"Central to Lang and Orwell's dystopian worlds are characters who represent the possibility of change"

Both Fritz Lang's 1927 silent film Metropolis and George Orwell's 1949 modernist novel Nineteen Eighty-Four present dystopian worlds whose characters represent the possibility of change and autonomy that is often elusive to achieve whilst under oppressive oligarchic rule. Lang's cinematic representation exemplifies how despotic rule stifles Freder's attempts for change in the form of compassion and dignity, reflecting his concerns with the perpetuation of capitalist power in post WWI Germany. Similarly, Orwell explores how demagogical leadership limits the possibility of change through Winston's struggles to uphold his morality and dignity, responding to the degradation of humanity within post WW2 totalitarian governments. Ultimately, both composers create dystopian worlds by exploring the possibility of individual freedom and dignity through the characters of Freder and Winston who challenge the established values of their respective times.

Lang's Metropolis represents the limited possibility for individuals to overcome social oppression under a detached from of autocratic government through Freder's struggle for freedom. Lang draws parallels between the commodification of workers in the Weimar Republic and the homogenised populace within Metropolis throughout the silent film, complete with inter-titles. This suppression of the individual is primarily reflected in the alienation of the protagonist, Freder, as well as the representation of the dystopian world he resides in. Lang reveals the difficulty for Freder and the workers to overcome the loss of individual agency through the initial cross-cutting shots of the city panorama and their drudgery. The extent of their degradation is heightened through Lang's use of German Expressionist chiaroscuro lighting, where the avaricious bourgeoisie are juxtaposed in bright settings to the working class' darkness. This disparity in lighting also contrasts the light and dark within Freder and Fredersen, as well as the existing antagonism between classes. These class tensions echo the Marxist theory of class struggle founded in the 1800s, resulting in the repression of individuality. In these times of anguish, humanity responds with an innate desire for freedom and exhibit a need for hope. Lang, however, does remind the audience that social change is difficult to

achieve within a dystopian world devoid of humanity. A ‘clock’ motif is used throughout the film, emphasising ‘time’ as an instrument of control. The metaphoric close-up shot of Freder symbolically straining under the pressure of the clock arms as an engulfing cloud of fog indicates the strict constraints individuals are placed under. Freder’s movement becomes controlled by the arms, symbolically suggesting the prominence of powerful political regimes in the lives of individuals during this period. Hence, Lang’s portrayal of this dystopic society represents the inherent struggle for individuals to overcome an oppressive oligarchy.

Similar to how Lang condemns the limited opportunities for individuals to rebel against an autocratic government, Orwell represents how the Party’s pursuit for oligarchic rule stifles Winston’s strive for autonomy. Written in an age pervaded by totalitarianism, the audience are reminded of this eroded individual agency that Orwell envisions through the eyes of the protagonist, Winston. This subjugation is heightened in Winston’s ironic sensory description of trivial paraphernalia such as his diary as “the beautiful cream paper”. This irony is reflective of Winston’s desire for beauty and freedom, which have been eliminated because of the Party’s totalitarianism. Like Lang, Orwell uses ‘time’ throughout the novel to reinforce this yearning for escapism, represented through Winston’s continuous cynically toned rhetorical questioning like ‘If both the past and the external world exist only in the mind, and if the mind itself is controllable…what then?’ This accentuates a need to escape the present time, much like how Freder attempts to escape the physical pressures of ‘time’, exemplifying how both composers have employed this motif to portray the harsh realities of their contexts. Using satirical commentary, Orwell exposes the Party’s oppressive control and the ensuing climate of fear, reminiscent of the great purges within the Stalinist Russian regime. Orwell consequently projects his fear of these oppressive political landscapes, especially the dictatorship under tyrannical rulers such as Hitler and Stalin. Lang creates his dystopian world by depicting the workers symbolically cloaked in a blanket of fog as they walk in an array up to the ‘Moloch.’ Similarly, Orwell emphasises confinement, indicating the individual’s desire for freedom in the vulgar visual image evoking description of the ‘canteen’ as having ‘all surfaces greasy, grime in every crack; and a sourish, composite smell.’ Ultimately, it is through the creation of dystopian worlds and

representation of characters that encapsulates the desire for freedom and change within the composers' contexts.

Lang argues that the human spirit can rise above technological and political oppression within a dystopian world, bringing about positive change for the proletariat class. By using a visual medium, Lang denunciates technological expansion through the close-up shot of Freder clutching his heart. This act of German Expressionism reflects Lang's fears on the growing dependency on machinery in the Weimar, heeding warning of consequential human suffering. Lang expresses his concern towards the workers' lack of human consciousness through repeated montages of their mechanical motions, whereby they have been transformed into the components of the leviathan boiler that powers the city. Consequently, this dehumanisation evokes the technophobia of his era in response to the Machine Age in America and Germany's Second Industrial Revolution. However, Lang conveys his perspective that by working together, individuals can prevent occurrences of inequity. This is signified by the representation of Freder as a guardian of the human spirit when he operates the hands of the clock, his deformed body visually reminiscent of Christ's Crucifixion. Through the mis-en-scene of Freder linking hands between Fredersen and Grot, Lang presents a hope-instilled resolution where Freder's upholding of his value of compassion reconciles the workers and the bourgeoisie. Therefore, Lang's representation of how Freder ultimately prevails and reconciles the workers and bourgeoisie suggests that those who possess love and empathy are capable of change and revolution within dystopian worlds.

While both composers agree that freedom of expression and love is elusive to achieve, Orwell concludes that individuals within dystopian worlds inevitably deteoritate into emotionless creatures, incapable of any change. The inevitable defeat of Nineteen Eighty-Four's everyman Winston furthers Orwell's perspective that humanity cannot endure against unprincipled oligarchic power. In contrast to Metropolis' outspoken hero, Winston's omniscient narration in his diary highlights how he can only silently challenge the Party's suppression of familial relationships: "always in your stomach there was a dull protest, that you were cheated of something you had a right to." This universal human

desire is further conveyed through Winston's intimate recount of his mother, "her feelings were her own, and could not be altered from outside". The characterisation through introspection echoes the 1945 Holocaust in which families were executed within gas chambers, projecting Orwell's fears of the perversion of familial devotion and love by authoritative powers. This political and social oppression is reinforced through O'Brien's horrific metaphor, "if you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face-forever", exposing the inescapable reality of power-drawn oligarchies. Following the dystopian convention, the audience is positioned to acknowledge rebellion against these systems is being negated in a manner like Stalin's midnight purges. Therefore, Orwell presents his underlying perspective that totalitarian power ultimately leads to demoralisation and the suppression of any possibility for change.

Both Lang's Metropolis and Orwell's Nineteen Eighty-Four represents the minute possibility for change and revolution within their constructed dystopian worlds through the characters' struggle to retain their morality. Ultimately, Lang and Orwell's portrayal of the values of the suppression of individualism, moral degradation and desire for freedom transcends time and remains relevant in the present social context.