

1984 to *Brazil*: From the Pessimism of Reality to the Hope of Dreams

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Certain works of literature exist in the popular imagination with such vivid power that they seem always, for many of us, to have been part of our awareness and to have shaped our perceptions of the world. George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is preeminently a work of this kind. Published in 1949, the novel has become a symbol of the nightmare world of totalitarian oppression and of our worst fears about what the future may hold. *Big Brother*, *Newspeak*, and *doublethink* are a part of our vocabulary.¹

Ejner Jensen and other scholars of Orwell's work agree that perhaps more than any other source, *1984* has the ability to invoke political anxiety in our culture, even among those who have never read it.² This dark vision of the potential of totalitarianism was transferred to the medium of film for a second time in 1985, perhaps a reminder that although the year 1984 had passed, the possibility of Orwell's vision's coming true was no less real.³

Later that year, Terry Gilliam's film *Brazil* was released.⁴ What makes this film particularly interesting is the obvious similarities to *1984*, noted by almost every film critic who reviewed it.⁵ Yet, despite these similarities, *Brazil* is full of ironic twists, humor, and details of plot and character that make it quite distinct from Orwell's vision. Because of this, I believe that a comparison of *Brazil* and *1984* will prove enlightening in terms of an understanding of our culture's views of totalitarianism and oppression and how such views can undergo change.⁶ Through a narrative analysis of their respective value systems, I will attempt to make sense of the myriad of details constituting the similarities and differences between the two films. With this analysis as a basis, Branham and Pearce's taxonomy of text-context relationships provides the means for explaining and illuminating the significance of the parallels between the two works.⁷

BRAZIL

Through the novel, film, or general enculturation, most readers will be familiar with *1984*, but many will not have seen *Brazil*, a film about post-industrial capitalism and bureaucracy run amok. Sam Lowry, the main character, is a timid part of an oppressive bureaucracy operating amidst rampant, but useless, technological "progress" and consumerism taken to its extreme. Sam constantly dreams of beautiful lands where he is the hero, saving a beautiful and endangered woman. His dreams increase in frequency and intensity when he sees Jill Layton, a truck driver

who quite literally resembles the woman of his dreams. Through his subsequent search for Jill, Sam begins to realize the faults of the system, the inequities, injustices, and red tape. He meets Tuttle, a "terrorist" who does freelance repair work, and realizes that the bureaucracy is unfairly prosecuting (and killing) innocent people, both by bureaucratic mix-ups (a dead beetle causes a printer to misprint the name "Tuttle" as "Buttle" on an arrest order) and by excessive paranoia.

The core of Gilliam's film is the role of dreams. Sam constantly dreams of strange and beautiful lands where he heroically fights symbols of technology and bureaucracy to save Jill. When he (in "reality") finally obtains his goal—finding and falling in love with Jill—Jill is killed and Sam is arrested and taken off to be tortured for his violation of various bureaucratic rules and laws. But Tuttle and a group of "terrorists" break in, saving Sam and helping him blow up the building in which the tortures are performed. He meets up with Jill and they escape, living out their lives in a beautiful, secret valley in the country. However, at this point we return to Sam in the torture chamber. The entire escape sequence was just another dream. Sam has been subjugated by the system and Jill is dead. But Sam still has his mind, his spirit, as represented by his ability to dream. Appropriately, as the film ends with Sam smiling to himself in the torture chamber, we hear the 1930s pop song from which the movie takes its name, glorifying romance and escapism.

PARALLELS

Several parallels are apparent between this film and *1984*. Both take place in London, apparently of the future (*Brazil* begins at "8:49 a.m., somewhere in the 20th century"). The level of technology in both is similar in that it is advanced, yet seems antique or crude by our standards. For instance, the bureaucracies in both *Brazil* and *1984* use pneumatic tubes to transfer paperwork. The elaborate computers of *Brazil* are made of very small black and white TV screens and old-fashioned typewriters. Televisions, in addition to their use in computers, are in abundance everywhere, reminiscent of Orwell's telescreens.

In *1984* we have the Ministries of Truth, Plenty, and Love, and in *Brazil* the Ministry of Information (MOI) and Central Services. Surveillance by various means is widespread in both worlds, a sign of the oppression carried out by the respective bureaucracies. In *1984* posters of Big Brother and slogans abound, as do slogans and posters in *Brazil*. In both works, members of the working class live drab lives; in *1984* they are pacified with machine-generated novels and in *Brazil* with television. The economic disparity widens noticeably as one climbs the social hierarchy of both worlds.

There are also several character parallels. One has to wonder about the coincidence of "Jill" and "Julia" as the female leads, each of whom is the object of desire of the main character. In both works, it is the women who instigate or encourage the men's rebellion. Both are made into "unpersons," Julia by the party, Jill by Sam's deletion of her computer file. In *1984* it is O'Brien, whom Winston sees as his friend and fellow conspirator, who brainwashes him after his capture. Similarly, it is Sam's old friend Jack Lint who undertakes his torture. Although parallels are less evident between Winston and Sam, the dreams of each play important roles in the respective films. In addition, they each occupy roles within the dominant bureaucracy, Winston as an outer party member working for the Ministry of Truth, and Sam as an

employee of the MOI. In both, the main character rebels against the system, and in the end is caught and subjugated by that system.

Numerous other detailed parallels could be drawn, but this is, I believe, sufficient evidence that the parallels are not merely coincidence. In fact, though Gilliam claims never to have read *1984* and others close to the film discount the parallels, one of his alternative titles was *1984 1/2*.⁸ What remains to be seen is whether these parallels manifest themselves in similarities at the value-level.

VALUE-ANALYSIS

As Hayden White points out, "Every historical narrative has as its latent or manifest purpose the desire to moralize the events which it treats."⁹ Implicit in any story is a set of values; a work can be read for a set of central themes, and implicit in such themes are values,¹⁰ simply defined as generalized conceptions of the good.¹¹ In the case of films, value implications must be drawn not only from dialogue, but from characters and their actions, the setting, other visual images, and even music.¹² I chose to compare *Brazil* to the 1985 film version of *1984* because the value analyses will be more comparable within the same medium. The value system of the film, however, for the most part remains true to that of Orwell's novel, despite some alterations and omissions.

1984

The primary values of *1984* are truth, freedom, and individuality. A description of these values will make apparent their significance and relations in the whole system. The value of truth presents itself in many predictable ways. We are barraged with lies from the telescreens, from increases in production and rationing figures that we know are false, to confessions from convicted thought-criminals that we know are greatly exaggerated. Winston himself manufactures some of these lies in his job, substituting dead soldiers for party heroes who have become unpersons. The truth is easily manipulated by the party, as when Oceania suddenly shifts from being at war with Eurasia to being at war with Eastasia and allied with Eurasia: "Oceania is at war with Eastasia. Oceania has always been at war with Eastasia." The shift is immediate and accepted by party members. A deeper understanding of truth comes from its relationship to the past in *1984*. Winston writes, "Everything fades into mist. The past is erased. The lie becomes truth and then becomes a lie again." Throughout we see the party's successful attempts at manipulating the past, for "Who controls the past controls the future, and who controls the present controls the past." During Winston's torture, O'Brien explains that it is by controlling the past that the party separates people from one another, making them easy targets of manipulation and control.

Winston's rebellion against the party's control of the past is manifested in a piece of coral encased in a glass ball, an antique that Winston buys, explaining to Julia that it is "a piece of history that they forgot to alter." He also finds importance in a jingle, "Oranges and lemons say the bells of St. Clement's," and is excited when Julia can add to it "You owe me three farthings say the bells of St. Martin's." These are ties with a *real* past—the past before the party. However, the ironic fact that both the coral object and the rhyme were given to him by the shop owner, later discovered to

be a member of the thought police, diminishes their actual historic value and points to the futility of Winston's rebellion, as does the destruction of the coral object by a member of the thought police.

Winston's desire for the truth relates directly to his desire for freedom, the second major value in the system: "Freedom is the freedom to say two plus two equals four. If that is granted, all else follows." An earlier entry in Winston's diary begins, "To the past, or to the future, to an age where thought is free. . . ." Winston and Julia's rebellion against the party, in thought and action, is an expression of freedom, but we see this value mostly implied in a negative way. The widespread existence of telescreens, for example, allows the monitoring of all words and actions of party members. The "salute" of Oceania is crossing the wrists over the head—a sign of bondage and subservience. In the rallies where we see this performed, the crowd responds almost mindlessly to the manipulation of emotions by the messages on the telescreen, yelling and screaming at the enemy, Goldstein, and chanting "B-B! B-B!" when Big Brother's face appears. The creation of newspeak (the destruction of words) also expressly limits freedom of thought. A friend of Winston's explains that getting people to think in newspeak will replace thought with automatic response. And of course, O'Brien's "curing" of Winston by torture again points to the futility of rebellion; even thought and the "spirit of man" (Winston's phrase) give in to the power of the state. In the end, Winston cannot write that two plus two equals four, and genuinely loves Big Brother.

The collective manipulation at rallies and the anti-individualist goals of newspeak illustrate the direct relationship of freedom to the third major value in *1984*, individuality. Negative implications of this value include a lecture on eradicating the orgasm which explains that the benefit of such an accomplishment will be the removal of "unorthodox tendencies toward one's own life." In addition, the children of *1984* lack individuality because of party controls on their education and youth organizations. This value also finds positive expression, as when Winston tells Julia, "To be in a minority of one doesn't make you mad." But as with freedom and truth, we find that individuals cannot stand up against the might of the party; those who rebel become unpersons. O'Brien states that "the individual is only a cell," and that people are "infinitely malleable" (as illustrated by the complete "curing" of Winston). In the end Winston loses what was most central to him—his love for Julia. When confronted with rats in Room 101, he screams "Do it to Julia!"

These three primary values are tied together by the recurring theme of pessimism, the weakness of the individual compared to the state. Winston and Julia know that their actions will, without a doubt, lead to their discovery and death. Winston's first entry in his diary reinforces this point: "To the past, or to the future, to an age where thought is free, from the age of Big Brother and the thought police, from a dead man, greetings." Right before their capture Winston says, "We are the dead," and Julia repeats the phrase. When they discuss the inevitability of capture, they agree that they will undoubtedly confess, but that their feelings for each other cannot be changed. However, as we see in the end, Winston betrays Julia, wishes the rats upon her, and loves Big Brother. Whatever Winston and Julia may declare to be their values, the plot speaks otherwise. There is no freedom, there is no truth, and there is no real possibility for individual thought or action in the society of Oceania.

This pessimism is reinforced by several other aspects of the film. First, the film is presented in a realistic, not fantasy, format. While it is not in our world as such, our current levels of technology and our understandings of human action do not preclude the events we see. Therefore, if the ending is without hope, and at the same time does not violate our expectations of how events happen, we are almost forced into accepting the conclusion, much as one feels compelled to accept the conclusion of a syllogism when one accepts the premises and the validity of the argument's construction, even if the conclusion runs counter to our desires. A second element of the film relevant to pessimism is its tone. The low-key dialogue and actions create a subdued tone, which in turn contributes to the general feeling of passivity consistent with Winston's and Julia's acceptance of their fate. Directly related to the tone is the film's genre; it is not action-adventure, a political thriller, a fantasy, nor does it meet the general expectations of science fiction. While it is difficult to place in a genre, much can be gleaned from those popular genres in which it does not fit. It is not an action-adventure or political thriller because it lacks the fast-moving pace and excitement. As discussed above, its form is realistic, not fantastic. Our contemporary expectations of science fiction films include high technology, fast action, and the moralizing of the western. The absence of these qualities, which we expect in most mainstream films, contributes to the feeling of pessimism.

Brazil

Like that of *1984*, the value system of *Brazil* is implied negatively and has many similar values, although they are manifested differently. The primary values are individualism, solidarity, freedom, and dreams. An elaboration of this value system will make apparent the critical differences between the two films.

The value of individuality is implied negatively through the bureaucracy and the resulting insignificance of the individual. For instance, all of the workers in each of the various departments of the MOI dress alike. Everyone is given a number, and thus Sam becomes "Information Retrieval Officer dee zed stroke one zero five" (DZ-105). When names are used, as with Tuttle and Buttle, the bureaucracy mixes them up, thus killing an innocent man. This accidental death is, however, shrugged off as a minor error. Two particular visual images reinforce this value. First, during Sam's final dream sequence, Tuttle is smothered by paper, symbolizing the bureaucracy. Sam pulls the papers off, only to find that Tuttle has disappeared. The second visual image which reinforces the insignificance of the individual is the torture chamber. The first shot is a close-up on Sam, strapped in a chair. Then the camera pulls back very fast, revealing that Sam is on a small platform in the middle of a huge dome-shaped room.

This individualist value is expressed in two sub-values. Responsibility is manifested positively in pride in one's work. Sam often shows his efficiency and pride in getting the job done quickly, as does Harry Tuttle in his repair of Sam's heating system. Tuttle formerly worked for Central Services, but now works freelance to avoid the bureaucratic paperwork. It is this freelance repair that makes him a subversive and terrorist. Most people in the bureaucracy, on the other hand, try to shift responsibility to others. As a consequence of the dead beetle-induced typo, Buttle has been tortured because he is mistaken for Tuttle, the "real" terrorist. When Sam discovers and tells his boss, Kurtzmann, of the Tuttle/Buttle error, Kurtzmann

recoils in horror: "A mistake!" But Sam quickly assures him that "At least it's not ours." The epitome of this irresponsibility is illustrated by Jack Lint when Sam tells him that he got the wrong person:

JACK: Information transit got the wrong man. I got the right man. The wrong man was delivered to me and I accepted him on good faith as the right man.

SAM: You killed Buttle.

JACK: There are very strict procedures to prevent that from happening. It wasn't my fault that Buttle's heart condition didn't appear on Tuttle's file.

When Sam tells Kurtzmann that Buttle is dead, Kurtzmann says, "Dead? That's awful. We'll never get rid of the damn thing [refund check for the mistaken arrest] now!"

Also related to individualism is the negative sub-value of consumerism. Throughout the film, Sam's mother is undergoing various treatments to make her appear younger. Her friend, Mrs. Terrain, is undergoing different treatments with a similar purpose. However, despite the apparent success of Sam's mother's treatments, Mrs. Terrain has "complications," and her health and appearance get steadily worse. These procedures illustrate the ridiculous nature of the technology in *Brazil*. The Rube Goldberg-like devices that make Sam's breakfast pour coffee all over the toast, making it inedible. The heating system in his apartment is a mass of intestinal tubing and breathing apparatus that makes his life miserable, not comfortable. As mentioned earlier, the computer screens are very small black and white TV screens, requiring awkward magnifying lenses to see. Fashions are also taken to an extreme—Sam's mother, for instance, wears a large leopard-skin shoe as a hat. Numerous other jabs are taken at consumerism, such as in Sam's last dream sequence: a young girl is asked by Santa what she wants for Christmas, and responds, "My own credit card." The absurdity of consumerism is best illustrated when one of the guards strapping Sam into the torture chair says, "Confess, son. Quickly! You hold out too long, you'll jeopardize your credit rating."

The second major value in *Brazil* is solidarity, characterized by cooperation, caring, and trust, and negatively implied by selfishness, apathy, and paranoia. The sub-value of cooperation is most obviously implied by Tuttle: "We're all in this together." Jill in particular cares for others, including Mrs. Buttle, Sam, and even a guard who is burned alive after she and Sam cause a police van to crash. Various members of the bureaucracy, on the other hand, display apathy or even cruelty; at best they are concerned only with their own advancement and well-being. Two Central Services technicians ruin Sam's apartment because he did not cooperate fully with them. When Buttle is arrested the officer in charge has Mrs. Buttle sign several release forms, and despite her justified hysteria urges her to "press harder this time" as she signs the receipt for her husband. Jack Lint exemplifies this selfish attitude: as he prepares to torture Sam, Sam says, "I'm scared, Jack!" and Jack responds, "Well how do you think I feel?"

Trust is an important component of solidarity. Sam constantly invokes trust in his relationship with Jill, but adopts the prevailing attitude of mistrust when Jill picks up and delivers a package which Sam believes to be a terrorist bomb. Jack and others within the bureaucracy exhibit extreme paranoia; Jack feels Jill is a terrorist because of her protest against Buttle's wrongful arrest. He also states that the "whole Buttle confusion was obviously planned from the inside," while we know it was actually

caused by a dead beetle. Several posters and signs reinforce the mistrust in the bureaucracy. One simply shows a big black lock and a set of big red lips. A sign in Kurtzmann's office reads "Suspicion breeds confidence" and a large poster in Jack's office asks "Who can you trust?"

The third major value in *Brazil* is freedom. This is, of course, manifested negatively in the various rules, regulations, and restrictions imposed by the bureaucracy. "They've got the whole country sectioned off—you can't make a move without a form." Freelance work such as Tuttle's is defined as terrorism. This value is positively represented in Sam's dreams: Sam is dressed in shiny armor, soaring through the clouds by means of a set of large, white, feathered wings. He tries to save Jill, who is held by the "forces of darkness" in a large black cage. Two things prevent this: an entire city of huge black monoliths bursts out of the peaceful green landscape, blocking Sam's way, as does a huge Samurai robot which he must fight. The flying and the cage represent positive and negative implications of freedom, the armor and brave actions heroism, the black monoliths technology, and the Samurai robot both technology and bureaucracy. The interaction of these symbols in Sam's dreams makes obvious their relations in the value system: Sam wants to be free, but technology and bureaucracy block his path, forcing him to fight heroically to gain his true love.

Sam's dreams are a crucial part of the film for understanding the value-system being presented. The positive value statements are predominantly presented in Sam's dreams and it is only in his dreams that he manages to defeat the bureaucracy. In reality, Jill is killed and Sam is essentially lobotomized. In his dreams, he and Jill escape to live a happy and simple life in the country. In his dreams, he and Tuttle manage to destroy the Information Retrieval building. In his dreams, he defeats the robot. More importantly, it is not *in* his dreams but *with his dreams* that Sam actually does defeat the bureaucracy. Sam lives out his ideal life in his head, smiling and humming, while Jack Lint and his boss admit that they failed: "We lost him." They neutralized Sam as a force of opposition, but they did not neutralize his human spirit.

This is where it becomes clear that one cannot fully appreciate the impact and meaning of *Brazil* outside of the context of *1984*. In both films, the rebel is physically removed from the battle against the oppressors. But in *1984* the human spirit is broken and there is no victory, while in *Brazil* the oppressors have limited success in defeating the human spirit. Thus dreams are a value in *Brazil*. The negative manifestation of this value is reality—the word even appears in the film as graffiti on Tuttle's apartment building. This move away from concrete "reality" also has implications for the pessimism inherent in the *1984* value system. One could argue that this same pessimism pervades *Brazil*, but I would contend that *Brazil* has a much more optimistic bent to it, for if the human spirit can survive, there is some degree of victory and, therefore, hope.¹³ It is through the conscious comparison of the two endings that this more optimistic reading occurs.

Additionally, the previous discussion of the elements of tone and genre in *1984* becomes relevant. While *Brazil* is also difficult to categorize, it has more elements of fantasy, lacking the realism of *1984*, even outside of the dream sequences. Its tone is dominated by humor and sarcasm, not pessimism. Fast-paced action—including even the obligatory car chase of political thriller and action-adventure films—gives it

a more active feel, not one of passive acceptance. The critical differences reflected by these formal aspects and the value-systems of the two films can be understood through an analysis of their symbolic, text-context relationship.

THE NATURE OF THE TEXT-CONTEXT RELATIONSHIP

Branham and Pearce state that "Every communicative act is a text that derives meaning from the context of expectations and constraints in which it is experienced."¹⁴ In these terms, *Brazil* is a text that is understood in the context of 1984, or at the very least in the genre of literature and film which is dominated by 1984. Audiences are able to use this context for interpreting *Brazil* because of the prevalence and strength of the 1984 vision in our culture. In order to understand *Brazil* fully, one must utilize 1984 as the framework within which to view it, and the obvious cues to 1984 in *Brazil* add credence to this. Yet my discussion also suggests that this results in an interpretation, a system of values, which denies the original starting point: the value system of 1984.

This seeming paradox of accepting and rejecting 1984 at the same time represents what Branham and Pearce call a strange loop: *Brazil* implicitly identifies 1984 as the context in which it can be interpreted, then *Brazil*, as text, loops back on the 1984 context, suggesting changes for our culture's view of totalitarianism.¹⁵ This is a process of "contextual reconstruction," wherein a text alters its own context.¹⁶ Hypothetically, while viewing the film and attempting to interpret it in a meaningful way, we would search for a frame of reference which aids us in doing so. The nature of *Brazil*, general cultural inundation, and specific cues would lead us to 1984 as an apparently useful context. However, the film, especially the ending, differs from 1984. Such a contrast is heightened because 1984 has been conjured up, so the text and context are explicitly compared. We might either subsume *Brazil* within 1984 or reject 1984 in favor of *Brazil* because of the crucial differences made apparent by the explicit comparison (this last step, representing a potential reconstruction of context, will be expanded on below). 1984, on the other hand, because its prevalence establishes it as its own context, "represents reciprocally reinforcing relations between texts and contexts; it is a 'charmed loop' in that the meanings at different levels each imply the appropriateness of those at the other."¹⁷

The strange loop involving *Brazil* has the potential to alter two important characteristics of the 1984 value system. First, it posits that hope does not lie in reality (externally, in truth and history), but instead in dreams (internally, in fantasy and the human spirit). Second, it provides a more optimistic view because of the strength of the human spirit. This represents a crucial shift, for these two changes are related: the strength of the human spirit originates, at least in part, in the power to dream. Orwell was firmly committed to an objectivist, empiricist paradigm.¹⁸ This manifests itself in how Winston rebels against the party: he looks for truth externally and believes that if freedom is possible, it is to be achieved by the discovery of "objective" truths such as the "accurate" knowledge of the past contained in the coral object and jingle mentioned earlier. 1984 denies the possibility that internal truth—experience, thought, the human spirit—can be the source of freedom.

This is inherently disempowering, leading directly to pessimism, for external objects—"facts"—cannot be controlled; "by neglecting our own experience as a source of truth we subject ourselves to the sufferings of an imposed truth."¹⁹ This

reliance on objective facts is what allows the syllogistic "Who controls the past, controls the future . . ." to work! The irony that the coral object in which Winston finds his external truth ("a piece of history that they forgot to alter") was not only provided by a member of the thought police, but was later destroyed by them as well, illustrates the pitfalls of a search for external validation. As Levin has pointed out, "In the standardized, mechanized world where 'objectivity' rules, the Self will be increasingly subjected to the most extreme objectification, i.e., domination by the exigencies of an 'objective' ordering of reality. . . ." ²⁰ Objectivity kills the self because it denies the self—it denies the validity of all internal experience, all internally discovered knowledge. ²¹ The turn to outside validation is what eventually leads to the loss of inner control—the destruction of the private world (freedom) by the party.

Brazil, on the other hand, tells us of the possibilities and advantages of a search for freedom internally. Whereas Winston establishes a clear internal/external boundary and then searches for truth, and therefore freedom, outside of himself, Sam not only turns his gaze inside, but blurs the boundaries. It is through his dreams that Sam attains his only real (i.e., external) victory, the denial of his mind and spirit to the bureaucracy. But his dreams, particularly the last one, blur the line between dream and reality, projecting inner experience onto the outside world. Sam looked internally for happiness, and because of blurred lines looked externally as well, as in his search for Jill. The appearance of Jill in his dreams and then in his external experience contributes further to the blurring of the inner-outer distinction, helping him resist encroachment into his private world. But Winston looked externally, and so was not prepared to resist the forces assaulting him. *Brazil* should not be seen simply as a retreatist, narcissistic turn inward, but as a blurring of the line between inner and outer. *Brazil* asks us to look within ourselves for the means by which to resist external forces. This is, quite literally, self-affirming, and optimistic. Orwell, on the other hand, comes from a modernist, Cartesian epistemology which is, also quite literally, self-destructive. ²² Seen in this light, *1984*'s pessimism not only takes on increased significance, but is hardly surprising. ²³

Beyond these changes in the respective value systems and epistemological positions, *Brazil* represents a vision which is not as politically pure as Orwell's, a vision which appears to have more "real" and direct connections to our own lives despite its "less real" form. *Brazil* seems a more relevant warning to our postindustrial consumer culture. In it we see a world where capitalism and bureaucracy have run amok, suggesting that it does not require a conspiracy of power-hungry or ideologically-guided individuals or groups to reach the world of *Brazil*, but rather that with the unchecked evolution of our current system we could easily find ourselves in a similar world. ²⁴

These various alterations to *1984* are significant, but I think represent more than a "simple" case of contextual reconstruction. *Brazil* could have created its own, independent vision of the future and its dangers. Although it would have been in the anti-utopian, totalitarian future genre, it need not have specifically conjured up images of *1984*. But the fact remains that it did. In having done so, *Brazil* has the potential for creating more significant change in our culture's view of totalitarianism and sources of resistance to it than it might have by avoiding the *1984* context. Because of the established and predominant nature of the *1984* vision in our culture, competing visions on similar topics become subsumed within its framework: "The

influence of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is in fact so great that it has appropriated to itself most of the horrors foreseen in other pessimistic fictions about the future."²⁵ Thus, alternate visions tend to take on the value-characteristics of *1984*, being seen as pessimistic about the future and the strength of the human spirit.

Brazil, however, prevents its cooptation in this manner by conjuring up the *1984* vision so that it can *reconstruct that context instead of being subsumed within it*. By overtly linking itself to *1984*, and thus forcing viewers to ponder its exact relationship to *1984*, it escapes being "unconsciously" lumped with that predominant vision. Paradoxically, by making explicit its connections to *1984*, *Brazil* may enhance its ability to resist *1984* and have a more lasting impact.

This possibility is reinforced by the abundance of irony in *Brazil*.²⁶ If we loosely define irony as an instance where we are forced to reject the obvious, surface meaning and reconstruct a more plausible alternative, we see that *1984* is also ironic. However, whether because of our familiarity with it or because of its nature as an ironic work, we find it comparatively easy to determine that the surface meaning must be rejected, and we also find it comparatively easy to reconstruct a meaning with which we are fairly confident Orwell and others would agree. *Brazil* is quite another story. We find ourselves (and the reviews confirm this experience) rejecting the surface meaning and reconstructing another, such as reading the film as like *1984*. Then, as I suggest above, we must reject that interpretation and make yet another. And another. . . .

Two examples illustrate the difficulties in establishing stable interpretations of *Brazil*. To begin with, there is Tuttle's twice-uttered line "We're all in this together." Given Tuttle's standing in the film as a positive character, I make the judgment that this is a positive representation of cooperation and solidarity. But we also see this same saying on a poster that appears three times in the film. The first two times the poster appears, it shows a family in a car with "Happiness" written below the car in bold letters. Only during the third appearance of the poster (in Sam's last dream sequence) do we see a smaller statement at the bottom of the poster: Tuttle's "We're all in this together." The appearance of the phrase on the poster provides several additional clues to its interpretation. First, all other posters in the film are easily interpreted as ironic, such as "Suspicion breeds confidence." Second, given the economic conditions of most families, like the Buttles, such a "Happiness" poster is a sarcastic jab at the inequity of wealth and the attempts of the bureaucracy to pacify the working class. How do we reconcile this with the evidence, presented earlier, that cooperation and solidarity are valued? Perhaps, extending on the inner-outer analysis presented above, Gilliam is denying relationships and outside human contact as a means of achieving freedom as well. But if that is so, how do we interpret Sam's love for Jill, an obvious part of his will to resist and his initial instigation to rebel?

A second example of a complex, unstable irony again begins with Tuttle. Tuttle, at great risk to himself, does freelance repair work because it allows him to do his job more efficiently. Again, his positive nature as a character leads me to interpret "hard work" as part of the individualism value. Sam also takes pride in his work, and is obviously more efficient than most of his coworkers. But Sam's character is both negative (a part of the oppressive and insensitive system) and positive (the protagonist, the hero who tries to save Jill at great risk to himself, and the manifestation of

the highest value, dreams). When giving the refund check to Mrs. Buttle, Sam refuses responsibility for the error, saying, "If you do have any complaints, I'll be happy to send you the appropriate forms." Is Sam's efficiency and hard work positive because of the traits and values it represents, or is it negative because it helps perpetuate the bureaucracy?²⁷

This need to reinterpret *Brazil* several times has important implications for how we see the relationship between the meanings and value systems of the two films. Irony requires a certain detachment: "To grasp irony, we must separate out the two meanings involved—the literal and the intended."²⁸ We have to remove ourselves from the work in order to see and understand the two (or more) meanings. *Brazil* requires, I would argue, an even greater distancing and detachment on the part of the viewer because of the more complex nature of the ironies involved. The non-traditional form of *Brazil* also would lead to critical reflection on the part of audiences whose conventional expectations have been violated.²⁹ This process of ironic interpretation and detachment forces the viewer to explicitly consider the relationship of the two films—especially in (re)interpreting the ending as pessimistic or optimistic. Therefore, as I claim above, this increases the potential for *Brazil* to stand alone from *1984* or, even better, actually to alter the value-system represented by *1984*—the larger context within which we view not only films and other fictions of this genre, but actual historical and contemporary political events.³⁰

CONCLUSIONS

The relationship between these two films and their value systems has, I think, important implications. To begin with, it illustrates the significance of the linkage between values, as in the tremendous effect that truth (conceived of as external), as opposed to dreams, can have on the attainment of freedom. Perhaps more practically, *Brazil* is a case where the predominance of *1984* as our culture's view of the means of resistance to and threats of totalitarianism and oppression is challenged. From this, we come to a better understanding not only of the role and importance of this predominant view, but of how such culturally-imbedded contexts can be altered by means other than the slow, evolutionary process of change through cooptation. It suggests that by paradoxically invoking the very context we wish to change, the chances of failure (cooptation) may be reduced, especially with the use of irony. The study of other attempts of contextual reconstruction in these circumstances should prove valuable, particularly in the case of non-dominant voices. This may suggest a means for unempowered groups and ideologies to prevent the dominant ideology from coopting their rhetoric.³¹ While *Brazil's* appeal may never be widespread enough to counteract the influence of *1984*, it does show the means by which that can be done.

Moving away from the theoretical realm, *Brazil* is a provocative text for analysis. It is a vision with an interesting mix of pessimism and optimism about the threats of oppression in our contemporary culture. Good and evil are difficult to separate. Oppression seems to be the unintended result of bureaucratic capitalism, not the planned and systematic result of a conspiracy. Technology, instead of simplifying our lives, adds to the confusion. And most importantly, it is only through our dreams that we can escape an unbearable and unsympathetic reality. The distinction between inner and outer sources of truth and resistance is not the only line that Gilliam blurs.

ENDNOTES

I wish to thank Malcolm Sillars for his assistance in developing this essay.

¹ Ejner J. Jensen, ed., *The Future of Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1984), 1.

² See, for example, David Widgery, "Reclaiming Orwell," in *Nineteen Eighty-Four in 1984: Autonomy, Control and Communication*, ed. Paul Chilton and Crispin Aubrey (London: Comedia, 1983), 15; Paul Chilton, "Introduction" in *Nineteen-Eighty-Four in 1984*, 1; Richard W. Bailey, "George Orwell and the English Language," in *The Future of Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 23; and Peter Stansky, *On Nineteen Eighty-Four* (New York: W.H. Freeman, 1983), x.

³ Michael Radford, dir., *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, with John Hurt and Richard Burton, Virgin Films, 1985. Since I am analyzing the film, not Orwell's novel, all textual support is drawn from this source. The first film version of 1984 was produced in Britain in 1955.

⁴ Terry Gilliam, dir., *Brazil*, with Jonathan Price and Robert DeNiro, Universal Studios, 1985.

⁵ The following reviews of *Brazil* noted parallels to 1984: Pauline Kael, *New Yorker* 10 Feb. 1986: 106-110; Harry Geduld, *Humanist* May/June 1986: 39-40; Tom O'Brien, *Commonweal* 28 Feb. 1986: 114-115; Cathleen McGuigan, *Newsweek* 16 Dec. 1985: 82; Richard Carliss, *Time* 30 Dec. 1985: 84; John Coleman, *New Statesman* 22 Feb. 1985: 35; David Denby, *New York* 27 Jan. 1986: 55-56; Andrew Kopkind, *Nation* 15 Feb. 1986: 186-187; Ian Pearson, *MacCleary* 10 Feb. 1986: 74; and Fred Glass, *Film Quarterly* 39 (Summer 1986): 22-28.

⁶ While a discussion of other prominent anti-utopian texts would undoubtedly prove insightful, my concern is with *Brazil's* relation to 1984 in particular for three reasons: (1) 1984 is the predominant anti-utopian text in our culture; (2) 1984 is the specific text most directly referenced by *Brazil*; and (3) there is already an abundance of literature on the "classic" anti-utopian texts, such as *Brave New World* and *We*.

For discussions of the relationship between film and culture, see Michael Ryan, "The Politics of Film: Discourse, Psychoanalysis, Ideology," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1988), 477-486; and James W. Chesebro, "The Media Reality: Epistemological Functions of Media in Cultural Systems," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 1 (1984): 111-130.

⁷ Robert J. Branham and W. Barnett Pearce, "Between Text and Context: Toward a Rhetoric of Contextual Reconstruction," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 71 (1985): 19-36.

⁸ Kael, 106; Jack Mathews, *The Battle of Brazil* (New York: Crown, 1987), 10, 47.

⁹ Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," in *On Narrative*, ed. W. Mitchell (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1981), 4.

¹⁰ For a relevant discussion of values and arguments in drama and literature, see Walter R. Fisher and Richard A. Folley, "Argument in Drama and Literature: An Exploration," in *Advances in Argumentation Theory and Research*, ed. J. Robert Cox and Charles Arthur Willard (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois UP, 1982), 343-362.

¹¹ For a similar definition, see Milton Rokeach, *Beliefs, Attitudes and Values* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1970), 160.

¹² Although I did not formally use the concepts presented, I did obtain guidance in this task from James Monaco, *How to Read a Film: The Art, Technology, Language, History, and Theory of Film and Media* (New York: Oxford UP, 1981), esp. ch. 3.

¹³ A point of interest about *Brazil* not immediately relevant to this analysis is the battle between Gilliam and Universal in releasing the film in the United States. Universal felt the film was too depressing for American commercial audiences, and tried to edit the film so as to make Jill survive and Sam's last dream sequence—when he escapes and destroys the Information Retrieval building—reality, leaving out the last scene showing him back in the torture chamber. Universal's version has recently been released to commercial television stations. The battle between Gilliam and Universal is described in detail in Mathews, *The Battle of Brazil*.

¹⁴ Branham and Pearce, 19.

¹⁵ Branham and Pearce, 25. The concept of strange loops was borrowed by Branham and Pearce from Vernon E. Cronen, Kenneth Johnson, and John W. Lannamann, "Paradoxes, Double-binds, and Reflexive Loops: An Alternative Theoretical Perspective," *Family Process* 21 (1982): 91-112.

¹⁶ Branham and Pearce, 19.

¹⁷ Branham and Pearce, 23.

¹⁸ Alfred G. Meyer, "The Political Theory of Pessimism: George Orwell and Herbert Marcuse," in *The Future of Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 131.

¹⁹ David Michael Levin, "Psychopathology in the Epoch of Nihilism," in *Pathologies of the Modern Self: Postmodern Studies on Narcissism, Schizophrenia, and Depression*, ed. David Michael Levin (New York: New York UP, 1987), 39.

²⁰ Levin, 53.

²¹ Levin, 29, 32.

²² For a similar argument regarding Orwell, see Francis A. Allen, "Nineteen Eighty-Four and the Eclipse of Private Worlds," in *The Future of Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 167.

²³ For a similar argument from a gender-oriented perspective, see Daphne Patai, *The Orwell Mystique: A Study in Male Ideology* (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1984).

²⁴ For a similar contrast to *1984*, see Allen, 165.

²⁵ Jensen, 1.

²⁶ My analysis of irony comes primarily from Wayne C. Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1974); Wayne C. Booth, "The Pleasures and Pitfalls of Irony: Or, Why Don't You Say What You Mean," in *Rhetoric, Philosophy, and Literature: An Exploration*, ed. Don M. Burks (West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue UP, 1978), 1-13; and Karen A. Foss and Stephen W. Littlejohn, "The Day After: Rhetorical Vision in an Ironic Frame," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 3 (1986): 317-336.

²⁷ An interesting and probably complementary read of these tensions could be undertaken utilizing the concept of "dialectical disorientation." See Karen Rasmussen and Sharon D. Downey, "Dialectical Disorientation in *Agnes of God*," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 53 (1989): 66-84.

²⁸ Foss and Littlejohn, 328.

²⁹ Cf. Ian H. Angus and Sut Jhally, "Introduction," in *Cultural Politics in Contemporary America*, ed. Ian Angus and Sut Jhally (New York: Routledge, 1989), 14.

³⁰ Cf. Allen, 151.

³¹ For a relevant discussion of dominant forms and non-dominant discourse, see Laura Kipnis, "Refunctioning Reconsidered: Towards a Left Popular Culture," in *High Theory/Low Culture: Analysing Popular Television and Film*, ed. Colin McCabe (New York: St. Martin's, 1986), 11-36.

