HI3001 – 1984: Past, Present, Prophecy

Tuesdays 2:30–5:30, LHS-TR+41
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During the second half of the twentieth century George Orwell’s Nineteen Eighty-Four became a staple (if not a cliché) of political, cultural and sociological comment. Heavily promoted by state actors after the Second World War for propaganda purposes, it took on a counter cultural life of its own during the late 1960s and 1970s. Interest in the book was reinvigorated in the 1980s thanks to the arrival of new computer, media and military technologies. In 2017 sales of the novel reached a new peak. Orwell’s novel only seems to have gained in momentum and relevance; its depictions of “Big Brother,” of telescreens, and of the “forever war” have been uncannily prescient. This course examines in detail the long cultural tail of Orwell’s canonical text from a multidisciplinary perspective.

The course work includes an extended, intensive study of a literary text in conversation with the methods, concepts, and practices of contemporary history. Due to its interdisciplinary nature, this course features deliberation on and assessment of different disciplinary methods, and the assignments challenge you to express your knowledge in new modes and to different audiences.

Required Texts:
George Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four, Penguin Modern Classics (014118776X)

Course Assignments and Assessment:
Preparation and Participation 10%
Essay 1 20%
Essay 2 20%
Group Presentation 25%
Reflection Exercise 25%

Prospective Itinerary

Week 1 – Welcome to the Future (and the Past, and the Present)
January 12 – Back to the Future, dir. Robert Zemeckis (in-class screening)

Week 2 – This Day (or this Year) in History
January 19 – Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four (Part 1)

Week 3 – Big Brother Is Watching You (You Are Watching You)
January 26 – Foucault, “Panopticism;” Postman, from Amusing Ourselves to Death
Week 4 – The Cold War (and the Forever War)

Week 5 – Slavery Is Freedom and Pain Is Pleasure
February 9 – Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four (Part 2), “Politics and the English Language”

Week 6 – Doublethink: All Art Is Propaganda
February 16 – Orwell, from The War Broadcasts; Rajaratnam, from A Nation in the Making
Essay 1 due

Week 7 – Writing in Room 101
February 22 – Crick, “Eric Arthur Blair”; Orwell, Nineteen Eighty-Four (Part 3)
Essay 1 due

Recess

Week 8 – Welcome to the Past (and the Future, and the Present)
March 9 – Brazil, dir. Terry Gilliam (in-class screening)

Week 9 – The History of a Single Year: 1979
March 16 – Caryl, from Strange Rebels: 1979 and the Birth of the 21st Century & others

Week 10 – Listening to a Novel, Hearing the World
March 23 – Mansell, from National Acoustics; Radiolab, The War of the Worlds

Week 11 – Cultures of 1984
March 30 – Group Presentations

Week 12 – Nineteen Eighty-Four’s Literary Legacies
April 6 – Atwood, “Orwell and Me”; Murakami, from IQ84

Week 13 – Orwell in the World: Influence and Dispersion
April 13 – Orwell, “Shooting an Elephant”
Essay 2 Due

April 30 – Reflection Exercise Due