
Keeping It All in the (Nuclear) Family: Big Brother, Auntie BBC, Uncle Sam and George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

By Nigel Morris

Nineteen Eighty-Four (BBC Television, 1954) originally created shockwaves and has since achieved legendary status. Its proximity to a cinematic version - *1984* (Dir. Michael Anderson, Holiday Film Productions Ltd, 1956) - offers the unusual opportunity to compare almost contemporaneous adaptations in different media. Consideration of technical, cultural, and ideological determinants reveals much about their context, both generally and specific to their production histories, including their place in the unfolding chronicle of responses to George Orwell's work.

Deadly serious drama

Twice broadcast live, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* demonstrates the aesthetic assumptions and technical constraints of its time. These included multi-camera studio practices that shaped play production for another decade until replaced by single-camera location shooting. Nevertheless, director Rudolph Cartier (credited "producer") and screenwriter Nigel Kneale challenged television's limitations. For example, filmed inserts provided exterior establishing shots, bridged scenes, facilitated special effects, covered costume changes, and accelerated pacing (Jacobs 2000, 109, 135-6).

The play featured on *BBC Sunday Night Theatre* on 12 December 1954. Accolades and notoriety prompted 35mm telerecording of the Thursday live "repeat", which is the earliest television drama in Britain's National Film and TV Archive. "Horrific" and "subversive", *Nineteen Eighty-Four* attracted numerous complaints. *The Daily Express* even linked it to a viewer's demise during the broadcast. The BBC assigned Cartier a bodyguard following death threats to prevent a repeat (Cooke 2003, 27; Duguid no date). Parliamentary motions and amendments accused the BBC of pandering to "sexual and sadistic tastes", yet praised its "plays and programmes capable of appreciation by adult minds", and celebrated the "freedom of the individual ... to switch off" and "soon [to] switch over ... to more appropriate programmes."

The latter reference to "more appropriate programmes" refers to the forthcoming Independent Television (ITV), an advertising-financed

commercial service that would break the BBC's monopoly over both funding and representation. The Corporation was, and continues to be, paid for by a compulsory fee levied upon viewers. This intermittently exposes it – despite official independence – to charges of being a mouthpiece for Government propaganda, particularly as Parliament sets the licence fee and therefore can apply pressure if programmes step too far out of line.

ITV was intended to be distinctly different. It would fulfil ambitions for more advertising: an industry constrained, despite economic boom, by newsprint restrictions caused by use of timber for post-war building reconstruction rather than to make paper. Also, not unconnected, ITV would appeal to less refined tastes than the BBC's somewhat patrician programming generally allowed. In this case, popularisation fed fears about cultural debasement. These extended back at least as far as Victorian anxieties about working-class youths reading lurid novels, through concerns expressed by the grammar school educated gamekeeper, Mellors, in D. H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1929) about cinemas and jazz causing moral decadence, to "prolefeed" in Orwell's satirical *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949): sentimental songs and machine-generated pornography to keep the masses subdued.

The BBC had been established for Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) in the 1920s on the grounds that spectrum scarcity meant the airwaves were a resource to be held in trust on behalf of the people – as opposed to exploitation for commercial profit, as in the United States. The Corporation's first Director-General, John (later Lord) Reith established guidelines about taste and impartiality. His vision embraced a broadly educational function which – against a global background of revolution and proletarian unrest, including in Britain the General Strike and Irish independence – would assert nationhood through common culture. This was predicated partly on arts and entertainment that audience members might not necessarily have chosen themselves, but were deemed socially healthy. Life-affirming experiences might be encountered between more accessible offerings in a mixed schedule rather than one intended to maximise ratings.

The BBC addressed a nation of households comprised of families united by common viewing events, many organised around annual rituals such as sporting and cultural occasions and the monarch's Christmas broadcast. During the early days of radio, broadcasting was suspended for an hour to allow listeners to dress for dinner: an indication of the Corporation's pervasive class assumptions, which insisted on radio announcers, like performers, wearing evening dress until 1939 (BBC no date). Following television's post-war resumption (1946), a "toddlers' truce" similarly suspended broadcasting to get children to bed. This

lasted eleven years until challenged by ITV, which was then also required to comply. The legacy of such traditions, conflated with the term “nanny state”, a pejorative right-wing concept itself conflating perceived authoritarianism with the British post-war Welfare system, led BBC presenter and comedian Kenny Everett in the 1960s to personify his employer as “Auntie Beeb”, a name that stuck.

The *Nineteen Eighty-Four* broadcasts, then, coincided with uncertainty and change in broadcasting and politics alike. The Parliamentary speeches thanked the BBC for warning Britons about “logical and soul-destroying consequences of their freedom” and that “inhuman practices depicted in the play ... are already in common use under totalitarian régimes.” Prince Philip revealed that the Queen and he had enjoyed the play. The Corporation’s Head of Drama defended it on the current affairs programme *Panorama* and introduced the repeat personally after BBC Governors narrowly endorsed it. The real issue, arguably, was the idealised conception of the Nation as Family (Jacobs 2000, 133). The teleplay’s perceived threats to the sanctity of the home (and Sundays) tangled with appreciation for rigorous drama’s ability to address challenging issues. Unofficial sources claim seven million watched the repeat: the most since the Coronation (Duguid no date).

***Nineteen Eighty-Four* as adaptation**

Controversy and sensationalism suggest Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was not yet an established classic. While it has sold millions of copies globally and become set reading for generations of students, it was then little-known; *The Times* considered its “impact”, pre-transmission, “only marginal” (16 December 1954; quoted in Jacobs 2000, 154), although Crick reports 49,917 British and 170,000 US sales by 1950, plus 190,000 through the Book of the Month Club (1982, 563). While recognition of Orwell’s dystopia was aided by interests pursuing a Cold War agenda, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*’s epoch-defining status as a television event rapidly introduced the public to the concept of totalitarianism, enhanced awareness of propaganda and brainwashing practices, and popularised now-familiar terms including “Big Brother”, “Room 101”, “Newspeak”, and “Thought Police”.

The novel tells of government official Winston Smith, who rewrites archived articles from *The Times* to accord with current circumstances, destroying previous versions so that the State’s predictions and policies prove infallible. Like all Outer Party members, he undergoes constant surveillance from two-way telescreens. Apart from ensuring conformity, these measures unite the Party behind Big Brother, a silent, ever-watchful personification of the State, which is engaged in perpetual warfare against other superpowers, continually shifting its

allegiance. Winston secretly hates Big Brother, suspecting that his superior, O'Brien, shares this "thoughtcrime", a capital offence. Winston and fellow Party member, Julia, initiate an illicit sexual relationship and are recruited by O'Brien into what they believe is an underground resistance movement - only to learn that this is a trap. After the lovers' arrest, anticipated by both as inevitable although they swear they will never betray each other, O'Brien tortures and interrogates Winston over many weeks. Winston's reprogramming concludes when he encounters his deepest phobia in Room 101 and screams for the atrocity to be committed on Julia instead. Broken and exhausted, he is released into low-level community work while awaiting assassination. Winston and Julia meet and confess their mutual betrayal - apparently all they now have in common. Telescreens report yet another victory, electrifying crowds in the surrounding streets while Winston overflows with adoration of Big Brother.

The BBC version conveys the novel's squalid mood, pessimism, and inexorable narrative logic. It retains key characters and events while omitting, eliding, or amalgamating peripheral elements to reduce complexity and scale to a two-hour, emphatically verbal performance from one studio - albeit with 22 sets, 28 actors, and closed-circuit video feeding to a large orchestra providing live accompaniment.

Within realist conventions that enhance credibility and persuasiveness, the adaptation cannot replicate the book's internal focalisation. Winston's thoughts and perceptions include childhood and recent memories, free association, and fantasies - "Nothing was your own except the few cubic centimetres inside your skull" (1983, 24). Nevertheless the dramatisation retains the paranoia, suspense, fascination with O'Brien (André Morell), and identification with the underdog that makes Winston's (Peter Cushing) defeat, and the annihilation of his humanity, all the more devastating. Recorded voice-overs reveal Winston's true thoughts, reinforcing alignment with him while he performs impassivity, remaining watchful in the presence of telescreens, or chants with the crowd during Hate Sessions: centrally orchestrated, ritualised, compulsory demonstrations in the workplace. The indoctrination sequence privileges Winston's perception of O'Brien, punctuated with fade-outs indicating unconsciousness, time passing, and systematic repetition of torture. One of the longest of these is followed by a long speech that keeps Winston off screen, permitting make-up and costume changes before the mirror scene in which neither Winston nor the viewer is prepared for his degradation.

Fig. 1: Winston's degradation: the mirror scene in Nineteen Eighty-Four.

No free-standing production could realistically hope to address the subtle political arguments contained in the rebel leader Goldstein's book, given to Winston by O'Brien, debated during Winston's re-education, and explained in the Appendix, "The Principles of Newspeak"; nevertheless, the play deftly incorporates its rudiments into the dialogue to orient the majority of viewers encountering the story for the first time.

The play thus exploits its limitations (although some changes, such as Winston's number from 6079 to 6090, seem inexplicable). On a modern large screen, the bare production values, budget-determined (despite this being the most costly television drama then made), do not detract dramatically. In fact, dark expressionistic shadows serve both to minimise set construction and evoke the values of cinematic *film noir* (to be discussed further in relation to *1984*).

Fig. 2: Nineteen Eighty-Four as film noir.

Furthermore, occasionally, infelicities were probably imperceptible to original audiences: they include microphone shadows, glitches in the electronic image (whether in production, transmission or reception), and mismatches in picture and sound quality between studio scenes and the fourteen film inserts. Viewers were accustomed to such anomalies in their brief experience of television, watched on 9-inch, 405-line sets. Such aberrations conceivably enhanced realism, positioning Orwell's fantasy with television's immediacy before video recording.

Multi-camera shooting created theatrical, two-dimensional scenes, albeit from different positions and with intimate close-ups, which was different from mainstream cinema's simultaneous construction and dissection of three-dimensional space. Inserts also broaden the production. They show Winston in the streets; writing his secret diary (a point-of-view difficult to achieve live), and with Julia (Yvonne Mitchell) near their woodland tryst; and contextualising information including past nuclear wars and communal Hate Week preparations. They also buy time for costume and set changes and make-up adjustments and reduce set construction costs. At the start, Winston passes co-workers in cubicles, before sitting at his identical desk; the sequence ingeniously conveys the Ministry's uniformity and size by preceding Cushing's live performance with clips showing individual actors occupying one modest set (Jacobs 2000).

Fig. 3: Economic production design in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: cutaways allow one set to serve as three identical cubicles.

A commonplace observation holds that audio-visual science fiction resembles its year of production, not the future when it is set. This version came out only five years after Orwell's book. Sharing cultural assumptions and concerns, its pervasive mood represents an era embracing both texts. For contemporary students of Orwell, the play offers fascinating re-historicism. The government had changed in 1951. Winston Churchill, returning as Conservative prime minister, replaced the nationalising Labour Party, founders of the Welfare State. Orwell satirises their bureaucratic controls, propagandising, and target-setting as "English socialism", precursor to the novel's Ingsoc - although he was concerned with international tendencies, not, he insisted, attacking the Labour party (Bowker 2004, 401). Churchill's association with victory and famous two-fingered salute resonate in Orwell's ironic use of Victory as ubiquitous branding for second-rate Party products - something the dramatisation downplays.

On-screen rationing and shortages corresponded to post-war austerity. Bombsites scarred British cities. Anti-communism was rife, stoked by Churchill, who coined the phrase "Iron Curtain" in 1946 to emphasise the Soviet Union's otherness (although he had joined with Stalin to defeat Hitler). Opportunistic alliances and altering loyalties, together with personification of nation-states by media-promoted charismatic leaders (epitomised by Big Brother), prefigure interchangeability of enemies and friendly powers in continuing world wars that Orwell's Oceania wages. They involve doublethink, highlighted in aphorisms like "War is Peace". The Two Minute Hate Sessions are efficient, mediated, localised, and routinised versions of Nazi rallies, familiar from newsreels; Goldstein's name and other Jewish allusions reinforce this. Purges, secret police, show trials, and bullets in the neck, recalling Stalin's pogroms (with Goldstein representing Trotsky), played to continuing Cold War fears. Slogans and mistrust of acquaintances chimed with the wartime campaign: "Careless Talk Costs Lives". Mass Observation, ostensibly beneficial, preceded *Nineteen Eighty-Four's* menacing surveillance. Nuclear weaponry (the play begins with atomic explosions) was an ever-

present threat.

Grounding in social realism equally made *Nineteen Eighty-Four's* elements of science fiction pertinent and convincing. This tendency in British film and television involves essentially sympathetic, although not uncritical, representation of ordinary (typically working-class) lives in contemporary industrial society. The broadcast sits alongside a 1950s cycle of characteristically sensational "social problem" films that were to feed into and complement the more politically motivated British New Wave and thereby inaugurate a defining trait of British television and cinema (Hill 1986). (Its producer and writer had made the first adult science-fiction television, *The Quatermass Experiment* (BBC Television, 1953), which set the agenda for reception of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as horrific; Kneale was later to adapt *Look Back in Anger* (Tony Richardson, 1959), a key British New Wave film.) Characteristic of Orwell's writing, social realism literally becomes "kitchen sink drama", with Winston in both novel and play clearing Mrs Parsons' drainpipe. The term, often opprobrious to avoid engagement with politically troubling content, derived from David Sylvester's 1954 article about contemporary English art, which referred to a canvas featuring a sink.

Elements of Winston's grubby existence inform image structures and mythic patterns in Orwell's prose that would, however, be hard to adapt. Orwell worked with T. S. Eliot on BBC programmes during wartime and they corresponded about his novel, *Animal Farm* (1945). Although the play introduces Winston after a shot of the dried-up Thames, Orwell's allusions to Eliot's poetry, particularly "The Waste Land" (1922), are less discernible when tangibly literalised. Orwell's imagery and motifs include bleak hopelessness; dust; squalor; scuttling rats; hollow-eyed chess players; London's indistinguishable masses; snatches of popular song; disjointed proletarian barroom conversations; time (a clock, ominously, strikes thirteen in April: Eliot's "cruellest month"); partly remembered nursery rhymes and names of churches; elusive sense of lost history and culture; desire for redeeming mythology and return to a golden time; mistrust of mass media; and epigrammatic figures (Eliot's "I will show you fear in a handful of dust" matched by Orwell's future as "a boot stamping on a human face - for ever" (1983, 250)).

Fig. 4: "The Waste Land": London after nuclear attack in Nineteen Eighty-Four.

Some remain evident, however, separated from Winston's memories and anxieties, and subsumed to narrative and art direction, they become naturalised, dissipating symbolic force accumulated throughout the novel.

Genre and self-reflexivity

Garrett Stewart observes that the typical *mise-en-scène* of science fiction films "is replete with viewing screens that function not only as tools in the narrative but as icons of continuity with the present-day science of communication or surveillance" (1998, 196). While this enhances cinematic spectacle, especially when asserting special effects against earlier achievements, *Nineteen Eighty-Four's* self-reflexivity looks forward rather than back. The broadcast occurred during television's rapid take-up amid passionate contestation in Britain over its future. Orwell's Ministry of Truth - supplying "every conceivable kind of information, instruction or entertainment" and "concerned ... with news, entertainment, education and the fine arts" (1983, 39, 4) - recalls Reith's PSB mission to entertain, educate and inform. (Orwell named Room 101 after a BBC boardroom where he endured tedious meetings; by circular serendipity, the play's greasy cafeteria, setting for important encounters, in the novel accurately described the BBC canteen (Bowker 2004, 285-6), while officials leaving the Ministry were filmed at the studio exit.) Given Reith's vision of Nation as Family, there is irony in Oceania's media-constructed "Saviour" being a Big Brother rather than a patriarch more immediately identifiable with a prime minister, president, king, or dictator (Orwell 1983, 15): presumably Orwell's inspiration was mass-media figures "Uncle Joe" Stalin and Uncle Sam. "BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU" in Newspeak is "B-B SEE".

Despite huge sales of receivers for the Coronation, the screen remained an alien presence to the British public. Fears about direct effects, such as radiation sickness or becoming cross-eyed through excessive watching, paralleled anxieties about behavioural influences, including Americanisation; yet qualms about cultural and psychological invasion incorporated American examples and arguments. Orwell's novel anticipates such worries, combining media manipulation with state surveillance and presenting mass collusion in preserving a sense of order, as well as rooting out the "enemy within": ideas with continued currency. In situating media satire within television drama, such concerns acquire an additional meta-textual relevance. As Jacobs emphasises, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* frames telescreens, similar to 1950s televisions, to fill the broadcast screen: Big Brother stares equally into viewers' and Party members' dwellings (2000, 138).

Fig. 5: “B-B SEE”: Big Brother embodied in, and as embodiment of, the screen medium in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* surveys the play’s viewers alongside Oceania’s inhabitants.

Plans for ITV were nearing completion, amid concerns that advertising constitutes brainwashing (the expression originated in print in 1950, in a Korean War context). Conversely, fears about the BBC peddling government messages had not been allayed by its role during the General Strike (1926) and World War II, or by the continuing legacy of Reith’s attitude generally. ITV promised consumer heaven amid rationing yet posed dangers of commercialism and cultural degradation. These debates echoed within the BBC and presumably among some of the novel’s existing readers. Orwell’s denigration of “prolefeed” and the telescreens’ endless good news about production-anticipate such concerns, using science fiction to exaggerate television’s potential to penetrate homes and influence minds.

Modern classic

The play’s legacy has been prolific. BBC2 broadcast a new production (1965), updating Kneale’s script. (No recording exists.) The original has been aired since, including on BBC2 to represent 1954 in a festival marking the Queen’s Silver Jubilee (1977); Orwell’s quintessential anti-Establishment vision had become thoroughly assimilated ideologically. For all the controversy accompanying initial broadcast, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is highly respected, admired for its innovation and daring, with relevance that withstands the passage of time.

Uncertain ending, uncertain origin

Orwell’s novel, Cartier’s adaptation, and Michael Radford’s 1984 film conclude with Winston and Julia’s mutual betrayal and capitulation to Big Brother. Outcast, alone, each awaits execution. Anderson’s film, some maintain, distorts Orwell’s vision. The “pessimistic conclusion”, Bowker insists, was “replaced by the optimistic message that the individual is uncrushable, and Winston dies with the cry of ‘Down with Big Brother!’ on his lips” (2003, 423).

This is not so in the UK DVD release, which proclaims itself on the cover as “The Original” (Orbital Media/ Blackhorse Entertainment, 2006). However, the Internet Movie Database (IMDb) notes “reportedly” different endings for the UK and the US. The only evidence is *TV Guide*, whose website states: “The American version has [Winston] betraying [Julia] and so successfully brainwashed that he shouts for the love of Big Brother rather than “down with Big Brother,” the words he screams as his last epithet in England.” Lucas claims “the US film version” has the “happy ending ... with Winston and Julia overcoming their conditioning and defying the “State/Party” as they are gunned down” (2003, 104).

Such alteration, even in this self-declared “freely adapted” rendering (opening credits), would be momentous. Bowker and *TV Guide* possibly report third-party mishearing, from a scratchy print and Winston’s (Edmund O’Brien) initially silent mouthing, of “Long live...” as “Down with Big Brother!” Investigation reveals no first-hand account of the heroic climax or of alternative versions. It does expose enmeshment in Cold War paranoia at official and secret quasi-governmental levels, and cultural concerns which suggest how this apocryphal account gained purchase.

The British Film Institute and the IMDb deem *1984* British. Most crew and cast were British – including Anderson and Michael Redgrave, collaborators on the patriotic World War 2 classic, *The Dambusters* (1955). The source was British, filming occurred in England, and the London Symphony Orchestra recorded the score. Yet \$100,000 funding came from the US Information Agency (Saunders 1999, 295).

Many 1950s British films involved American investment, following Hollywood studios’ breakup and increasing independent production. Creative talent gained greater freedom by shouldering some monetary risk. Major companies reduced overheads, ensured a film supply for their chains and, as attendances declined, backed “original and unusual subjects of international importance” for US and overseas distribution (Michael Balcon, quoted in Hill 1986, 40). Also common, to maximise US box office, were American leading actors – Winston and Julia (Jan Sterling) here. Sometimes, however, business obscured other involvement. The US Information Agency wanted *1984* to be “the most devastating anti-Communist film of all time” (quoted in Saunders 1999, 295 n55).

Behind the scenes

It is no secret that the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) acquired rights to *Animal Farm*. Their website links to a review of Saunders’ book, acknowledging (without comment) her claim that it funded filming of *Animal Farm (1954) and 1984* (Troy 2007). The “independent” American Committee for Cultural Freedom (ACCF), a CIA front, influenced *1984*’s screenplay and ensured distribution, appreciative editorials, and attendance by discounting tickets (Lucas 2003, 116; Saunders 1999, 296, 298). It belonged to a network of bodies with, as will be seen, euphemistic, vague titles and abbreviations as obfuscating as any assault on language in Orwell’s satire.

This era saw the “Second Red Scare”. The Soviet Union exploded an atomic bomb weeks after publication of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, set in the aftermath of global nuclear conflict. Mao Zedong gained control of China

the same year, despite American-backed opposition. The Korean War started in June 1950. Simultaneously, “more than a hundred European and American writers and intellectuals met in Berlin and established the Congress for Cultural Freedom [of which the ACCF was an offshoot] to resist the Kremlin’s sustained assault on liberal democratic values”; they comprised, according to a member of the connected Australian Association for Cultural Freedom, artists and thinkers “who shared many common attitudes, particularly their opposition to totalitarianism”, but had “no agreed position” (Coleman 1989, xi, 52). In the same year Senator Joseph McCarthy claimed 205 communists were shaping State Department policy. The House Un-American Activities Committee investigated over a hundred alleged infiltrations. Top officials and scientists were convicted of espionage or related crimes; Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were executed in 1953 for stealing atomic secrets.

As Lucas notes, vagueness in Orwell’s philosophy means “he can be stretched across a wide spectrum of political opinion” (2003, 135). Unsurprisingly, various interests exploited *Nineteen Eighty-Four’s* ambiguity strategically (the author having died shortly after publication). Although the novel condemns all totalitarianism, commentators including V. S. Pritchett and Lionel Trilling highlighted anti-communism, downplaying and marginalising Orwell’s socialism (Lucas 2003, 118). His publisher Fredric Warburg, one of “the English associates of the Congress” (Coleman 1989, 61), steered screen rights towards interests able to maximise propaganda value (Bowker 2004, 422).

A clandestine operative for the CIA, Carleton Alsop, a long-time Paramount and MGM producer and agent, reported Hollywood Communists and sympathisers while operating a covert pressure group to influence movies’ content (Saunders 1999, 290-3). He served in the Office of Policy Coordination (OPC), a “dirty tricks department” associated with the State Department, which cultivated overseas support for foreign policy without being traceable to Washington (40). He and Finis Farr, both members of the OPC’s Psychological Warfare Workshop, visited Britain after Orwell’s death to secure *Animal Farm*, which became Batchelor and Halas’s animation financed and distributed worldwide by the CIA (294).

Knowingly or not, Orwell had assisted by introducing Arthur Koestler to the International Relief and Rescue Committee (IRRC), a trade union entwined with US officials and CIA funded; Koestler met anti- and ex-communist intellectuals during an IRRC American lecture tour and co-founded the CIA-financed CCF in 1949, having in wartime given US intelligence his proposals for psychological warfare (Lucas 2003, 91-2; Cesarani 1998, 305-10). The CCF bankrolled a startling array of international art and culture, including a thirty-day Festival of Paris in

1952 and hundreds of seminars worldwide until 1967, when its legitimacy was undermined by revelations of the Agency's involvement at the height of opposition to the Vietnam War. Particularly noteworthy is its success in using leading intellectuals to help promote foreign policy, while denying such a programme existed. The Congress's five Honorary Presidents were Benedetto Croce, an Italian freethinker who opposed Mussolini and whose writings were on the Vatican Index of Prohibited Books; John Dewey, the American liberal educationist and leader of an official inquiry into Stalin's trials of Trotsky and other revolutionaries; the German Karl Jaspers, a pioneering existentialist and scourge of the Third Reich; Jacques Maritain, a liberal Catholic humanist and holder of the Medal of French Resistance; and the English philosopher and winner of the 1950 Nobel Prize for Literature, Bertrand Russell. Coleman points out that these names exemplify "almost all the participants," who "were liberals or social democrats, critical of capitalism and opposed to colonialism, imperialism, nationalism, racism, and dictatorship. They supported freedom of thought and the extension of the welfare state" (1989, 21). That last sentence especially highlights deliberate US efforts to conflate democratic socialism with Stalinist communism - as the movie *1984* demonstrates - and, ironically, the doublethink this entailed.

Against this backdrop, Warburg helped modify *Animal Farm's* script, following doubts from the Psychological Strategy Board (a very different PSB!) about "clarity of message" (quoted in Saunders 1999, 294). The PSB (1951-53), successor to the wartime State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee, "was composed of the Undersecretary of State, the Deputy Secretary of Defense and the Director of Central Intelligence" (Truman Papers, no date). Top-level intervention, then, prompted the solution: alteration of Orwell's ending, in which pigs (communist leaders) and farmers (capitalists) become interchangeable. Instead, the pigs' decadence spurred other animals to counter-revolution.

Confusion with this travesty, and knowledge of Sonia Orwell's dissatisfaction and blocking of the cartoon from schools (Bowker 2004, 423), possibly explain rumours of *1984's* alternative endings. So might misidentification of Anderson's with Cartier's adaptation. These arrived close together, were for decades almost unobtainable, were both monochrome and featured Donald Pleasence in similar secondary roles.

Fig. 7: 1984: Donald Pleasence (R) as Parsons with Edmund O'Brien as Winston.

Nevertheless, Saunders insists: "The film actually concluded with two different endings" (1999, 97).

Producer Peter Rathvon was a former RKO president involved in the Motion Picture Service (MPS). This propaganda organisation financed and distributed films in 87 countries, including Eastern Europe, via 135 US Information Service offices. It targeted projects toward specified audiences, and recommended titles to international festivals (Saunders 1999, 295, 289). Rathvon consulted Sol Stein, ACCF Executive Director, throughout scripting. Stein advised that an actor should play Big Brother, as a cartoon resembling the deceased Stalin would weaken the menace of dictatorship. Stein replaced Anti-Sex League sashes, different from any real totalitarian uniform, with armbands, and eliminated trumpets from telescreen announcements because Americans associated them with pageantry. In light of the persistent rumours, it is notable that Stein suggested a sentimental ending, not adopted, to replace Winston's submission - which, he thought, denied "human nature," which "cannot be changed by totalitarianism" (quoted in Saunders 1999, 297).

Orwell was not entirely innocently wronged. He was prominent among anti-communist intellectuals collaborating with Koestler who, ostensibly "maintaining an independent position for freedom ... was soon working with the [British] state, referring anti-communist exiles to US intelligence" (Lucas 2003, 91). Orwell in 1949 named, to the (British) Information Research Department, thirty-eight suspected sympathisers including Paul Robeson, J. B. Priestley, Stephen Spender, Upton Sinclair, John Steinbeck - and, remarkably (given his later role in *1984*), Redgrave, who like many Leftists had followed the Communist Party of Great Britain in supporting the 1939 Hitler-Stalin pact.

Warburg proposed that *1984* as "a horror film ... might secure all countries threatened by communism for 1000 years to come" (quoted in Bowker 2004, 384). Conscious that adaptations increase book sales, Warburg supported "the Cold War offensive" (Bowker 2004, 422). (Later, "fully aware" of CIA covert funding, he distributed *Encounter*, a leading Anglo-American literary journal supported by the CCF (422)). Orwell's American publisher sent *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, imploring him to publicise its warnings. Hoover did not issue

endorsements, but the novel was with “one of the most powerful people backing the war in the US against ‘Un-American Activities’” (Bowker 2004, 398). It became PSB “required reading” (Saunders 1999, 295).

1984 as adaptation

Winston’s and Julia’s American accents are notable because the Inner Party and Thought Police are British. The voice-over is also American: “This is a story of the future. It could be the story of our children if we fail to preserve their heritage of Freedom.” “We” are American; telescreens use British Received Pronunciation. Winston buys his paperweight with shillings – not dollars, as in the novel. Such details exceed commercial necessity for American stars. They dissociate *1984* from American politics. Its distinctly London setting downplays Britain’s subservience to the superpower Oceania (which Orwell associated with US imperialism; he likened wartime Britain to “Occupied Territory” (1968)). Instead Ingsoc represents “English Socialism” – the 1945-51 Government. Responding to an American review describing the novel as anti-Government, Orwell insisted it “is NOT intended as an attack on Socialism or on the British Labour Party (of which I am a supporter).” However, that reading took purchase in America (Bowker 2004, 401). As Saunders observes, Orwell’s “target was less specific than universal: the abuse of language and logic ... was imputed to Us as well as Them” – a “distinction” the film “obscured” (1999, 296).

Other changes are routine; seemingly unimportant. O’Brien becomes O’Connor (Redgrave) presumably because of the star’s surname. Winston’s number again undergoes inexplicable alteration (6079 to 6748). *The Times* becomes *The Gazette*. Yet befittingly for a representative of the American Way in a simplistic adaptation, Edmund O’Brien’s Winston is portly and robust in his well-tailored suit, unlike the BBC’s gaunt Peter Cushing or John Hurt in Radford’s adaptation. The mirror scene, revealing Winston’s broken body, outward sign of abject surrender, fails totally: the only difference after “days, weeks, months” of brutality is unkemptness and facial stubble.

Fig. 8: Winston's degradation: the mirror scene in 1984.

Moments before arrest, Julia, frocked and made up like a 1950s *Good Housekeeping* model, observes a sunlit washerwoman bathing her baby; she confesses desire for motherhood before remarking, "There must be others like us in love - who will rebel."

Fig. 9: 1984: Julia as ideal 1950s woman.

Thus family values are affronted when "You are the dead!" grates from the telescreen after the couple express love of life. Orwell's Winston and Julia, who has slept with numerous Party members for "a good time" (1983, 121) - instinctive, not politicised, rebellion - iterate "We are the dead", aware that their relationship dooms them and perhaps that maintaining it against inevitability involves doublethink, before the telescreen echoes them (206).

Moreover, the film's individualism, opposed to collective action, brackets out class. O'Connor has a palatial apartment, a butler, wine, and a controllable telescreen, and Julia obtains Inner Party coffee and sugar; but the closest view of a prole (a word the film avoids) is the singing washerwoman in long shot from the couple's hideaway. Safely distant, she becomes another idealised housewife, symbolising desired normality - rather than representative of the oppressed, "a solid unconquerable figure, made monstrous by work and childbearing ... [o]ut of [w]hose mighty loins a race of conscious beings must one day come" (206). Remarkably, too, Goldstein becomes Kalador, and of the book's traitors, Jones, Rutherford and Aaronson, the third is dropped. Perhaps associating Jewish names with "liquidation", Winston's term for punishment, seemed distasteful so soon after the Holocaust, or dissociation from Nazism was to heighten anti-Communism.

Location sequences concretise Orwell's descriptions of rubble-strewn streets and terraced houses bombed by rockets. They incorporate authentic landmarks, recalling British social realist films, which positioned fiction within contemporary society as implicit commentary. In the "Golden Country" where Winston meets Julia (1983, 114), landscape and dappled shadows relieve the claustrophobia of Winston's workplace,

the city, and – a different formal and thematic discourse – the *film noir* mood of chiaroscuro lighting, night shooting, and omnipresent menace.

Fig. 10: 1984 as film noir: Winston fears arrest by the Thought Police.

The *noir* element relates *1984* to broader Cold War paranoia and oppression, apparent in a cycle then unrecognised by filmmakers, audiences, and critics alike. “When the environment is given an equal or greater weight than the actor,” Schrader wrote about lighting that places *noir* protagonists in shadow, “it of course creates a fatalistic, hopeless mood” (1986: 175). Schrader’s observation applies figuratively to emphasis on the society Winston inhabits. “Corruption and despair” (181), antitheses of the American Dream, point less to a sense of what the Free World has become than assert what, under Communism, it threatens to be.

Indeed, *1984*’s *noir* characteristics are both pertinent to the film’s specific project and symptomatic of its ordinariness and conventionality, even while its shadowy, confused production history confirms disturbingly mysterious, powerful, unaccountable forces already close to home. The centrality of the cycle of crime and transgressive desire manifests in Winston and Julia’s rebellion. So too the “strange and compelling absence of ‘normal’ family relations” (Harvey 1978: 25) in *noir* is apparent in the couple’s quasi-domestic liaisons, and Julia’s initial presentation accords with its typical “foregrounding of woman as enigma, mystery” (Kaplan 1983: 62).

Fig. 11: 1984: Winston returns “home” to mock domesticity after a hard day at the office.

This arises from the focus on Winston’s perspective – we learn about Oceania gradually through him: “Most classic films operate the view from behind, in that the spectator is placed in a privileged position of knowledge in comparison with the characters in the film about what is going on in the story. Some films, however, speak “with” their characters – this is a defining feature, for instance, of the *film noir*” (Kuhn 1994: 49-51). The *noir* influence accordingly pervades Winston’s interrogation, with angled and subjective shots expressing disorientation. The art direction overall is impressive, especially the grandiose Party towers and futuristic Ministry of Truth interiors with branching wall girders; these create expressionistically fractured mise-en-scene while recalling wartime V for Victory images (emphasised on posters and in a composition that foregrounds Victory Gin in Winston’s apartment). Especially inventive is Winston’s office space as a panopticon: ranked, backlit cubicles keep each functionary prominently visible.

Fig. 12: 1984: The Ministry of Truth as panopticon.

The film is accessible, and recognisable as typical of the era, by its genre hybridisation. Marketing prioritised its melodrama and science fiction over political drama. Taglines included: “Will Ecstasy Be a Crime ... In the Terrifying World of the Future?”, “Amazing wonders of tomorrow! Nothing like it ever filmed!” and “SEX OUTLAWED ... in the terrifying

world of tomorrow!” Julia as catalyst for rebellion conforms to classical narrative’s combination of romance with goal-oriented plot. Her initially threatening presence as she apparently spies on Winston, subsequent embodiment and liberation of his desires, and eventual punishment alongside his, structurally parallel *noir’s femme fatale* although, as victim and would-be mother, she equally represents the genre’s idealised wife. Uniforms, emphasising conformity, and telescreens’ spiralling patterns, implying mass hypnosis, relate *1984* to other 1950s’ science fiction, of which critics commonly interpret alien attack as figuring Communism and/or the Bomb. Telescreens’ flashing constantly distracts from foreground action, creating empathy with subjection to constant surveillance.

Subtle directions include Winston frisking himself automatically before his telescreen; O’Connor’s near-swoon when Big Brother replaces Goldstein during the Hate Session, economically implying desire sublimated into political fanaticism (called by the novel’s Julia “simply sex gone sour” (123)); and O’Connor humanised by taking a tablet and becoming literally hot under the collar, drying his neck with a towel, while torturing Winston. The latter suggest residual decency – a germ of hope – contrary to the ruthless efficiency of Orwell’s O’Brien.

Nearly erased from history

Data about reception and profitability, seemingly impenetrable as information about the film’s provenance, would merit further investigation. Box office appears meagre in that it took £80,073 in Britain; the same source conversely reports “total gross billings” as £32,274 and places *1984* among “Failures” which “grossed less than £100,000 between 1946 and 1957” (Porter 2000, 510, 476, 471). Either figure is disproportionate against the three million dollars (just over a million pounds at 1956 rates) taken in North America by the high-budget science-fiction hit *Forbidden Planet* (Fred M. Wilcox, 1956) or the £419,528 domestic gross that made *The Dam Busters* the previous years’ most successful film in Britain. Circulation ended as distribution agreements expired. These apparently included broadcast rights, as it remained unseen for years.

Conclusion

Despite its brisk pace, *1984* remains unconvincing to modern eyes. Romance becomes excessive; the score is over-emphatic (and during love scenes hardly surpasses the telescreens’ muzak); and Goldstein’s book is reduced to a brief opening voiceover and “The Principles of Newspeak” to a curt dialogue exchange. These latter originated in what *The Times* considered Orwell’s “best pieces of satirical writing” – yet “obviously

unfilmable” - while the romance and torture were, the reviewer suggested, the novel’s “most attractive” elements for conventional filmmaking. For Cartier, interviewed by *Films and Filming* (September 1958), presumably unaware of interests behind the film, failure resulted from the medium and viewing conditions:

[A]ll the directional skill of Michael Anderson could not recapture the impact of the TV transmission [T]he subject could only frighten spectators who were “conditioned” to experience fear by sitting alone in the darkness, and unable to find help or comfort by looking around the mass audience in a modern cinema - where they would feel safe from “Big Brother”. It was decidedly different in the TV viewer’s own home, where cold eyes stared from the small screen straight at him, casting into the viewer’s heart the same chill that the characters in the play experienced whenever they heard his voice coming from *their* watching TV screens. (Quoted in Jacobs 2000)

Fig. 13: 1984: Big Brother one step removed from the spectator: embedded in the mise-en-scène.

Here Cartier intuitively anticipates psychoanalytic film theory: the cinematic apparatus, while immersing the spectator in the action and

diegesis, nevertheless creates a sense of mastery. The scene presented, however persuasive, is unconsciously known to be illusionary; it unfolds elsewhere despite the impression of presence; and ultimately, in that conventional narrative guarantees satisfactory closure, it does not threaten. *1984* fails partly because Winston's evident joy at embracing Big Brother in the final moments elides one version of conformity – American individualism and family values, which O'Connor brainwashes him out of – with another, so that at a formal level at least he appears to be assimilated into the community, his alienation from which was previously the source of narrative conflict. Gin-soaked tears of love and constant anticipation of an assassin's bullet that make Orwell's ending poignant are forgotten. The BBC version alternatively mobilised fears not about a specific ideology but rather the little-understood question of media influence precisely as television transitioned from fascinating novelty to familiar household furniture. Ritualistic, fully attentive viewing of a provocative mass event, experienced domestically, embodied the concerns of the drama and facilitated identification with the protagonist's plight.

Notwithstanding some fine talent and intellectual resources of the world's wealthiest propaganda machine, Orwell's fears about the power of persuasion proved premature in the case of Anderson's movie. Little over a year previously, the hegemony that Orwell satirised and aspects of which he despised – and which for the political interests behind the film provided a convenient target – perversely spawned a programme that is a landmark both of Public Service Broadcasting and the notion of freedom from vested interests to which it aspires.

Filmography

1984 (Michael Anderson, 1956).

1984 (Michael Radford, 1984).

Animal Farm (Joy Batchelor and John Halas, 1954).

The Dam Busters (Michael Anderson, 1955).

Forbidden Planet (Fred M. Wilcox, 1956).

Look Back in Anger (Tony Richardson, 1959).

Nineteen Eighty-Four (BBC Television, Rudolph Cartier [credited as “producer”] and Nigel Kneale [screenwriter], broadcast live twice: 12 and 15 December 1954).

The Quatermass Experiment (BBC Television, Rudolph Cartier [credited as “producer”] and Nigel Kneale [screenwriter], six episodes: 1953).

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