The Importance Of Cognitive Dissonance In The Dystopian Atmosphere In George Orwell’s Novel 1984

The importance of cognitive dissonance to an autonomous and fulfilling human experience, is often seen in acts of rebellion against the power of totalitarian governments. This is represented through the dystopian atmosphere in George Orwell’s novel 1984, and Yorgos Lanthimos’s film, The Lobster, where both protagonists are anomalies within their society. These texts embody this individual human experience through the use of power and control of the government in encouraging, rather than restricting human behaviours.

George Orwell’s dystopian text, 1984, utilises dystopian conventions to caution society against the problematic outcomes of government structures prone to totalitarian sentiment. Orwell represents an environment where individual acts of rebellion and any sense of an autonomous identity are repelled, and thus, a fulfilling human experience is unachievable.

Winston’s first act of rebellion against the government is in the evocative description of, “Winston had been stricken immediately by an overwhelming desire to possess it… the beautiful creamy paper deserved to be written on with a real nib instead of being scratched with an ink pencil'. The description of ‘overwhelming desire to possess it’ shows the impulses of Winston’s’ aspiration to rebel against the government, thus representing his individual experience of cognitive dissonance.

During the ‘Two Minutes Hate’, Orwell represents how the creation of a collective consciousness bound behind a common enemy is crucial to monopolistic control. In the imagery and resonant word choice of ‘automatically’ in “the sight or even the thought of Goldstein produced fear and anger automatically”, we see the power of such indoctrination to effectively create ‘robots’ out of human beings. The party uses Goldstein as a scapegoat to avoid blame, and systematically create unity in the collective through a common enemy. This therefore limits a fulfilling human experience for the collective – driving Winston to his cognitive dissonance

Additionally during the Two Minutes Hate, Winston accomplishes acts of disobedience and resistance to the Party in the paradoxical statement, “at one moment Winston’s hatred was not turned against Goldstein at all, but, on the contrary, against Big Brother, the Party and the Thought Police… sole guardian of truth and sanity in a world of lies.” Winston is progressing his individual experience of cognitive dissonance by coming to a sense of awareness of the power of the Party, thus defying against the collective society and protecting his liberty. Through the representation of Winston as an individual in paradoxical tension to the collective, we see the power of cognitive dissonance in inciting rebellion – powerfully, at a time where the Party had absolute control, and thus the threat of punishment should have been an effective deterrent.

Similarly to 1984, the dystopian future that Yorgos Lanthimos creates in The Lobster, is a dichotomous ‘black and white’ society where current social mores are administered at the cost of individual freedom as citizens are under surveillance in which the human experience of cognitive dissonance in provoking rebellion is established.

This indicates the immense power and control that the government hold, and the loss of

individualism in the society, both of which are analogous to 1984's structure of government. The society's mania for companionship has created a stigma around those who do not fit in, the "inconsistencies".

The Lobster demonstrates Lanthimos's tendency to satirically comment on the structure of relationships, modern romance and dissidence. Dissidence can be seen when characters begin to fake infirmities to connect with each other to meet the desires of the government and fit in with the collective. This concept is different to 1984 as Winston does not fake infirmities as a rebelling exploit but instead rebels through his hatred of Big Brother.

In the mid-shot angle and the dialogue of "I can't understand why you did it when you know as well as anyone that a relationship cannot be built on a lie. You'll get the punishment you deserve", invites the audience to gage the emotions of David after his rebellion. The protagonist's nervous facial expressions in the mid shot highlight his awareness in knowing he will have to face the retributions by the government, but he completed the act nonetheless. Similarly to 1984, both protagonists are aware of the consequences of their insurgence, but their inner conscience of cognitive dissonance led to rebellion nonetheless. The audience is able to gage the effect of cognitive dissonance as a human experience and how it drives individuals to rebel and become dissident to what is controlling them. Have you ever been influenced to do something when you know there are consequences that accompany it?

When David escapes the authority of the government, he unites to a collective of anomalies from society, but it is also a regiment environment in which David, once again, has individual experiences within the collective. In the limited third person narration, "We love each other and we suit each other. That's the reason why we've decided to leave the woods and stay together forever in the city", cognitive dissonance between two individuals is evoked as their inner conscience is to be together even if it means to go against the collective. The narration allows responders to gain the sense of the forbidden love they have between each other. Hence, we can see that the protagonist is prepared for the consequences and advances his impulses by defying against the rules once more influenced greatly by his human experience of cognitive dissonance.