Aomame to 1Q84, thus removing themselves from the narrative of the Little People. This expression of agency, however, is not strong enough to create their own reality. Traveling back up the stairwell, escaping from the 1Q84 world, Aomame and Tengo are not sure what reality they have (re)entered. Rather than 1984, “*Could this be another, altogether different place? Did we move from one world to yet another, third world? Where these Esso tiger shows us the left side of his face, not his right? Where new riddles and new rules await us*” (Murakami 1151). Their attempts to gain control are thwarted, they “*still don’t know what sort of world this is*” (Murakami 1156). The control of their reality and narrative is out of their grasps; they have been repositioned into a new narrative, a new reality, with a different Big Brother watching.

With this, Murakami suggests that individuals cannot author the grand narrative of history; individual control is unattainable. Despite losing control, a space for the collective can exist. For Aomame, she can create a space when she learns, “*to believe in that [Tengo’s] smile, she told herself. That’s what’s important here*” (Murakami 1157). No longer attempting to understand the narrative she is in, Aomame forgoes the struggle for control, allowing others to author history’s narrative. To truly survive in this powerless situation, she must abandon the desire for authorship; attempting to gain control only results in death [the removal of individual space in the narrative]. Rather, to survive, humanity must focus on relationships with each other rather than the state; forming personal bonds will provide enough combined agency to create space within history’s narrative. In *1Q84*, Murakami suggests that individuals have no way to

truly win the authorship of history, but suggests a redefinition of humanity. The human narrative can continue to exist without individual agency—that through a collective, the self [in this scenario, the collective self of society] can find a space to exist.

Rather than engaging in an Orwellian milieu of contemporary society, a world where Big Brother is writing history, Vernor Vinge's *Rainbows End* and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* examine the near future, depicting a society where Big Brother no longer controls history and its narrative. In Vinge's *Rainbows End*, history has fractured into multiple narratives that exist simultaneously; they are controlled by individuals yet depict the struggles individuals and the continuation of humanity as a whole face when there is no collective narrative to follow. In *The Road*, Cormac McCarthy looks at the impossibility of the continuation of humanity's existence when there is no narrative at all, when both Big Brother and the individual have ceased to exist. These two texts illuminate the significance of this struggle, showing how the failings of contemporary society will affect the existence of the human narrative's future.

Vernor Vinge's *Rainbows End* examines technology's immense impact on eradicating the historical narrative through its control over the pre-narrative, or in Vinge's world, human identity. Set in 2025, technology has become a power strong enough to break the human narrative. Personifying technology, Vinge's explores this possibility, asking readers to "Imagine yourself confined to your house with only limited data access to the outside, to your masters. If those masters thought at a rate — say — one million times slower than you, there is little doubt that over a period of years (your time) you could come up with 'helpful advice' that would incidentally set you free" (Vinge qtd. in Tierney). In *Rainbows End*, the freeing of technology and the ramifications of this 'helpful advice,' of this dependency on technology, are expressed

through the destruction of the individual, who, by 2025, has become the pre-narrative, the event being rewritten.

The significance of technology's impact on the destruction of identity and the creation of multiple individual narratives is framed in a debate over the usefulness of mind control. Mind control [known in *Rainbows End* as You-Gotta-Believe-Me] has always been a force within history, for "Weak, social forms of YGBM drove all human history. For more than a hundred years, the goal of *irresistible* persuasion had been a topic of academic study. For thirty years it had been a credible technological goal. And for ten, some version of it had been feasible in well-controlled laboratory settings" (Vinge 25). By the year 2025, however, total mind control has been actualized. Within a laboratory, the invasion and manipulation of minds has been achieved and *Rainbows End* is set on the cusp of this development being brought to the general public. For some, "If we are right about these labs and if we fail to properly. . . deal . . . with them, that could be the end of history. It could be the end of all striving for good against evil that has ever been" (Vinge 25). Through mind control, history would cease, for humanity would lose its very essence. With individuals stripped of their own thought, those who control technology would be able to direct the creation of history according to their personal will.

Other individuals, however, see this control as necessary to allow progress to be made: "Effective YGBM would not be the end of everything. In the right hands, YGBM technology was the one thing that could solve the modern paradox, harnessing the creativity of humankind without destroying the world in the process. In fact, it was humankind's only hope for surviving the twenty-first century," because, "For the first time in history, the world would be under adult supervision" (Vinge 29). Mind control allows those in power, those who have harnessed this technology, to eliminate all negative aspects within society, allowing for a 'perfect' progression

of both history and humanity. To save humanity from itself, from its own capability for self-destruction, it needs to be monitored by a smarter power. In *Rainbows End*, however, the ‘power’ making this decision is not a unified party, but rather it is individuals, acting independently, who possess significant technological skill. A singular person, not governmental bodies, breaks into another’s identity. Opening the novel with this debate, Vinge exposes technology’s place in the struggle between the authorship of history, thus framing the dispute.

Within this society, people are synced directly to machines, fusing themselves mentally to technology. To ‘wear’ is to use contact lenses synced to one’s brain that provide an individual with smart phone capabilities without requiring external equipment. This ‘innovation’ allows an individual to participate in the creation of multiple realities. An individual can switch which reality they wish to exist in moment to moment:

Colored maps appeared before his [Robert Gu’s] eyes. There were realities that were geographically far away, not overlaid upon San Diego at all. Those must be like cyberspace crap of the eighties and nineties. Finally he got a window that promised “public local reality only.” Yeah. Only two hundred thousand of them for this part of San Diego County. He chose at random. Outside the car, the North Country hillsides were swept clean of the subdivisions. The road had only three lanes and the cars were out of the 1960s. He noticed the tag on the windshield of his car (now a Ford Falcon): *San Diego Historical Society*. Bit by bit, they were reconstructing the past. Big hunks of the twentieth century were available for people who waned those simpler times. (Vinge180)

Dissatisfied or bored with the present reality, with history’s narrative, individuals have the ability to alter it to their own specifications. Living in different moments and locations, individuals are

not living or experiencing the same reality. With the present consisting of multiple overlaid realities, history cannot progress, for no one is engaging in or helping advance a collective narrative. Society is distracted from the 'real' reality that is occurring, allowing the distraction to become the real. Rather than a central narrative overseeing society, in the near future, multiple narratives run parallel to each other. No collective history is being made, bringing society and the human narrative to a halt.

This is shown through the destructive act of watching. When Robert Gu, a noted poet, is presenting a project, the server "showed the presence of several million people suddenly observing, grabbing resources so fast that they confused his poor little prediction program—and changed the nature of what was observed" (Vinge 338). Despite observing the same presentation, individuals are adapting this moment to their own narrative and are destroying the possibility of a collective moment that all can engage in from occurring. Transformed into a form of active participation, watching helps demolish the collective narrative by allowing for the reinterpretation of the Event.

This removal of the historical narrative, coupled to a shift towards emphasizing the individual interpretation of reality, provides individuals with the power to harm another's individual narrative. With no narrative for all to collectively participate, individuals use other individual narratives to enhance their own, as shown in the hijacking of individual minds. When 'wearing,' the direct connection between individual and technology allows identities to be hijacked. As Robert Gu learns, "You really must learn to be more paranoid about identity, Professor. I know, you've met Zulfi Sharif in person. That *is* the graduate student you think it is, and just the groveler he seems. But he doesn't have good control. I can show up as Sharif whenever I please" (Vinge 182). In this near future, identities are usurped by those better at

controlling technology, rendering the victim a passive spectator in their own life. The notion of individual thought and ownership is destroyed; lacking control over thoughts and actions, becoming a subject to another's will within one's own mind, allows the individual to lose control over their own narrative. Even when attempting to aid one another, individual narratives are often usurped, creating a sense of powerlessness within many people. Robert Gu is diagnosed with Alzheimer's, then cured, yet "I got a new life, but the Alzheimer's cure. . . it destroyed my talent" (Vinge 349). 'Perfected,' his illness is cured, he has been stripped of his talent, losing a vast amount of his personal agency. Unable to express himself as he had previously done, Gu has fallen victim to a larger body inadvertently controlling him.

The individual's narrative is also broken when they become a JITT, a person receiving a massive download of information. Like downloading new software onto a computer's hard drive, people are programmed to receive massive amounts of information in one sitting. While appearing to be a useful advancement, its ramifications on the individual psyche are enormous:

Learn Russian or Latin or Chinese or Spanish, overnight and painlessly! *But be careful what you wish for.* . . . He read the section on side effects: Learning a language, or a career specialty, *changes* a person. Cram in such skills willy-nilly and you distort the underlying personality. A very few JITTs suffered no side effects. In rare cases, such people could undertake a second hit—even a third—before the damage caught up with them. The rejection process was a kind of internal war between the new viewpoints and the old, manifesting as seizures and altered mental states. Often the JITT was stuck in some diminished form of his/her new skill set. (Vinge 179)

Not allowing for the natural progression of learning to occur, a segment of the individual's narrative rapidly jumps from start to finish in a matter of hours when it should take months or even years, creating a deficiency in understanding and experience. Lacking the time to understand how the new information changes the individual and the course of their narrative, unable to fully integrate these changes into their person, part of the individual is separated from the rest of their character. Unable to have a fully developed narrative, their minds become fractured. Rivera, a man who downloaded Chinese, loses control of his speech, repeating “Wǒ zài shuō yīngyǔ ma? Shì yīngyǔ ma?” Am I speaking English? Is it English” (Vinge 176). Powerless, lacking control in his own mind, Rivera becomes a disjointed individual missing a cohesive narrative. Trapped in their own mind, suspended in one moment, JITTs are removed of individual agency, powerless in advancing their own narrative.

Throughout *Rainbows End*, the contention between individual and collective control over the individual narratives is visible not only at the individual level, but is also extended to the masses through the destruction of books. Groups that specialize in shredding books and digitalizing their contents attempt to grasp widespread power by controlling the records of knowledge, information, and the past. In 2025, all the information from the British Library can be purchased for \$19.99 on a flash drive, for “Leaving aside things that never got into a library, that's essentially the record of humanity up through 2000. The whole premodern world” (Vinge 344). In creating this, however, all records are subject to ‘semi nondestructive digitalization,’ for those digitalizing are editing and controlling the information available and what interpretation of the past people will formulate. An unmediated and unaltered access to knowledge does not exist.

As technology advances, individuals are being controlled by those skilled in its use; the ‘power’ has been transferred to individuals with the most understanding of and access to

technical knowledge. With the central ‘power’ disjointed, rather than united behind a collective narrative, multiple narratives begins to appear. With this fracturing of narratives, individuals are subsumed, becoming puppets in the various ‘power’ narratives. Through this depiction, Vinge posits that in the near future, ‘power’ will be obscure and hidden behind technology, with the narratives directed from afar. The struggle will no be visible, for it will happen behind many overlapping layers of technology. For humanity to be saved, individuals must both alter the way they uses technology as well as change the manner in which they interact with each other. No longer can social media be the primary way people interact. No longer can individuals, bored by those around them, escape into an alternative universe. Society must unite to resume the collective human narrative in order to eliminate the possibility of identities being usurped and to ensure that people retain the rights to their own selves.

The collective narrative proves an impossible solution to safeguard the survival of humanity, however, within Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road*; no longer is society overrun with multiple authors and narratives. Instead, in this near future there is no longer anyone vying for control, no one capable of authoring of history. Through this, *The Road* examines the possible effects on humanity when the struggle over control of history and the pre-narrative result in no author. Over time, the struggle escalates so far that both sides ensure each other’s destruction. With no author, the narrative dies, allowing nothing to rise from its ashes. With no historical narrative, there can be no pre-narrative—history is completely eradicated. All destroyed, there is no way for the narrative to resume, for “*The Road* is set in a dead world,” and “a social contract cannot emerge from a dead world” (Curtis 25, 37). With no victor in the struggle for history, humanity cannot sustain itself. By examining the novel’s depiction of time, the loss of individual

identity, and the cannibalistic environment within *The Road*, the imminent destruction of humanity in a society without an author becomes apparent.

In *The Road*, all forms of historical narrative have ceased to exist. With no narrative recorded, with nothing to be replayed and readapted, the pre-narrative vanishes. After an apocalyptic event, when “The clocks stopped at 1:17. A long shear of light and then a series of low concussions. . . . the power was already gone. A dull rose glow in the windowglass [*sic*]” (McCarthy 45), the production of the pre-narrative stopped. The cataclysmic event itself does not matter, “It could be anything – volcanic activity or it could be nuclear war. It is not really important. The whole thing now is, what do you do” (McCarthy qtd. in Adams). For those ‘survivors,’ what to do is complicated by the gap between the past and this new moment. The former narrative has ceased and the cataclysmic event has dissociated itself from the past narrative. With the narrative of history ending, *The Road* “creates a new space which is in some way ‘beyond time’ since the narrative of history as progress has effectively ended” (Manjikian 215). This new space is outside the realm of traditional time— there is no progression, nothing is building upon previous events. In *The Road*, this notion is actualized when “the child would ask him questions about the world that for him was not even a memory. He thought hard how to answer. There is no past” (McCarthy 46). The earth has slipped out of the timeframe of traditional history, disassociating itself from this previous period; there is no past to recollect, for the only moment that matters is the end. Outside the realm of history, memories of the previous narrative are near impossible to recall— the present space is too far removed from the past narrative.

This new space existing outside of the historical progression, outside of the frame of time, is working solely towards the finality of the moment. Everything in this moment is based

on “Borrowed time and borrowed world and borrowed eyes with which to sorrow it” (McCarthy 110). Unable to enact progress, everything is stalled and simply attempting to preserve itself for as long as the suspension exists. The end has arrived, regardless of any action taken to delay its fruition, for “We used to talk about death, she said. We don’t [sic] any more. Why is that? I don’t know. It’s because it’s here. There’s nothing left to talk about” (McCarthy 48). No longer existing as a linear narrative, time has ceased—the end has come. There is no tomorrow to prepare for, and “Every day is a lie” because there is no hope of progression to a new tomorrow (McCarthy 200). The characters exist continuously within the same moment—a suspended moment on the cusp of destruction. With death the only true change, the difference between days does not matter; all actions result in the same inevitable conclusion. For the protagonists, the Man and the Boy, a father and son pair who have ‘survived’ to the end, “Even now some part of him [the Man] wished they’d never found this refuge. Some part of him always wished it to be over” (McCarthy 130). Living on borrowed time, the end is already known. The pre-narrative of time has broken down; when death is actualized does not matter on this non-linear frame.

The effect this suspended moment has on humanity is represented through the loss of identity. With no pre-narrative, identity becomes useless. The futility of holding onto any semblance of identity in this moment is shown when the Man throws away all forms of previous identification:

He’d carried his billfold about till it wore a cornershaped [sic] hole in his trousers. Then one day he sat by the roadside and took it out and went through the contents. Some money, credit cards. His driver’s license. A picture of his wife. He spread everything out on the blacktop. Like gaming cards. He pitched the

sweatblackened [*sic*] piece of leather into the woods and sat holding the photograph. Then he laid it down in the road also and then he stood and they went on. (McCarthy 43-44)

Throwing off all vestiges of his identity, the Man simultaneously exposes the breakdown of the pre-narrative, giving up any semblance of hope for his own personal narrative to continue, as well as demonstrating the futility of attempting to retain an identity in this suspended moment. Accepting that his own narrative cannot continue on, that he is merely existing, waiting to die, no form of humanity can help him prolong this moment. It cannot realign society to a linear timeframe; it cannot save him from his inevitable destruction.

Only called the Man and the Boy, the lack of identifying names for the characters also shows the futility of identity in a dead world. In a moment lacking progression, “There is no need for a name in a world that is ending. Names give particularity and meaning to human life” (Curtis 31). There is no name for each individual because they do not have their own narrative. Their lives have no meaning; they are all simply waiting for death. No one is a survivor; rather, they are “the walking dead in a horror film” (McCarthy 47). Within *The Road*, humanity is a mass of zombie-like creatures, void of any sense of identity or purpose, feeding to perpetuate their existence, yet lacking any hope to every truly live again. Existing without agency, unable to direct their personal narrative, the pre-narrative of identity has fully ceased to exist.

The ramifications of this breakdown of identity for humanity are represented by the practice of cannibalism within *The Road*. No one can remain truly human once entering the suspended space where all wait for the end, and “*The Road* cautions the reader of the difficulties of remaining human after the end—with cannibalism as the ultimate failure of humanity” (Curtis 19). Respect for the individual is gone and people are bestialized. Encountering a pack of

cannibals, the Man and the Boy find, “Huddled against the back wall were naked people, male and female, all trying to hide, shielding their faces with their hands. On the mattress lay a man with his legs gone to the hip and the stumps of them blacked and burnt” (McCarthy 93). In an attempt to prolong their period of existence within this suspended space, people are devouring their own kind, brining about the complete destruction of human life. Attacking and consuming each other, breaking down the human ideal of the ownership of the self, the people in *The Road* have given up any hope of continuing the human narrative.

This cycle of self-destruction is unpreventable; all are attempting to prolong the moment, unwilling to fully risk their ‘life’ for another’s. Unable, or unwilling, to do anything, the Boy realizes that, “They’re going to kill those people, aren’t they? Yes. Why do they have to do that? I dont [*sic*] know. Are they going to eat them? I dont [*sic*] know. They’re going to eat them, arent [*sic*] they? Yes. And we couldnt [*sic*] help because then they’d eat us too. Yes” (McCarthy 107). Afraid of becoming consumed, father and son cannot help free these individuals. By doing so, however, they contribute to the end of the human race; consuming humans, or letting the consumption continue, brings about the destruction of the structures that establish humanity, the collective society of individuals. Attempting to sustain themselves, the Man and the Boy are brining forth the end of the human race. *The Road* exposes “the possibility that there is no point, no potential mutual advantage, in banding together” (Curtis 19). That if the struggle for history ends with no victor, not only is the impossibility of individual narratives certain, but through the unwillingness to band together, the disappearance of a collective narrative is also definite. The suspension of the moment removes all possibility of human progression; identity is eradicated and humanity has given up hope of continuing its own existence.

The suspension of this new moment in a dead world is physically represented by the material destruction depicted in *The Road*. All goods within this suspended moment, everything from the past world, turn to ash. Settling within the air, blanketing everything, “The ashes of the late world carried on the bleak and temporal winds to and fro in the void. Carried forth and scattered forth again. Everything uncoupled from its shoring. Unsupported in the ashen air. Sustained by a breath, trembling and brief” (McCarthy 9-10). Separated from any structure, the contents of the previous narrative are physically broken down; incapable of being remade, they can never again represent or become what they once were. Unable to be reformed, there is no hope of resuming the previous narrative; this suspended moment is separated from and incapable of recalling back the past narrative. The physical separation from the previous timeframe is also exemplified by advertisement billboards, which “had been whited with thin coats of paint in order to write on them and through the paint could be seen a pale palimpsest of advertisements for goods which no longer existed” (McCarthy 108). The physical remnants of a previous world exist, yet what they represent no longer remains. The memories they intend to recall are absent. Unable to create anything new, “in *The Road* all the survivors can do is to recycle the remnants of human industry” (Curtis 39). Only existing within a suspended moment on the cusp of destruction, no progression within society can occur; ‘survivors’ must reuse whatever has survived the apocalypse until it too turns into ash.

In *The Road*, the physical world and all within it have lost their narrative. There is no longer any form of progression or sense of humanity within this post-apocalyptic society. Throughout the novel, McCarthy exposes the necessity of an author, of one who will direct the narrative of history, allowing the pre-narrative to obtain a solidified meaning. McCarthy shows that the world cannot exist without a narrative, and the longer it is suspended, the further society

moves towards its ultimate destruction. *The Road* exposes the perils this struggle creates for humanity: that without a decided author, the whole of humanity risks being consumed by its own longing to survive. Through its absence, *The Road* posits that to exist, humanity needs a history, a narrative, to bind itself together.

The struggle over history, of control over the Events within the narrative, cannot be perpetuated. The longer this struggle continues, the further humanity fades into non-existence. If history does not contain an author, humanity will perish in the struggle. If institutions of power gain this authorship, an Orwellian environment will persist, leading to the eradication of individuality, and the continuation of Big Brother's narrative regardless of the consequences. If this side triumphs, individuality will be unable to continue, yet humanity may remain, as shown in *1Q84*: if individuals combine their agency, a space can be found to exert control independent of the official narrative. The only way for 'individuals' to triumph is to come together and completely overhaul the structure, to collectively decide to oust those in power and begin a new narrative authored by the collective, as is enacted in *Lives of Others*. Humanity can be saved from the destruction found in *Rainbows End* and *The Road*, but the notion of the individual and the way people interact with each other must adapt to fit these new times. Society must overthrow the ideals that continue this struggle, the ideals that allow the pre-narrative to continually be readapted. No longer can society suspend true progress—collectively, all must stop reliving the past and move on to build a new social contract.

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