*Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1984) and *Metropolis* (1927) expertly portray future civilisations and cultures reflective of the composers’ context and values. *1984* was published after the conclusion of World War II, by George Orwell, an English supporter of Democratic Socialism. Through his dystopian fiction, Orwell cautions against totalitarian societies and warns of the direction towards which British and international socialism is moving. *Metropolis*, directed by Fritz Lang, is a silent black and white film produced after World War I, during the emerging German Weimar Republic. The seminal science-fiction film depicts a dystopian future civilisation in which social injustices, due to intensifying industrialist values, are evident. Both texts incorporate cultural and political values of the composer’s context in order to produce speculative pieces of fiction intended to invoke social change.

In the early 20th Century, mass culture developed as a result of industrialisation, urbanisation, modern media and an increasing middle class, and was often viewed as a despoliation of intellectual thought and culture, and a means of social control. During the interwar period, mass culture increased in prominence, particularly in Germany, and was frequently perceived as powerful and threatening, with the ability to destroy one’s individuality and humanity. Fear of mass culture is presented in *Metropolis* through costuming and movement, intended to rob the workers of their individuality. During the initial shift change, the worker’s unified and choreographed movements appear mechanical and dehumanising through their indirect comparison to machines. The worker’s drab overalls symbolise the working class’ stolen individualities, demonstrating the detrimental effects of industrial capitalism on Germany and modern human societies.

*1984*, composed during the culmination of a mass society in modernity, reflects Orwell’s belief that mass culture leads to cultural imperialism. Orwell’s concerns regarding mass culture are presented in *1984* through costume description and imagery. The outer Party members’ clothing is limited to the uniform Party overalls and the endorsed Anti-Sex League sashes which rob these workers of their individuality, similarly to *Metropolis*’ use of costume. Winston’s vivid descriptions of the ‘Two Minutes Hate’ emphasise Orwell’s fears of cultural imperialism through the mystification and conformity of the Outer Party Members, demonstrating mass culture’s degrading effect on society. Aural and visual imagery dehumanises the workers through the animal sounds and behaviours depicted in the ‘Two Minutes Hate’. The workers ‘hiss’ and one woman’s ‘mouth was opening and shutting like that of a landed fish’. These zoomorphic descriptions further abolish the Party members’ humanity. Lang and Orwell’s concerns relating to the rise of mass culture are uniquely expressed through conformity and the portrayal of the working class as machines and animals in *Metropolis* and *1984* respectively.
During the 20th Century, there was a substantial increase in technological advancements and consequently, society’s structures became progressively dependent on machines. This period is known as ‘the machine age’ and it developed as a result of rapid industrialisation. Metropolis, produced during the rise of industrialism, presents the machine age’s positive and negative aspects through stylised movement, characterisation and depictions of machines. The worker’s choreographed and unified movements demonstrate a negative view of the machine age as the workers are dehumanised through resemblance to automatons. The automaton, False Maria, demonstrates negative aspects of the machine age through her corrosive and destructive characterisation, which conflates machines and women to show their threat to society. ‘False Maria’ corrupts the workers, encouraging a violent revolution in which the worker’s children are almost killed and the city nearly destroyed, reflecting contemporary fears of the machine age and the rising ‘new woman’. In contrast, depictions of technology and culture in the upper class city of Metropolis portray the machine age’s positive aspects through the city’s glamorous art deco design shown through skyscrapers and flying cars. The threat and promise of modernity, a common conceptual tension of the time, is shown through Lang’s ambivalence towards the machine age.

Orwell’s negative view of the machine age and technological progress was heavily influenced by World War II technologies, including the atomic bomb, which threatened immense devastation and destruction. Televisions, represented by Telescreens in 1984, were advanced technology during Orwell’s context which negatively affected society by inducing fear and providing a means for governmental control through surveillance. Winston’s and Julia’s careful avoidance of telescreens and microphones during their sexual affair, ensuring any criminal acts occurred in isolated locations, demonstrates fear of surveillance technology. In addition, Winston remains quiet and hidden from the telescreen’s view when writing in his diary to conceal his unapproved actions from the thought police. Through negative portrayal of surveillance technology in 1984, Orwell demonstrates that machines will cause the ‘end of progress’ as technology, if harnessed by extreme ideologies, could destroy intellectual thought. Unlike Lang, Orwell holds no ambivalence towards the machine age, believing that technology will be harnessed for social discipline.

George Orwell and Fritz Lang produced highly influential texts reflective of their individual contexts and values. Their portrayal of future societies clearly communicates political, social and cultural values prevalent during the early 20th Century. Orwell’s negative portrayal of a futuristic totalitarian society informs the reader of the detrimental effects of a centralised, dictatorial government, proposing instead true socialist values. Lang’s portrayal of an Industrialised society cautions against technocratic Capitalist societies and the film’s utopian conclusion promotes reform as the means to accomplish equity in society. Through comparative study of Metropolis and 1984, a greater understanding of the composers’ values is developed, allowing for a deeper appreciation of their powerful and highly influential texts.