

Background Information on the “1984” Macintosh Commercial

1984 by George Orwell

The title of this commercial is an allusion to the novel written in 1949 by George Orwell. The novel takes place in the year 1984 and depicts a dystopian society in which citizens’ freedoms are restricted by a totalitarian government ruled by a dictator referred to as “Big Brother.”

In the society Orwell describes, everyone is under complete surveillance by the authorities. People are constantly reminded of this scrutiny by the cautioning phrase “Big Brother is watching you.” This warning refers to the two-way computer screens placed throughout the society which display the dictator’s image and which are used by the Thought Police to monitor citizens for subversive thought and speech (referred to in the book as “thought crimes”). Many critics draw parallels between today’s society and the world depicted in the novel, suggesting that we are starting to live in what has become known as an Orwellian society.

Fast Facts about the “1984” Macintosh Commercial

- The commercial was first aired during half-time of the 1984 Super Bowl to announce the arrival of Apple’s new personal computer, the Macintosh.
- When this advertisement aired, Apple was in a fight with IBM to win control of the personal computer market.
- In the 1980s, Apple had the image of the maverick, anti-corporate company. For example, the company encouraged employees to wear jeans and t-shirts to work.
- In the 1980s, IBM was famous for its rigid company structure and insistence on that its employees maintain the “blue-suited corporate look and attitude”. The nickname for IBM is “Big Blue.”
- The advertisement was directed by Ridley Scott (*Alien*, 1979, and *Blade Runner*, 1982) and cost \$1.6 million to produce.