Living Under the Bell Jar: Surveillance and Resistance in Yevgeny Zamyatin’s We

MICHAEL D. AMEY

Observation plays an increasingly significant role in twentieth-century society as a means of regulation. In this regulatory function, observation manifests itself in the ubiquitous CCTV, traffic cameras and other surveillance techniques used to monitor and record the activities of ordinary citizens. One of the more alarming recent manifestations of the potential for all-pervasive surveillance is the announcement of the development of an urban surveillance system by the United States military, which ‘would use computers and thousands of cameras to track, record and analyze the movement of every vehicle in a foreign city,’ and which could potentially be used by governments on their own citizens. The dramatic increase of surveillance in the twentieth-century has also been matched by an increase of voyeuristic entertainment, exemplified by the Orwellian titled television game show Big Brother. The entertainment value of voyeuristic surveillance has arguably rendered individuals more accepting of regulatory surveillance in their personal lives. This trend towards increasing surveillance coupled with a citizenry inured to a constant invasion of its privacy has formed the basis for a number of twentieth-century dystopian novels and films, such as George Orwell’s 1984 (1949), George Lucas’s THX-1138 (1971), Stephen King’s The Running Man (1982), Peter Weir’s The Truman Show (1998), Kurt Wimmer’s Equilibrium (2002) and the Warchowski brothers’ Matrix trilogy (1999–2003). The widely acknowledged forerunner of these works, however, was a novel, We, written in 1921 by the Russian author, Yevgeny Zamyatin.

Zamyatin’s concerns about the power of vision in regulating society and individuals have been shared by twentieth-century cultural theorists such as Michel Foucault and Laura Mulvey. Paradoxically, while Zamyatin’s novel suggests that surveillance in the hands of the state is a mechanism for regulating, and perhaps even for destroying
the individual, the novel also depicts the self-conscious, reflexive gaze as fundamental to the development of the identity of the protagonist. This representation of the emergence of the individual parallels psychoanalyst Jaques Lacan's mirror-stage theory, in which he argues that individual identity is constructed when a subject first sees and apprehends him or herself in a mirror. If the theories of Foucault, Mulvey and Lacan are equally correct, then seeing, when done by authorities, controls and disciplines individuals, but, conversely, when individuals direct their gaze back at themselves, it serves to differentiate them from the collective, thus providing a basis for future resistance against the demands of collectivism. As I have already stated, both forms of seeing are represented in We. The centrality of vision in this novel is indicated by the fact that Zamyatin constantly draws attention to the eyes of his characters, as noted by Ray Parrott, who has found over 160 allusions to eyes in the novel. This emphasis on eyes suggests a corresponding emphasis on vision. Without a doubt, concepts of opacity, transparency and surveillance are central to the construction, regulation and resistance of individuals in We. To clarify how Zamyatin uses these concepts, I begin in the next section with a summary of We and then indicate how Foucault's theory of panopticism elucidates the carceral structure of society in We. In the last section I turn from investigating the regulatory surveillance practices of Zamyatin's fictional society to examining through the lens of Lacanian theory the identity formation of the protagonist, D-503.

The Glass Menagerie: The One State and the Power of Surveillance

Yevgeny Zamyatin's novel, We, depicts life under the repressive control of The One State. The One State is a city-state entirely cut off from the natural world by a glass Green Wall. Like the Green Wall, all of the structures within the city are made of glass, with the sole exception of The House of Antiquity, a surviving derelict house that serves as a museum. Thus, citizens, called numbers, live and work under the constant scrutiny of their fellow citizens. The only officially sanctioned privacy occurs during Sexual Days when numbers are permitted to lower the blinds in their dwellings.
Life in The One State is strictly regulated so that it is, for the most part, egalitarian. Citizens live in identical dwellings, eat the same food, and wear matching uniforms. The sexual needs of numbers are scientifically determined, and they are allotted a corresponding number of Sexual Days. Everyone has equal access to sexual partners in accordance with the Lex Sexualis that stipulates ‘every number has the right of availability, as a sexual product, to any other number.’ Unsurprisingly then, familial structures have been abolished and children are raised by the state. Every number lives according to the strict schedule laid out by The Tables of Hourly Commandments. The only noticeably elite members of this society are the Benefactor, who creates laws and carries out punishments and the Guardians, who police The One State.

The narrative of We is written in the first person by D-503, the chief builder of a spaceship, the Integral, designed to spread the ‘mathematically infallible happiness’ of The One State throughout the universe (19). As the Integral nears completion, D-503 begins writing We with the intention of educating any ‘barbaric’ and ignorant aliens encountered by the crew of the Integral of the benefits of The One State. D-503’s loyalty to The One State is undermined, however, by his sexual relationship with a woman, E-330, who increasingly involves him in subversive activities. It eventually becomes apparent that E-330 is a leader of a resistance group comprised both of numbers living in The One State and ‘savages’ living outside the Green Wall. This resistance group, called the Mephi, plots to attack The One State and hijack the Integral. The attack on The One State is only partially successful, and the attempted hijack fails. D-503, along with all of the numbers, is forcibly subjected to a newly developed operation, a fantasiektomie, which destroys the individual’s ability to fantasize. As the state newspaper explains: ‘A triple cauterisation of the node with X-rays, and you are cured of Fantasy – You are perfect; you are on a par with machines’ (173–4). This reduction of individuals to machines renders any form of resistance impossible. The novel ends with the emotionless D-503 watching the torture and execution of his lover, E-330.

The immense power of the political structure in The One State stems from its capacity for unremitting surveillance made possible by the transparent architecture. D-503 explains in his fourth entry how constant surveillance has become an accepted part of daily life:
Ordinarily [...] we constantly live in full sight of all, constantly bathed in light and surrounded by our glass walls that seem to be woven of coruscating air. We have nothing to conceal from one another. Besides, this lack of concealment lightens the onerous and exalted work of the Guardians. Otherwise, who can tell what things may happen? (35)

These buildings, in other words, permit both the officially sanctioned Guardians and ordinary citizens to continually spy on each other. Although D-503 insists that ‘we have nothing to conceal from one another’, the fact that ‘this lack of concealment lightens the [...] work of the Guardians’, and indeed the very necessity for Guardians in The One State, suggests that numbers have a great deal to conceal: their carefully concealed subversive thoughts. The underlying resentment of the numbers is tacitly acknowledged by D-503, who worries that if structures were opaque, ‘who can tell what things may happen?’ Indeed, it is the fact that nobody could tell, both in the figurative sense that concealed activities are inconceivable and thus unspeakable, and in the literal sense that nobody could report these activities to the Guardians, that worries D-503.

As D-503 understands, however, the disclosure created by the glass walls prevents the resentment of the numbers from coalescing into active resistance. At the same time, this constant exposure renders resistance even less likely by facilitating the assimilation of the individual into the collective. This assimilation is described by D-503, who explains, ‘To the right and left, through the walls of glass, I seem to be seeing myself, my room, my clothes, my movements – but repeated a thousand times over. This is invigorating: one sees oneself as one enormous mighty whole’ (46–7). In this manner individual numbers are encouraged to identify with the collective. The success of this assimilation is further evidenced by D-503’s happy explanation to E-330 that ‘nobody is one, but one of. We are so alike’ (24). This assimilation of the individual into the social body encourages numbers to accept, in the words of a similar society, the Borg, depicted in Star Trek: The Next Generation, that ‘resistance is futile.’ At the same time, numbers are to be so completely invested in the social body that they will view any attack on it, any difference of opinion or behaviour, as a threat to their personal well being.

The function of architecture in The One State corresponds in many ways to the function of the Panoptican as described by Michel Foucault. The Panoptican, advocated by the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century philosopher Jeremy Bentham, was a multi-
purpose building-plan designed to assist in the regulation of prisoners, factory workers, students or any part of the population that needed to be controlled. This proposed structure consisted of a surveillance tower surrounded by a circular outer building. The circular outer building would be divided into cells. There was to be no means of communication between individual cells. Each cell would have a window both on the wall facing away from the surveillance tower, to let in light, and on the wall facing the surveillance tower, so that the authorities could view the activities of the inmates at any time. Just as importantly, the surveillance tower was designed so that the inmates could always see the tower, but could never see inside the tower, and thus could never know when they were being watched. In theory, because the inmates would never know when they were being observed, they would constantly regulate their own behaviour. Thus, the Panoptican induces ‘in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power.’ Foucault goes on to explain that ultimately:

He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principal of his own subjection.5

This description of an inmate’s response to the vigilant eye of the Panoptican parallels D-503’s response to the unremitting surveillance of his own carceral society. D-503 is constantly aware of the demands of The One State, and every infringement of the rules on his part evokes an emotional crisis. Indeed, he is the principal of his own subjection to the extent that when he breaks the law he declares:

In my relationship to The One State I have the right to receive punishment, and this right I shall never relinquish. No number among us should ever renounce, or should dare to renounce this sole – and hence the most precious – right of his. (118)

D-503’s subjugation to the state is further emphasized by the fact that immediately following this statement he argues that individuals cannot possess rights in relationship to the state, and that even ‘the right to punishment’ is merely a presumptuous fiction on his part. Punishment, according to this view, rises from the whim of the state. In acknowledging that even punishment is arbitrary, D-503 realizes
that numbers in fact possess no rights at all. Thus D-503 posits himself, and indeed all numbers, as completely at the mercy of an impersonal and incomprehensible state. It is not The One State, however, that has subjugated D-503, but rather his awareness that at any time The One State’s vigilant eyes may be watching him. As a result, through his internalisation of the power of the state he has become the principle of his own subjection.

Although the Panoptican and society in The One State are similar in their reliance on the gaze as a mechanism of power, because The One State system is operating under different conditions it has by necessity modified its use of surveillance. The most obvious difference between these two systems is the scale upon which they operate. While the Panoptican empowers some individuals to regulate and modify the behaviour of other individuals, The One State uses everyone to regulate and modify the behaviour of everyone. It follows then that there is no clear distinction between those who watch and those who are being watched, those who regulate and those being regulated. D-503’s description of The Day of Unanimity, the day when a show election of The Benefactor is put on, emphasises the erasure of distinction between the watched and the watchers:

We have nothing to conceal or to be ashamed of; we celebrate our elections openly, honestly, in the light of day. I can see how all give their votes for the Benefactor — all can see how I give my vote for the Benefactor — and how can things be otherwise since all and I are the one We? (138, my italics)

While the Guardians possess greater authority and perhaps, though this is never stated, more privileges than other numbers, the only clear distinction between them and ordinary numbers is that they are licensed to act upon information gathered, whereas numbers are expected to report any signs of disobedience to the Guardians (44). But Guardians, because they live in a society rendered literally transparent, are subjected to the same scrutiny as other numbers. The inevitable result of this constant policing by everyone is that The One State is nothing less than a penal colony where all serve equally as prisoners and prison wardens. While the inmates of the Panoptican may, however futilely, dream of either escape or release into free society, for the citizens of The One State there is, as far as they are concerned, no place to escape to, and no limit to their incarceration. The all encompassing ubiquity of The One State matches Foucault’s
views on the pervasiveness of power so that, as he argues, ‘power is “always already there”, that one is never “outside” it, that there are no “margins” for those who break with the system to gambol in.’

Yet, because they share the responsibility of policing, as well as the weight of being constantly policed, most numbers seem unable to envision alternatives, and thus quietly, and in many cases apparently happily, submit to their incarceration. Indeed, D-503 is so inured to his socially enforced captivity that he believes liberty to be inconsistent with happiness, stating that ‘the instinct of non-freedom is organically inherent in man’ and speaks of his gratitude for the surveillance provided by the Guardians:

It is so gratifying to feel somebody’s vigilant eye upon one, lovingly guarding one from the least mistake, from the least erring step. It may sound somewhat sentimental, but that same analogy again comes to my mind – that of the guardian angels, whom the ancients used to dream about. (75–6)

It is difficult to envision the inmates of the Panoptican so completely and contentedly accepting the instruments of their own incarceration.

Two crucial differences can be detected in the workings of the Panoptican and that of The One State. Firstly, The One State lacks a surveillance tower with which the inmates can identify with their oppression. The absence of a clearly defined source of oppression means that this oppression is distributed more or less equally among the numbers. The surveillance tower is rendered unnecessary because the numbers have internalized its function. For those guilty of deviating from the social norms, everyone arouses fears of betrayal. The absence of a clearly defined source of oppression also makes resistance all the more difficult, and it becomes evident within the novel that an attack cannot merely target the Benefactor or the Guardians, but must instead target society as a collective entity.

The second obvious difference between the Panoptican and The One State is that in the Panoptican inmates are divided into discrete cells, and are thus subjected to solitary confinement. Foucault describes the objective of this isolation:

The crowd, a compact mass, a locus of multiple exchanges, individualities merging together, a collective effect, is abolished and replaced by a collection of separated individualities. From the point of view of the guardian, it is replaced by a multiplicity that can be numbered and
supervised; from the point of view of the inmates, by a sequestered and observed solitude.⁹

By contrast, life in The One State is organized so that citizens have little time to themselves. Far from wishing to abolish the ‘collective effect’, The One State seeks to promote it, and instead struggles, with only limited success, to abolish or at least to render ridiculous to its citizens the concept of the individual. In practice The One State’s mechanism of control is more nuanced than that of the Panoptican, for while it attempts to destroy in its numbers the fundamental concept of individuality, it still relies on recognition of individuality for purposes of administration. Where the Panoptican replaces the collective with ‘a multiplicity that can be numbered and supervised’, The One State literally – in that numbers are given alphanumeric names – numbers its citizenry for the purpose of supervising them. Yet this administrative numbering in no way threatens the identification of its citizens, not with each other, but with The One State.

The One State is at least partially successful in destroying individuality. D-503, as I noted earlier, finds the view of all the numbers going through the same routine invigorating because ‘one sees oneself as one enormous mighty whole’ (47). This sight provides an example of how individual numbers are enticed into identifying with the collective. The extent to which the collective is privileged over the individual is repeatedly attested in the novel. E-330 formulates, for example, the way that originality (and thus individuality) is unfavourably compared with uniformity (and the collective):

'It is clear [...] that to be original means standing out from others. Consequently, to be original means violating uniformity. And what in the idiotic language of the ancients was called being banal means among us only the fulfilment of one's duty'. (43)

D-503 agrees with E-330’s definitions, but initially fails to notice her antagonism to the imposition of ‘banality’ as fulfilment of one’s duty. Far from resenting The One State’s insistence on uniformity, D-503 finds it comforting. Later he records his feelings about the triumph of the collective over the individual when he describes the numbers ‘all pacing along in even ranks of four each’ (22). He states, ‘We walked along, a single million-headed body, and within each of us was the
meek joyfulness which, probably, constitutes the life of molecules, atoms and phagocytes. [...] We is from God, I is from the Devil' (129–30).10

While The One State’s mechanisms of power are substantial, ultimately its attempts to foreclose the possibility of resistance through surveillance fail. This failure stems from the fact that some numbers do come to recognize their individuality. A doctor provides this explanation for the development of individuality in D-503, ‘You are in a bad way! Apparently a soul has formed within you’ (95). The process through which this individuality is realized in D-503 is in many ways similar to Jacques Lacan’s theory of the mirror-state. It is this formation of ‘the soul’ and its role in making possible resistance that will be examined in the next section.

Through the Looking Glass: The Individual in Wonderland

According to Lacan’s theory of human development, when a child is born it does not yet possess an individuated identity. Because the infant does not have a sense of its own individuality, it also cannot distinguish the individuality of others. Thus, the baby and the baby’s environment are inseparable, at least as far as the baby is concerned. Although the numbers in We are adults and do possess a certain awareness of their individuality, they are much closer to Lacan’s theoretical infant than most adults. From the outset of the novel, for example, D-503 blurs the distinction between himself and the Other, stating, ‘I shall merely attempt to record what I see, what I think – to be more exact, what we think (we, precisely, and let this We serve as the title of the entries I am making)’ (20). Of course D-503’s praise of the collective is problematic precisely because the first word of his first entry does identify the active subject with the singular first person pronoun ‘I’. D-503 paradoxically recognizes his individuality at the precise moment when he sees himself as part of ‘one enormous mighty whole’ (47). Yet, although D-503 does, apparently against his best intentions, acknowledge his individuality, he continuously struggles to dissolve his identity into that of the state. Consequently he describes the numbers as a ‘single million-headed body,’ and later explains the function of the rigged elections in The One State saying, ‘the elections themselves have a significance that is more symbolic
than anything else: to remind us that we are one mighty, million-celled organism’ (129, 138).

The process by which a subject identifies itself as ‘I’ first occurs, according to Lacan, when the subject identifies with an image outside of him or herself. For an infant, this image may be her reflection in the mirror, or it may simply be her family mirroring her behaviour. When the infant equates herself with the object in the mirror, she sees her body, for the first time, as complete. Thus, ‘the synthesis of this image produces a sense of contrast with the uncoordination of the [child’s] body, which is experienced as a fragmented body’.11 The child, fearful of her lack of mastery over the perceived fragmentation of her body, instead associates herself with the specular image of her complete body, and it is out of this identification that what Lacan terms the ‘ideal ego’ is formed. However, the ego will always be endangered by that initial sense of fragmentation, and, according to Lacan, this danger will manifest itself in ‘images of castration, emasculation, mutilation, dismemberment, dislocation, evisceration, devouring, [and] bursting open of the body’.12 Not only does the subject retain this uneasy memory of the fragmented body, the subject, in identifying with her specular image instead of her actual body, is identifying with an alienating identity. Or, as Lacan explains, ‘the initial synthesis of the ego is essentially an alter ego, it is alienated’.13 Thus the alienated, or, to use Lacan’s term, split subject, ‘will never know [herself] completely, but will always be cut off from [her] own knowledge’.14

The process by which D-503 becomes increasingly aware of his own individuality is in many respects similar to the development of the ego theorized by Lacan. Just as contemporary western society relies on psychology and the use of medical terminology to describe the development of the ego, so also The One State relies on doctors and medical terminology to delineate the development of the ‘soul’. The development of a soul, however, is regarded by The One State as a disorder precipitated by fantasy. A soul is merely a symptom of a diseased fantasy.15 Thus, when D-503’s ‘normal’ equilibrium is upset by the fantasies aroused in him by E-330, he convinces himself that he must be ill. Indeed, he seems to diagnoses his malady as a perversion. D-503’s fears are entirely confirmed by a doctor, who tells him ‘you are in a bad way’, and informs him that having a soul is an ‘incurable’ condition (95). The doctor’s observation that D-503 is ‘in a bad way’ is a double entendre which comments both on D-503’s
‘dangerous’ medical condition, and on the fact that now that this ‘soul’ will lead him to increasingly resist The One State. It is the pathway to individuality that most concerns the state, and eventually the state will provide a ‘cure’ in the form of compulsory fantasiection. In the meantime, however, the doctor describes the formation of the soul in these terms:

Well, then, take a plane, a surface – there, this mirror will do. And you and I are on this surface – there, you see: we’re squinting our eyes because of the reflected sunlight, [...]. But just imagine that through the application of some form of fire this impenetrable surface has suddenly softened, and nothing any longer glides over it – everything penetrates it, into that mirror-world which we eyed with such curiosity when we were children – children aren’t at all as foolish as people think they are, I assure you. The plane has become a mass, a body, a world, and that which is within the mirror is within you [...]. And, you understand, a cold mirror reflects, rejects, whereas my supposititious mirror absorbs, and retains a trace through all time of all things that have affected it. (96)

Zamyatin’s novel was first published in English in 1924 prior to Lacan’s work, but this description bears in many respects an uncanny resemblance to the mirror stage. Like Lacan, Zamyatin sees the reflected image (whether literally, or reflected by some other person or thing) as a catalyst for the development of the individual. Thus the doctor presses D-503 not to see the reflection as merely a specular image, but rather as ‘a mass, a body, a world’, and urges D-503 to identify himself with this oddly absorbent ‘supposititious mirror.’ Significantly, like Lacan, the doctor also notes the particular fascination that the ‘mirror-world’ possesses for children.

The extent to which mirrors, or the mirroring of others, play a role in D-503’s self realization is remarkable. D-503 increasingly sees mirrors everywhere, and, as Lacan would have predicted, D-503 both identifies with the image projected by these mirrors and at same time finds that this reflected identity alienates him from himself. This process begins, however, before D-503 sees himself in the mirror, through his relationship with E-330. He describes one of his meetings with her in these terms:

There were two Is. One I was my former self, D-503, the number D-503, while the other ... Up to now he had merely shoved his shaggy hands just a little out of the shell, but now all of him was crawling out; the shell was cracking, any minute now it would fly into smithereens and ... and what then? (67–8)
The image conjured up by D-503 suggests both the fragmentation of the body (‘up till now he had merely shoved his hands a little out of the shell’ ‘the shell was cracking’), and the fundamental alienation caused by this processes (‘There were two Is’). The paradox by which D-503 both identifies with his new identity and fails to recognize this new self is even more manifest when he looks at himself in a mirror after he has begun transgressing the laws of The One State:

I am in front of a mirror. And for the first time in my life (yes, precisely so: for the first time in my life) I see myself clearly, distinctly, consciously; I see myself with amazement, as if it were somebody else’s I. There he is, this I [...]. And out of there (this there is at the same time both here and infinitely far off) – from there I am contemplating myself (or him) and know that that fellow with his eyebrows as straight as if drawn with a ruler has nothing to do with me, a stranger whom I have met for the first time in my life. But I, the real I, am not he. (70)

D-503 clearly recognizes himself in the mirror, and yet this recognition of his reflection also constitutes a méconnaissance, a misunderstanding and misrecognition. The specular image presented to D-503 is both abundantly familiar, and at the same time a stranger, whom D-503 is meeting for the first time. This sense of alienation remains even after D-503 is no longer looking in the mirror, so that he states: ‘I am alone. Or more correctly, I am alone with that other I of mine. I am sitting in an armchair with my legs crossed and, out of some there, am curiously watching myself (my own self and no other) writhing on the bed’ (74).

If this individuated D-503 is unfamiliar to D-503, it is equally a stranger to The One State. D-503, because of his awareness of the surveillance of The One State, struggles unsuccessfully to discipline and control this new identity. His failure to regulate this new self, however, is made bearable by the fact that he can cast the burden of responsibility for his actions on the ‘new’ D-503, whom he simultaneously identifies with and disavows. D-503’s description of an attack on a friend, R-13, illustrates this point: ‘I (the real I) got a good grip on the collar of the other self of mine, wild, shaggy, breathing hard. I (the real I) said to him – to R-13, “Forgive me, for Benefactor’s sake. I’m quite ill; can’t sleep. Can’t understand what’s wrong with me –”’ (73–4). D-503 also distances himself from his violent sexual encounter with E-330 by casting the blame for his behaviour on his other self. He offers in his entry an objective report
of this encounter, with himself acting as a first-person witness to something he commits in the third-person: ‘This I saw: with shaggy paws he roughly seized her, tore her delicate silk to ribbons, sank his teeth into her. My recollection is precise on this point: he used his teeth’ (68).

As I have noted above, along with an irreparable sense of alienation, one of the other results of the development of the ego according to Lacan is that the imagination will be haunted with images of the fragmented body. Unsurprisingly then, images of isolated and dismembered body parts are a recurrent motif in D-503’s thoughts. When D-503 first encounters E-330, who is the catalyst for his individualization, he begins talking with her of body parts:

‘Yes, the noses!’ I was almost shouting by now. ‘As long as there is a basis for envy, no matter to what extent … if I have a nose like a button, while somebody else has one line —’

‘Well, now, when it comes to your nose I’ll grant it is rather classic, as they used to say in the old days. But as for your hands — no, no, do let me see your hands!’

I can’t bear to have people looking at my hands; they’re all grown over with hair, shaggy – some sort of ridiculous atavism. I held out my hands, and said, making my voice as objective as I could, ‘They’re simian’. (25)

Significantly, when D-503 describes his hands, he dissociates himself from them by ascribing them to a simian. His hands are both his, and not his; human and animal.

D-503’s image of the dismembered body becomes more pronounced after he finds himself cut-off, through his disobedience, from the body of The One State:

Properly speaking, I presented an unnatural sight. Imagine a finger lopped off a man, off his hand – a human finger, all hunched up and bent over, hopping and dashing over the glass sidewalk all by its lonesome. I was that finger. And the strangest, most unnatural thing of all was that this finger had no desire whatsoever to be on the hand, to be with the other digits. (109)

Thus D-503 envisions himself cut off from the imaginary complete body of society. In his description D-503 depicts himself not as an outcast or rebel, but as a dismembered fragment of the body. This fragmentation is caused not so much by his sense of loss – though this loss of innocence and belonging does manifest itself throughout the
novel – as it is caused by the fact that D-503 is torn by his contradictory desires for restoration to his community, and individual fulfilment with E-330. D-503’s predicament illustrates the point made by Lacan when he wrote that the subject ‘is originally an inchoate collection of desires – there you have the true sense of the expression fragmented body.’

D-503’s desire from the beginning of the novel has been to combat this sense of a fragmented body by effacing his identity and submersing himself into the identity of another entity, initially that of The One State. When E-330 disrupts D-503’s union with The One State, he redirects his desire for unification to her. He describes the assimilation of his identity into her stronger ego in these words:

I was a crystal, I was dissolving in her, in E-. I felt with perfect clarity how the polished facets defining me in space were dissolving, constantly dissolving; I was vanishing, dissolving in her knees, in her; I was becoming smaller and smaller – and at the same time expanding, increasing more and more, becoming more and more unencompassable. Inasmuch as she was not she but the whole universe. But then, for a second, I and that ecstatically transfixed armchair were one. (132)

Ironically then E-330 temporarily displaces The One State, and becomes for D-503 the entire universe into which he disappears. The degree to which E-330’s control supplants that of The One State is indicated by D-503’s uneasy collusion in her attempts to sabotage the state. The new identity developed by D-503, however, cannot be entirely regulated either by The One State or E-330. Yet in spite of this individualization, the mother-figure, which Lacan suggests is necessary for ratifying the infant’s identification with its specular image in the mirror is missing for D-503. Thus, in one of his final entries, having lost both his relationship with E-330 and with The One State, D-503 laments:

If I only had a mother – as the ancients did: a mother of my own – yes, precisely, my own ... And if only I were, as far as she was concerned, not the builder of the Integral, and not a number, D-503, and not a molecule of The One State, but a bit of common humanity, a bit of her own self – a trampled-upon, crushed, cast-off bit .... (206)

Although there is no mother to ratify D-503’s individuality and affirm that he is more than ‘a molecule of The One State’, before the fantasiectomy D-503 becomes acutely aware of his individuality. The
awareness of individuality brought on by his alienation fuels D-503's resistance to the power of The One State. His disaffection exposes the limitations of The One State's surveillance; for it is in the alienated individual that resistance can best conceal itself. The transparent structures of The One State and the vigilant, regulating gaze of all of the numbers makes resistance seem difficult, if not futile. Yet because individuals are opaque, concealing their thoughts inside themselves, resistance is still possible. The privacy denied the numbers by The One State is nonetheless available on an individual level. D-503, recognising this dilemma, regretfully notes in one of his early entries The One State's failure at rendering individuals transparent: 'Therefore, no matter how deplorable it may be, I must remark at this point that the process of the induration, the crystallization of life is, apparently, still incomplete, even among us' (39). He further emphasises the opacity of individuals later, when he describes his first unsettling meeting with E-330:

At last we came to a stop before a mirror. At that moment all I saw were her eyes. I was struck by an idea: why, man is constructed just as primitively as these preposterous apartments: human heads are opaque, and the only windows into the interior – the eyes – are tiny. She surmised my thoughts apparently – and turned around. 'Well, here are my eyes. Well' [...] I was confronted by two eerily dark windows – and the life going on within them was so unknown, so alien. (42)

The reference to the mirror in this passage is suggestive both of the embryonic individuality in D-503 and of the rift that this individuality will cause between The One State and D-503. Watching E-330 in the mirror D-503 becomes suddenly aware that the opaque human head deflects investigation of the interior life of the individual. The eyes alone act as windows into the interior, and E-330's eyes reveal a private life that threatens the conformity, or, to use E-330's term, the banality, demanded by The One State. D-503 acknowledges this threat by repeatedly comparing what he sees in E-330 to a fire, stating later, 'Through those dark windows, her eyes, I saw there, deep within her, an oven flaming, sparks, tongues of flame licking upward, mountains of piled dry, resinous fire-wood' (159–60). The image of the cleansing and destructive force of fire recurs several more times in the novel, suggesting that the emergence of the individual in The One State marks the beginning of the apocalypse for this collective society.
The personal life hinted at in E-330’s eyes contrasts with the emptiness D-503 finds in the eyes of his other lover, O-90:

Her round blue eyes were wide open – blue windows giving access within – and I penetrated within without catching anything, and found nothing therein – i.e. nothing extraneous, unnecessary. (49)

The vacuous eyes of O-90 and her apparent acceptance of her assimilation into The One State are the antidote for the fiery eyes and rebellious individuality of E-330. E-330 and her co-resisters, however, have taught The One State that it cannot rely on conditioning and surveillance to control humans. As long as an individual is capable of thinking and of concealing his or her thoughts, there will always be the threat of revolution. The One State’s ultimate response to this threat is to use fantasiectomy to reduce the numbers to machines. The success of this surgery is testified to by the dramatic change in D-503. In his last entry he reviews his earlier entries and notes that while the handwriting is the same, everything else about himself has changed:

There are no ravings whatsoever, no preposterous metaphors, no emotions whatsoever. Facts only. Because I am well; I am perfectly absolutely well. I smile; I cannot help but smile: they have extracted some sort of a sliver out of my head; my head is light, empty. To be more exact: it is not empty, but there is nothing extraneous in it. (220)

D-503’s condition exactly replicates the condition he had earlier noted in O-90. The fantasiectomy has successfully extirpated D-503’s fantasy and reduced him to the soulless status of a machine. So completely has D-503’s individuality been erased that when he sees E-330 tortured he shows no emotion, except to comment on how ‘her face became very white and, since her eyes were dark and large, this created an extremely beautiful effect’ (221). Thus, with the removal of his soul D-503 ‘returns to the Garden of Eden, re-enters the Womb, […] and receives the Supreme Grace of Unblemished Happiness from the Immaculate United State.’ He has effectively been infantized, and is once more united with The One State.
Conclusion

In light of modern society's increased capacity for surveillance and its growing willingness to subject its citizens to unremitting investigation, *We* provides a very pessimistic prognosis for individuality. Yet at the same time as he warns us to beware of granting the state and society too much liberty in prying into our private lives, Yevgeny Zamyatin also suggests that an introspective gaze has a liberating power. The introspective gaze reveals the individual, and it is within the privacy of the individual, and from the position of alienation that resistance to the societal power structures begins.

Notes

I would like to thank Dr Jim Simpson of the University of Glasgow for introducing me to Lacanian theory and discussing this article with me, and I would like to thank Dr. Joy Cushman for introducing me to Foucauldian theory.


2. Yevgeny Zamyatin's name has been transliterated into English in various forms, including Evgenii Zamiatin, Eugene Zamyatin, and Evgenij Zamjatin. I have opted to use Yevgeny Zamyatin for the simple reason that this was the form chosen for the 1977 translation upon which I am basing this article. In addition I should note that my decision to rely on an English version of *We* instead of using a Russian edition is based on the grounds that although *We* was originally written in Russian, it was first published in English.


6. Beyond the obvious fact of the constant regulatory surveillance of numbers, there is other evidence that The One State is a penal colony, including the fact that, ‘as in many prison systems, the numbers all have shaved heads and wear identical unifs.’ Brett Cooke, *Human Nature in Utopia: Zamyatin's *We*’, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2002), 41.

7. Strangely, none of the citizens of The One State, even those who are actively rebellious and have contact with humans living beyond the Green Wall, seem to seriously consider living outside the Green Wall.


10. The manner in which the marching numbers come to identify themselves with The One State foreshadows the use of marching in totalitarian regimes to promote identification with the state. This is particularly exemplified by the marching held at the Nuremberg rally in Nazi Germany.


