

BABELSBERG/BABYLON

FRITZ LANG'S "METROPOLIS" REINTERPRETED

Jürgen Müller

1. Thea von Harbou, dedication page for *Metropolis*, 1926. Published by August Scherl-Verlag, Berlin

Anyone picking up Thea von Harbou's novel *Metropolis* today will be amazed by the pathos the author expressed in it. Without a doubt, the author had a knack for performance: "I place this book in your hands, Fried" [Fig. 1] is the unctuous dedication of her novel to her husband, Fritz Lang.¹ In 1926 the text was published, in an abridged version, as a serial novel in the Frankfurt weekly paper *Das Illustrierte Blatt*,² then the book was published by August Scherl-Verlag in Berlin, a year before the legendary film premiered.

In addition to the dedication to her husband, there is another prelude [Fig. 2] in which the author offers the reader her own assessment of the work: "This book is not of today or of the future. It tells of no place. It serves no cause, party or class. It has a moral which grows on the pillar of understanding: 'The mediator between brain and hand must be the heart.'"³ What is the riddle Von Harbou wants to offer her reader here? First she tells us what the book isn't and rejects any attempt to exploit or instrumentalize her text, only to end with the sentimental assertion about the heart.⁴

The film *Metropolis* is very famous.⁵ It depicts a distant future in which the working class has been deprived of all rights and slaves away in

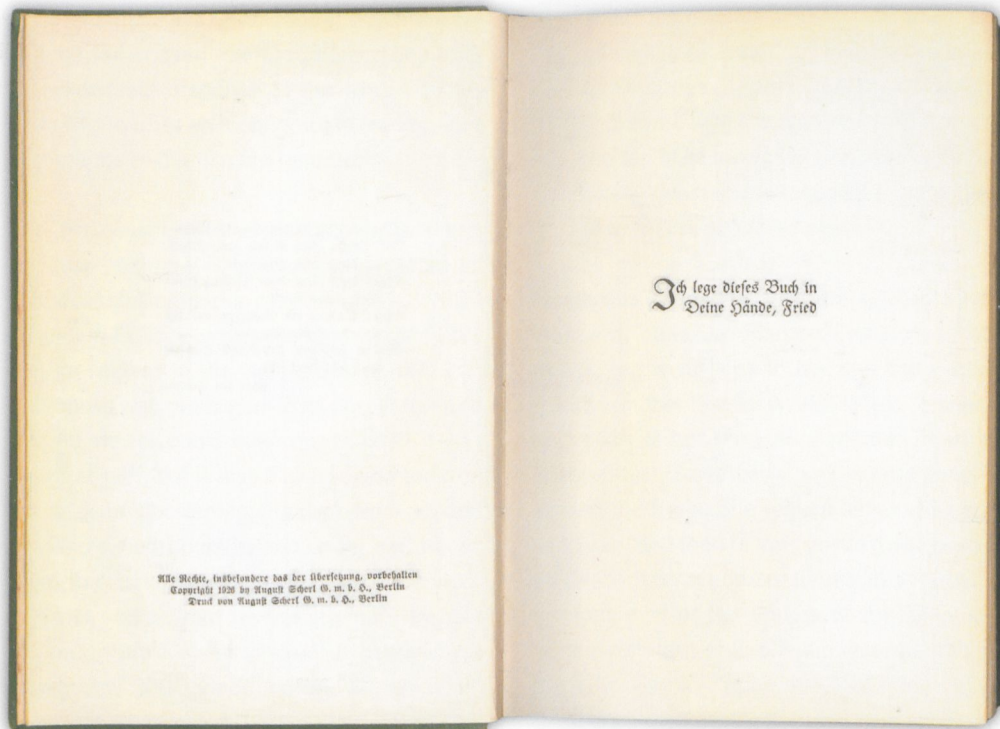
subterranean production plants in order to enable an aristocratic class to live a comfortable life. Only the love affair between Maria, a young woman, and Freder—the son of Fredersen, the ruler of Metropolis—gets things moving. There is an uprising in which the evil inventor Rotwang wants to take vengeance on Fredersen for having taking away his great love long ago. Initially, Fredersen believes he is allied with Rotwang, but in reality the latter is pursuing his own ends. He has created an artificial human being with which he hopes to resurrect his former love.

Because the workers are dissatisfied, Fredersen asks Rotwang to design the robot to resemble the young woman from the masses. His intention is to incite them to give him a pretext to respond violently. The plan fails. In the end, the insane inventor is overcome by the young Freder, who throws him off the roof of the cathedral. A new era begins for Metropolis. The subterranean world of the workers is destroyed, so that there is no basis any longer for the exploitative system. A better future can begin in which the world is no longer divided into top and bottom.

The social order in Metropolis seems strangely premodern. The ruling class stands face to face with the workers, with no bourgeoisie that could mediate the rise and fall. Joh Fredersen

is the ruler above it all. The images in his company headquarters present him to be a powerful industry tycoon. As the plot progresses, he is the character who has to change the most for a new order to prevail.⁶ In *Metropolis*, the old stand against the young, which initially brings to mind the conflict of fathers and sons. This opposition is clearest, however, in the narrative strand of the finale that concerns the rescuing of the workers' children. They symbolize the future of the whole population. The sequence of their rescue is given unusually extensive coverage in the film. In shot after shot, the chil-

nection to the old, venerable cathedral, which is consciously contrasted with the high-rises of the modern world in *Metropolis*. With its religiously tinged critique of capitalism, we may find the story naive, but the crucial thing about the construction of the plot is that the injustice cannot be recognized by the people living above ground. These idlers do not notice that their carefree existence is due to the work of others.⁷ As a result, the viewers are identified a little moralistically with the people of the upper world, and the storyline is claimed to be politically topical. With reference to the novel, Wolfgang Braun-



dren run up the steps out of their subterranean neighborhoods to escape the flood.

In both the novel and the film, the cryptic use of Christian symbols and motifs is striking. The members of the group of workers led by Maria, who assemble in hidden, subterranean locations, are called "Gothics." This established a con-

gart has even spoken of a "Catholicizing utopia," which could be about a renewal of the Catholic order.⁸ This thesis deserves discussion insofar as it raises the question of whether the novel and the film and the ethics advocated in both are to be understood as national or transnational. At the end of the film, when the residents of *Metropolis* are standing in front

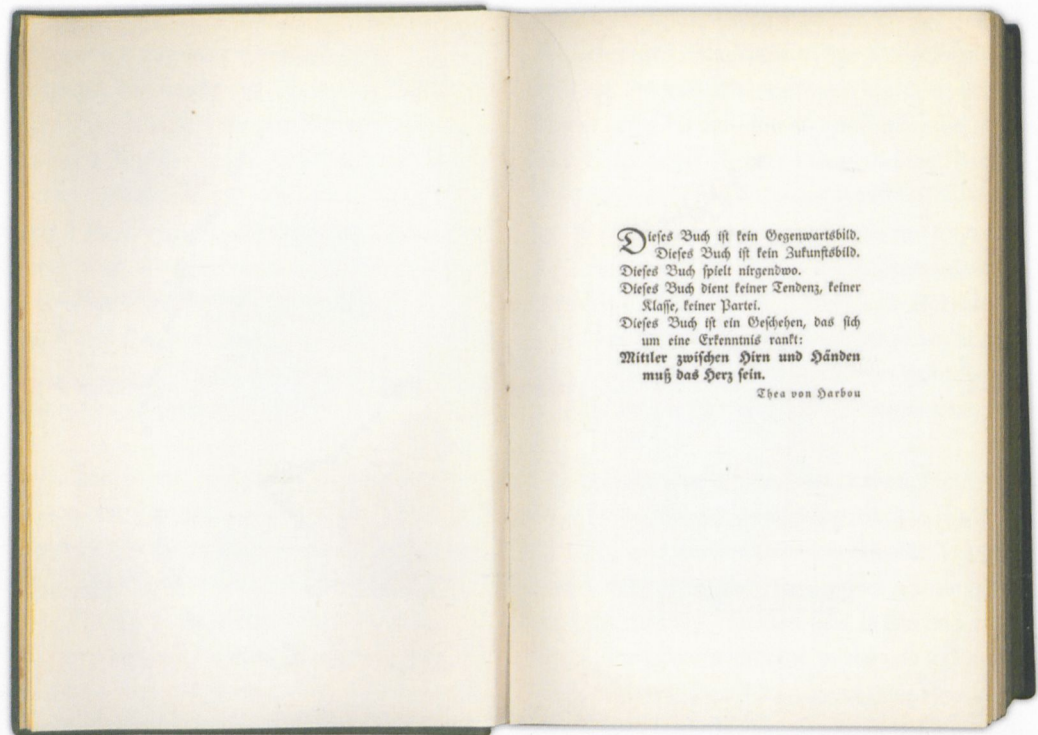
of the cathedral, has the class society been overcome? Are the people agreeing on a new Christian ethics that bridges differences? Or is the new order an old one in the sense of the premodern? Are state and religion united again from now on? If so, the "good news" of the film goes back to a time before the Enlightenment.

If we want to reflect on the film in a fresh way, we have to be on guard against the laudatory rhetoric of the masterpiece and of world cultural heritage. Instead, it is necessary to explain how such a well-versed screenwriter and an

ambitious films as *Cabiria*, *Birth of a Nation*, *Napoleon*, and *Battleship Potemkin*. In *Metropolis*, Lang was attempting nothing less than creating a national film icon—building a German cathedral of film, so to speak—an ambition that the film does not, however, live up to at any point.

Metropolis has been interpreted either politically or mythically, in the sense of a fairy tale. It began with Siegfried Kracauer's book *From Caligari to Hitler*, which accused the film of a protofascist tendency because of its penchant for crowd scenes.¹⁰ In Tom Gunning's biography

2. Thea von Harbou, second dedication page for *Metropolis*, 1926. Published by August Scherl-Verlag, Berlin



experienced director could have ignored the audience so completely. Fritz Lang produced Ufa's most expensive film ever; at five million reichsmarks, it eclipsed everything that had come before it.⁹ Certainly the film represents an enormous effort, but at the same time it was a flop in German cinemas. The director's goal was to be on a par with such innovative and

of Lang, the psychoanalytical depth structure of the film is emphasized in the spirit of an Oedipal drama.¹¹ Thomas Elsaesser also argued that the narrative had an ahistorical structure. He devoted a monograph to the film that, for long stretches, comes across as a research report with commentary.¹² Elsaesser opts for a deconstructive reading in which all interpreta-

tions based on intention and attributing meaning are played out against one another in order to reveal the film's ability to be more intelligent than its interpreters. The catalogue published by the Berliner Kinemathek in 2010 offers no significantly new interpretations.¹³ The most interesting essay is Eva Horn's political interpretation, which takes up a number of political threads by asking who is in charge in *Metropolis* but does not manage to tie them together.¹⁴ Norbert Grob's recently published biography of Lang is also merely descriptive when it comes to *Metropolis* and contributes little new to the film's interpretation.¹⁵ Many of the interpretations thus far have been vague. Some are retellings rather than interpretations. They offer an inadequate response to the film's visuality by failing to offer an iconographic reading. The key images of the film are ignored.

The film was indeed difficult to understand, because extreme cuts were made after an unsuccessful premiere on January 10, 1927. Channing Pollock, who was hired to reedit the film for release in the United States, said that *Metropolis* was symbolism in its purest form, so that no viewer could even guess what it was about at all.¹⁶ Yet it was Pollock who took on the task of shortening the film from around two-and-a-half hours to just under two hours. From that time, roughly a quarter of the work was lost, and despite several attempts it would not be possible to reconstruct it nearly completely until 2008, when a previously unknown copy was discovered in Buenos Aires.¹⁷ This version of the film, completed in 2010, is the basis of my interpretation, whose new results essentially derive from the parts of the work that were previously unavailable.

MONUMENTAL AND SUBLIME

If we begin with a discussion of the quality of the novel, reading it reveals its author's feel for an especially cinematic treatment of the mate-

rial. Von Harbou knew how to develop a story from images:

*Joh Fredersen's eyes wandered over Metropolis, a restless roaring sea with a surf of light. In the flashes and waves, the Niagara Falls of light, in the color-play of revolving towers of light and brilliance, Metropolis seemed to have become transparent. The houses, dissected into cones and cubes by the moving scythes of the search-lights, gleamed, towering up, hovering, light flowing down their flanks like rain. The streets licked up the shining radiance, themselves shining, and the things gliding upon them, an incessant stream, threw cones of light before them. Only the cathedral, with the star-crowned Virgin on the top of its tower, lay stretched out, massively, down in the city, like a black giant lying in an enchanted sleep.*¹⁸

Numerous passages could be quoted as evidence of Thea von Harbou's mastery of language, but it suffices to say that the primary quality of the text is visual. When it seems necessary to her, the author imitates Friedrich Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* or orients herself around the Bible. She makes her prose glitter and spark and then follows it with a pathos-laden description in somber words. In contrast to the film, part of the appeal of the novel is a certain remnant of Expressionism that makes the city with its "open mouths" seem alive. The evilness of the machines is dramatized in ever-new variations. They represent the terrifying beings of prehistoric times. They roar and demand to be fed people. It would have been considerably more difficult for the film to achieve such clear stylistic categorization.¹⁹

When Fritz Lang would later discuss *Metropolis* in interviews, he never tired of emphasizing the quality of the film's architecture: Otto Hunte,

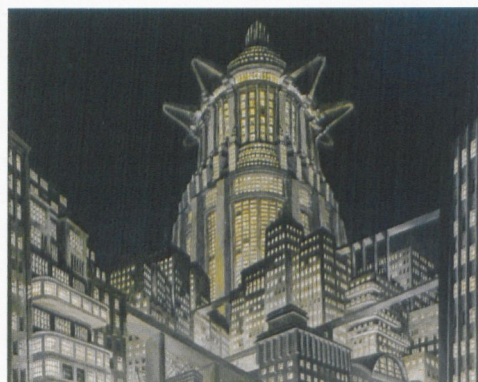
Erich Kettelhut, and Karl Vollbrecht were responsible for the buildings.²⁰ As in the novel, the night views of the immense city also reveal the technical identity of the sublime.²¹ The painting of *The Tower of Babel* by Erich Kettelhut [Fig. 3] is one of the most beautiful shots in the film in that respect: through a bar of diagonal lines, the viewer's gaze is led left and right in the lower area, dramatizing even more the looming of the building. Technology transforms darkness into an imposing sea of lights that makes the Tower of Babel look like a precious stone. The splendidly filmed architecture turns Lang's work into a kind of cinematic *vedute*.²² The film graphically evokes the glittering skyline of an enormous city of the future, which has preserved its venerable cathedral like a relics of past ages. Thanks to its visionary images of a city of the future, Lang's *Metropolis* is one of the most beautiful films of the twentieth century. Those responsible for the film's architecture took their lead from popular models: illustrations of the bestseller *Die Welt in 100 Jahren* (*The World in a Hundred Years*) of 1910 already imagined the increased use of spotlights and flying machines in the cityscape of the future.²³ The striving into the heights and the three-dimensional use of space with elevated roads and railways and bridges between buildings are also anticipated in a print that accompanied Hudson Maxim's "Das 1000 jährige Reich der Maschinen" (a translation of "Man's Machine-Made Millen-

nium"), beneath the partial title "Die Stadt der Zukunft" (The City of the Future).²⁴ Similar visions of future architecture were offered on the cover of an illustrated guidebook *King's Views of New York* of 1911 by Moses King [Fig. 4], showing a sky teeming with airships over New York and bridges connecting the buildings.²⁵

Whatever models may have been used, the aesthetic persuasiveness of *Metropolis* derives from its rigorous use of the experience of space. We do not need to hear the arguments of the workers because we vividly feel the oppressiveness of their cramped living conditions. Space and daylight become privileges of the ruling class. Over the course of the film we are taught that the grand view we are repeatedly offered is not innocent, in that perceiving a city is connected with power. The view down from above is reserved for the rulers. There is a subterranean world and one above the ground, a world of progress and the future above and a world of marching and eternal repetition below. Even more than that, when the film begins to show images of oppressed works, we recall the slavery of the Israelites in Egypt, just as the film as a whole brings together the aesthetic of the epic film and that of the science-fiction film, as Tom Gunning has rightly noted.²⁶

Our perspective on skyscrapers is that of a camera looking down from a dizzying height. We are liberated from the gravity pulling on our bodies in order to become all eyes. Architecture becomes an experience of immense height and depth. Its enormous size eliminates the difference between nature and culture. This quality of an aesthetic of the sublime belongs both to the science fiction film and the genre of the utopia. The architecture of the French Revolution finds its legitimate successor here. Dietrich Neumann has placed *Metropolis* in the context of the architectural debates in Weimar on the pros and cons of high-rise architecture and referred to a

3. Erich Kettelhut, *The Tower of Babel*, 1927, oil on cardboard painting made for Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*.



series of possible models for it.²⁷ Of particular interest is his reference to Oswald Spengler's study in cultural criticism, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (translated as *The Decline of the West*), which as early as 1923 predicted a horror scenario of giant cities of the future. This ideological context strikes me as more plausible than seeking to understand *Metropolis* as an experimental field for discussions of the architecture theory of the Weimar Republic.

Because there have been repeated references to Bruno Taut, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, and other important High Modernist architects in discussions of *Metropolis*, it should be emphasized that Lang and von Harbou indulge in a decided antimodernism in their science fiction film. The "tower building" as an expression of modern culture is the counterimage to the "spiritual" cathedral. The high-rise architecture, the automobiles, the videophone, the nightclub, the newspaper stand, and the billboards are elements of an unbridled modernism that refer critically to the alienated present. *Metropolis* contains neither a modernist credo nor an homage to its own era. The identifiable real elements are part of the world to be overcome.

It has been noted many times that it was Fritz Lang himself who identified the New York skyline as an emblematic image in the context of *Metropolis*. On a trip to the United States with Erich Pommer, this impression, which was familiar to everyone who traveled to America in earlier times, inspired his new film.²⁸ The Manhattan skyline has two meanings. On the one hand, it announces to the traveler: You have survived the dangerous journey and are now safe. On the other hand, it is an image of hope that conveys to those arriving an image of America as the land of unlimited possibilities. So when Lang refers to the symbol of the skyline familiar to everyone, he is pointing the viewer's attention in a certain

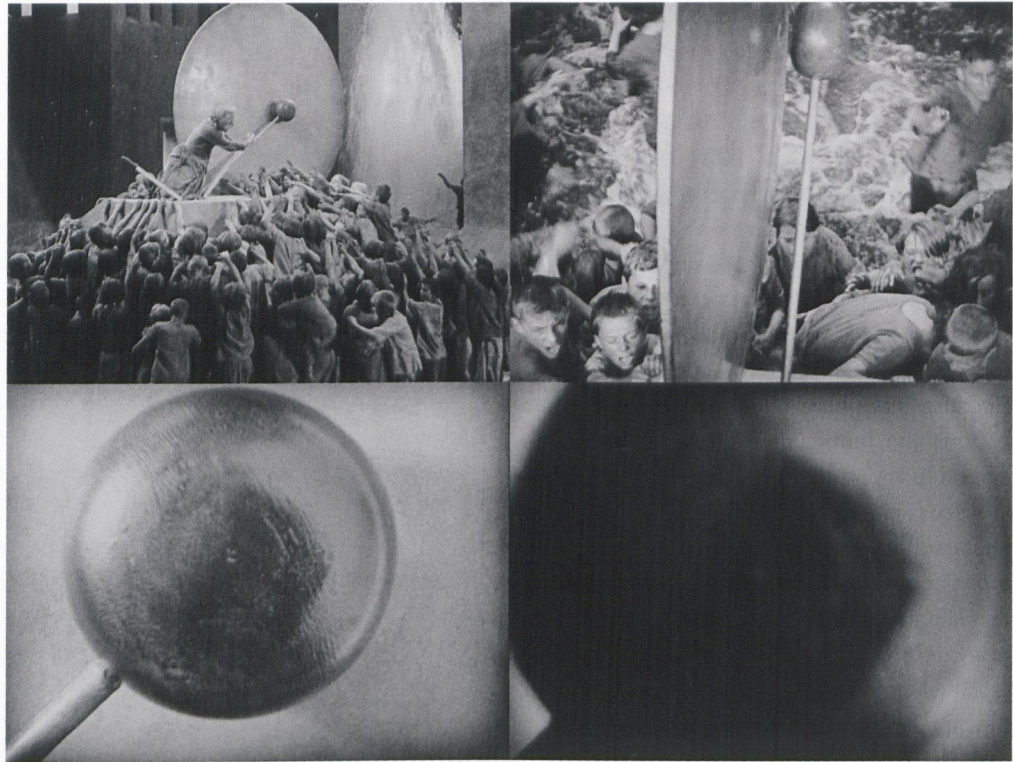


4. Cover of *King's Views of New York* published by Moses King, 1911

direction.²⁹ He is naming nothing less than one of the most famous images of technological progress. Yet, like the labyrinthine architecture of Giambattista Piranesi before him, the high-rise jungle of the megalopolis offers a grand perspective but no orientation.³⁰ No people can be seen; the drivers and passengers of the vehicles do not seem to play a role any longer. The technologically smooth running of this urban life seems to be fulfilled in itself. Without it having been explicitly stated, this city must have achieved dimensions that make a march on foot seem senseless. Modern architecture is mystified: high-rises as symbols of progress and rationality reveal their labyrinthine quality.

The Tower of Babel, the building of which is described in the Bible and to which Thea von Harbou had referred in her novel, has become part of cultural memory as the first high-rise in history.³¹ This form of building thus already had negative connotations in the Old Testament. The work of humanity displeases the Lord:

5. Four film stills from
Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*,
1927



as punishment, people are scattered across the earth and their language confounded. The skyscraper proves to be unsuitable as a way of honoring God. By citing the building of the tower, the film is quoting a symbolism of hubris that the viewer is intended to apply to *Metropolis*.³² In both cases, human reason is not reined in by morality and is expressed as soulless progress. Seen in this way, the episode with the building of the tower is an allegory of progress and at the same time of failure. At that moment when the architects lost sight of their original intention of praising God, the project became an end in itself. This is expressly emphasized, since in the film Maria's interpretation does not see the project of building the tower itself as immoral; rather, it should be built to honor human beings and their Creator. But the necessary communication is between those who thought up and initiated the project—the head, as it were—and the organs charged with implementing it, the

workers. To the latter, working on building the project seems like senseless oppression, so the project fails. The “brain” and the “hands” emerge separately from Babel's confusion of tongues.³³

Nevertheless, the building of the Tower of Babylon is certainly an image of human creativity. It shows the grand achievements people are capable of. In Lang's version of the biblical tale, however, the problem of inventive, visionary human beings is inseparable from their fate as political beings. The building of the tower is a knotty problem; its construction demands not only intelligence but also community. In order to erect an enormous building, a group has to be organized. When conquering the third dimension, the world is divided into top and bottom, which becomes an expression of social hierarchy. Seen in this way, the Tower of Babel is a metaphor not of the state but of injustice.

PLAYING WITH THE AESTHETIC BOUNDARY

Not just today but already in 1927, *Metropolis* had a difficult time reaching a cinema audience. From the outset, people objected to its false pathos. That applies not only to the plot but also to the arc of tension. When the false Maria has to be burned at the stake at the end of the film, or when the children are saved from the flood waters, and the people from the workers' world run up or down the steps in powerful crowd shots, the viewer is left unmoved. Nor is the love story developed, and one is left uncertain about what one is supposed to consider good and above all why. The fact that Rotwang is thrown from the roof of the cathedral? The flooding of the workers' city? A new chapter in the story of *Metropolis* beginning? Viewers don't really grow fond of any of the characters. Everything about the film seems artificial and hypothetical.

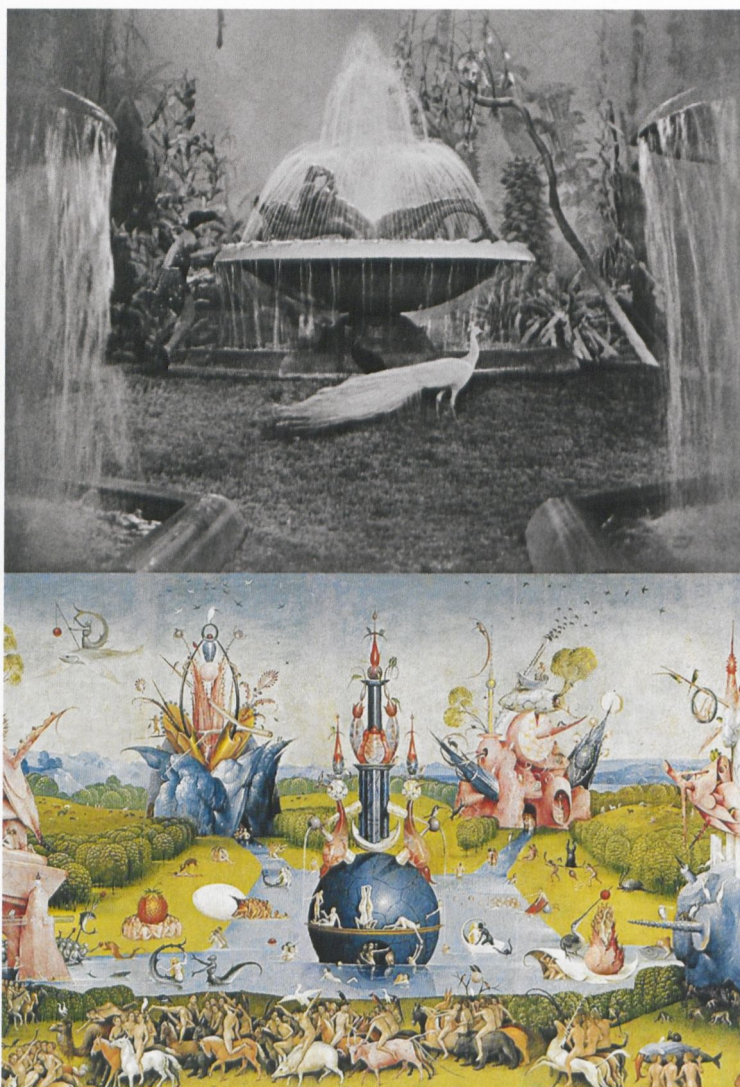
Yet the director and the screenwriter did their best to reach the viewer. They tried to integrate viewers artfully into the film by addressing them with the camera directly and subjectively. Lang's diverse use of the stylistic means of breaking down the aesthetic boundary demonstrates that it was particularly relevant to him. A few examples can be identified and distinguished. The viewers not only adopt the role of Freder eavesdropping on the sermon of the monk Desertus, during which he holds up a Bible with a woodcut of the whore of Babylon, but they are also blinded with Rotwang's flashlight along with Maria, get into a wild duel with an admirer of the mechanical Maria, are called to order by the whistling of the workers' leader Grot, and gaze in parallel with the excited audience in the Yoshiwara. As a rule, the subjective camera goes hand in hand with a role assignment that enables us to experience a certain scene directly with the eyes of the person involved.³⁴

This play with the aesthetic boundary is surely most impressive in the sequences dedicated to saving the children. When the workers in a rage—as predicted and provoked by Joh Fredersen—storm and destroy the heart machine, their homes are flooded, along with the children who have been forgotten in them. As Maria and Freder try to save those left behind with dramatic actions, the viewer is addressed in a way that deserves closer analysis. When Maria sounds the large alarm bell on the central square to summon help, the rescue action begins. As she uses the level to set the bell's clapper in motion, there is a cut, and it looks as if the viewer is in the bell's position [Fig. 5], to that the clapper moves toward us and strikes the movie screen from inside. This does not serve to assign a role in the sense of a subjective camera but rather makes the auditorium and the viewers sitting there the theme. This changes again a short time later when the children, hoping to be saved from the floodwaters, extend their hands toward Maria and Freder to seek help. The camera then shows the children from a top view, thus putting the viewer in the role of the rescuing couple.

But for that moment when the clapper strikes the movie screen, the fiction is abolished. The audience is aware of its presence. "Finally you



6. Ufa-Pavillon,
Nollendorfplatz 4, Berlin,
screening Fritz Lang's
Metropolis, 1927



7. Film still from Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* showing a garden fountain juxtaposed with Hieronymus Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, before 1593. Museo del Prado, Madrid

awaken and note that it is about your future!" the images seem to want to say. It speaks for itself that this shot is repeated seven times over the course of the rescue. Why does Lang so excessively use this stylistic technique of evoking the present moment? Something similar is achieved in the finale, playing with the viewers' anxiety about the helpless children. It is not just about the now but also about the future of the entire people! It is interesting in this context to note that a modification was made to the Ufa-Pavillon am Nollendorfplatz. It was

the only cinema where *Metropolis* was shown after the premiere, and it was on the program until May 13 [Fig. 6].³⁵ The alarm bell from the film's finale was placed over the entrance, so that fiction and reality were already associated for the viewer.

THE DIRECTOR AS PAINTER

When I subject *Metropolis* to an iconographic analysis here, I assume that there can be different ways of referring to works of the visual arts in film. Such a citation need not necessarily add to the semantics but can merely have a vague meaning. Important directors of the Weimar era understood their work as high art and saw themselves in the tradition of the fine arts. Such references testify to directors' self-image as "painters" and to their familiarity with artistic traditions. One need only think of artists such as Ernst Lubitsch and Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau.³⁶

Looking at Lang's "Arbeitsgemeinschaft im Film" (Working Team in Film), published in 1924, just a few years before *Metropolis*, in the film journal *Kinematograph*, this self-image leaps out.³⁷ The director's self-identification as artist is clear when he writes: "For I knew that he [the cameraman Karl Hoffmann] would make everything that I as *painter* had dreamed of the visual aspects of the *Nibelungen* come true with his application of light and shadow."³⁸ The director spoke of a cinematic and working team that together produced *Die Nibelungen*—a film that was created "not in the American style," as he writes, significantly. Lang's presentation of himself as painter did not go unnoticed. That his allusions to the history of art were perceived by his contemporaries is demonstrated, in a not especially flattering way, by Paul Ickes, who wrote in his review of *Metropolis*: "Your misfortune, dear Mr. Fritz Lang, is that the idea means nothing to you, only the image. You cling to the painting."³⁹

Elsaesser aptly wrote of the “tableau-style” in reference to *Metropolis*, whose deceleration and dramatization of the single image may have been irritating to adherents of montage cinema.⁴⁰ In her catalogue *Filmbilder, Vorbilder*, Heide Schönmann makes an interesting attempt to determine in detail how the visual arts influenced Lang. She persuasively links the head of the “mechanical man” to a work by Oskar Schlemmer, his sketch of a mask for the *Scheibentänzer* (wheel dancers).⁴¹ For the worker’s struggle against the merciless clock, she points to a work by Kurt Schmidt from 1924.⁴² Also persuasive as relevant in connection with *Metropolis* is her reference to the context of the skyscraper debate



in Berlin in the early 1920s and the designs of Bruno Taut.⁴³ The models mentioned in her catalog are certainly convincing in terms of their form, but it is striking that nearly all the references to works of art for the science fiction film are to art contemporaneous with Lang.

If we go beyond the findings of Schönmann’s catalogue to ask what works of visual art are cited in *Metropolis*, it is possible to identify some references that have yet to be discovered by film scholars. Such an approach can, however, also be criticized, for doesn’t such an interpretation presume an ideal viewer with enormous visual knowledge? Indeed, my interpretation presumes that in the Weimar era

there was still a knowledgeable public resulting from an upbringing in bourgeois education, and film was understood to be a natural part of this culture and helped shape it.⁴⁴ Not only Goethe’s drama *Faust* but also Dürer’s series of woodcuts on the Revelation of Saint John and knowledge of the façade of Strasbourg Cathedral were part of a general education at the time that no longer exists today. That does not mean that people of that era were “more educated” but only that culture was organized more strictly according to the canon.

The garden in which the *jeunesse dorée* of *Metropolis* spends its time at the beginning of the

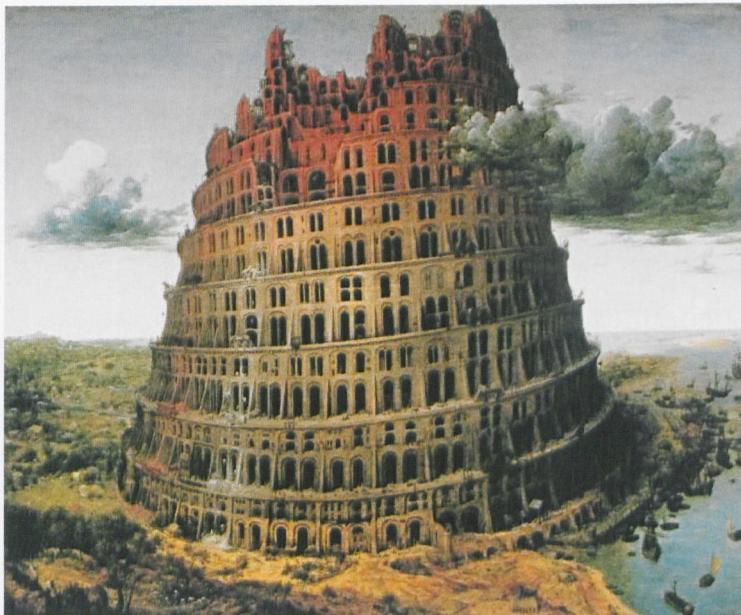


8. Michael Erhart, *Virgin of Mercy*, reportedly from the high altarpiece of the Church of our Lady in Ravensburg, ca. 1480, carved and painted linden wood with gilding. Skulpturensammlung, Bode-Museum, Berlin

9. Film still from Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* showing Maria in the heavenly gardens with a crowd of children

10. Pieter Breughel the Elder, *The Tower of Babel*, 1568, oil on panel. Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam, The Netherlands

11. Film still from Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* showing a Babel-like tower



film has a fountain whose design recalls one on the central panel of Hieronymus Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights* [Fig. 7]. The figure on the fountain, half covered by a jet of water, is a siren, like the one also found on Bosch's panel—a common reference to the seduction of the world. Lang has Freder's teasing and erotic play with a companion take place here. Thus

he offers a picture of decadence and idleness coupled with the innocence of paradise.

Another art historical reference follows that one: the scene in which Maria is leading the children of the workers into the world of the ruling class. At first we see from the perspective of Maria and the children—in the manner of a subjective camera—a young woman in chic clothing. When Maria then appears in the heavenly gardens with the crowd of children, she resembles a Virgin of Mercy [Figs. 8-9], which is also the case in the description in the novel. Just as prominent as Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights* is a quotation from Pieter Breughel's *The Tower of Babel* in Rotterdam [Figs. 10-11], the first high-rise in the history of the world, as we recognize in the context of the film.⁴⁵ When Maria tells the Bible story, the makers of the film show an architect looking at a model of the tower. As in Brueghel's painting, the building is a ramp that tapers upward in a spiral. The sequence of the building of the tower is presented in its allegorical character. It becomes a symbol. The architect has similarities with Auguste Rodin's *The Thinker* [Fig. 12] making him a multiple metaphor, for *homo faber* but also for the ordering and visionary statesman who must direct society toward a common goal [Fig. 13].⁴⁶ Another impressive scene is the one in which Death leaves the cathedral to come over to Metropolis—an allusion to the famous painting by Arnold Böcklin in which the plague is rushing toward the viewer [Fig. 14]. It is an aesthetic game that Fritz Lang was able to translate into a succinct cinematic sequence in which Death, swinging a scythe, tries to descend into the auditorium. The director made a painter's idea even more radical.

The film becomes even more allusive just before the dance of the false Maria, which does not really have a corresponding scene in the novel. First, the lid of a censer opens [Fig. 15];

12. Auguste Rodin, *The Thinker*, 1880-82, bronze

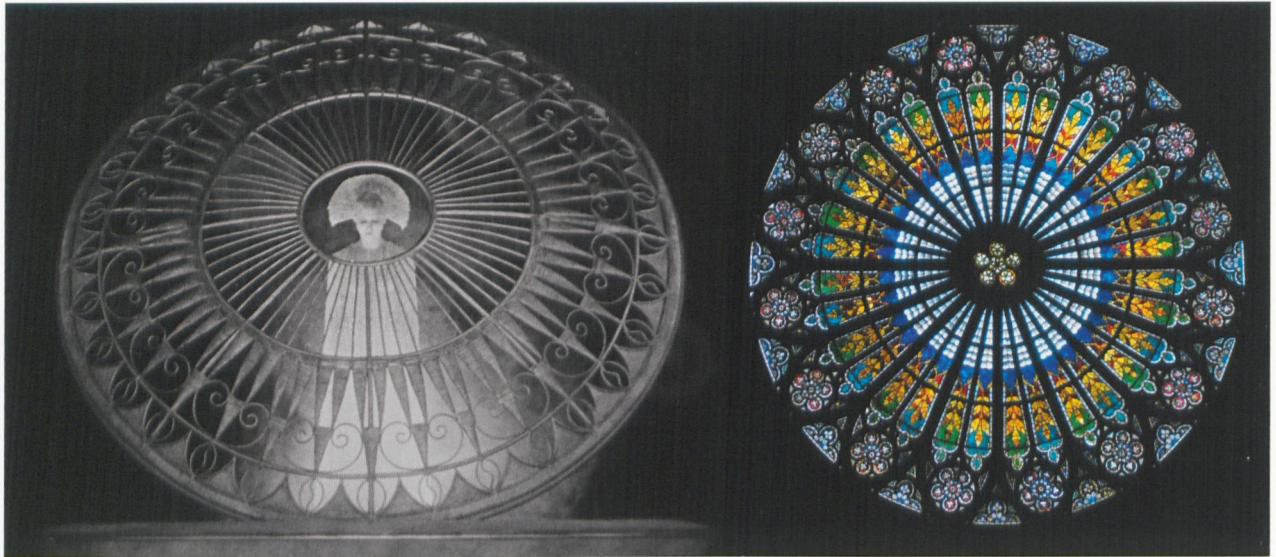


13. Film still from Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* showing the architect sitting near a model of the Babel-like tower



14. Film still from Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* showing Death leaving the cathedral juxtaposed with Arnold Böcklin's *Plague*, 1898, tempera on wood. Kunstmuseum Basel





15. Film still from Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* just before the dance of the false Maria juxtaposed with a medieval rose window from Strasbourg Cathedral

it recalls a medieval rose window, and indeed none other than that of the Strasbourg Cathedral. The mysterious vessel itself from which the false Maria steps out recalls a medieval baptismal font [Figs. 16-17]. Other borrowings from the visual arts include the medieval round dance of vices, with the Grim Reaper in the

center, and the cathedral itself, which can be understood as a symbol of national tradition. Finally, there is a quotation in the film architecture. The heart machine of *Metropolis* [Fig. 18] alludes to Étienne-Louis Boullée's Cenotaph for Isaac Newton [Fig. 19]—an analogy that makes sense in that it is the place containing the city's

16. Film still from Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* showing the false Maria stepping out of a mysterious vessel



17. Medieval baptismal font

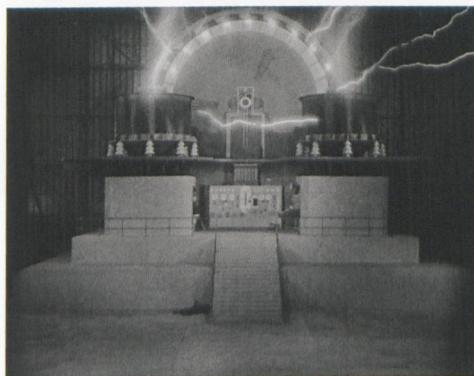


energy. The reference to Boullée also tells us of the modern identity of Metropolis, which has its counter image in the medieval cathedral.

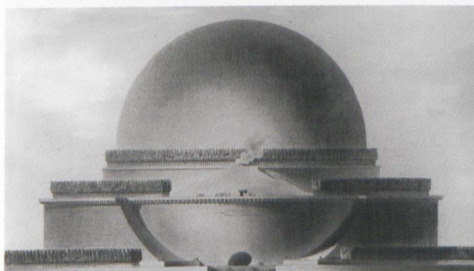
The problem of the iconography is not limited to works of art being used as models. Joh Frederesen, played by Alfred Abel, recalls probably the most famous capitalist of the time: Henry Ford, whose likeness could be seen in numerous articles in newspapers and magazines in the 1920s, and who enjoyed great popularity in Germany as well.⁴⁷

Looking again at the quotations of the rose window of the Strasbourg Cathedral and the Dürer woodcuts, an educated person might call on his knowledge of literature, since Goethe used this very example in his *Sturm-und-Drang* (Storm and Stress) manifesto "Von deutscher Baukunst" (translated as "On German Architecture"). The Strasbourg Cathedral was, Goethe wrote "brought about by the strong, rugged German soul." And Goethe too preferred the "wood-carved face" by the "manly Dürer," thanks to its beauty.⁴⁸ By evoking such topoi of the German discourse on culture—one might also think of Thomas Mann's distinction between *culture* (= German) and *civilization* (= French) in *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* (translated as *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man*) of 1918⁴⁹—the film gives its audience the opportunity to activate its visual knowledge that not only wants to be regarded as a specifically Germanic one but also claims, according to the nationalist ideology of culture, that its most profound appreciation can only be felt by a deep German soul. Thus the film also aims to reinforce the national common sense of an elevated stratum of viewers. But this common sense goes hand in hand with a critique of the existing culture. For the education that shows through in the film quotation is inseparable from the reference to the greatness of the past, it is the expression of a nation that wants to be

understood as a response to a modern age that resulted from the necessities of the capitalist economy.



18. Film still from Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* showing the heart machine of Metropolis



19. Étienne-Louis Boullée, *Cenotaph for Isaac Newton*, 1784

BABYLON AND BABELSBERG

These are interesting references, and doubtless they are characteristic of the film's aesthetic ambitions. But what about the level of political meaning? Siegfried Kracauer early on made the film's insistence on crowd scenes the point of departure for his reflections and determined that its content was protofascist. However, Kracauer's thesis with regard to *Metropolis* did not lead to other specific observations but instead to arguments about a zeitgeist that determined everything.⁵⁰ That is problematic in that the zeitgeist can, famously, adopt any form. It is always already there and is responsible for everything. In contrast to Kracauer, I would like to retain the paradigm of subjective intentionality. Thea von Harbou's novel and her screenplay, but also the film, have an intended statement, regardless of how many readers

20. Film still from Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* showing Desertus during a sermon to the people in the church



21. Michelangelo, detail of *The Last Judgment* from the ceiling of The Sistine Chapel, 1508–12, painted plaster. Vatican City



or viewers understand it or not. This message is not “contraband,” as Kracauer called it, that consciously influenced the making of the film. Rather, it corresponds to a worldview that is still recognizable today.

After all the comparisons between images in the film and works of the fine arts, it is reasonable to observe that Lang’s film placed great demands on education as a way of distinguishing itself from American productions. But what is the real message of *Metropolis*? The key image in the whole form is in the scene of the monk Desertus’s sermon—that is to say, in a sequence that could only be rediscovered in the latest reconstruction. During his church service, which the young Freder attends, Desertus refers to the whore of Babylon in his sermon and holds up a woodcut to the people in the church [Fig. 20]. Her image is seen in an illustrated Bible, and soon thereafter it will recur in a dream that seems to comment on the real events around the false Maria. It should be emphasized, in keeping with it being a key image,

that the sequence with the monk Desertus on the pulpit is shown twice in the film. When the monk presents the woodcut, it is especially emphasized. Once again fiction and reality meet here, since the viewer in the cinema is equated with the visitors to the mass at this moment. The actual viewer is once again integrated into the narrative: This message about the whore of Babylon is for the viewer.

22. Whore of Babylon, woodcut





23. Albrecht Dürer, *Whore of Babylon*, sheet from *The Apocalypse*, 1498, woodcut

24. Film still from Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* showing the death by fire of the false Maria



25. Matthias Gerung, *The White Rider and the Whore of Babylon*, sheet from *The Apocalypse*, ca. 1550, woodcut

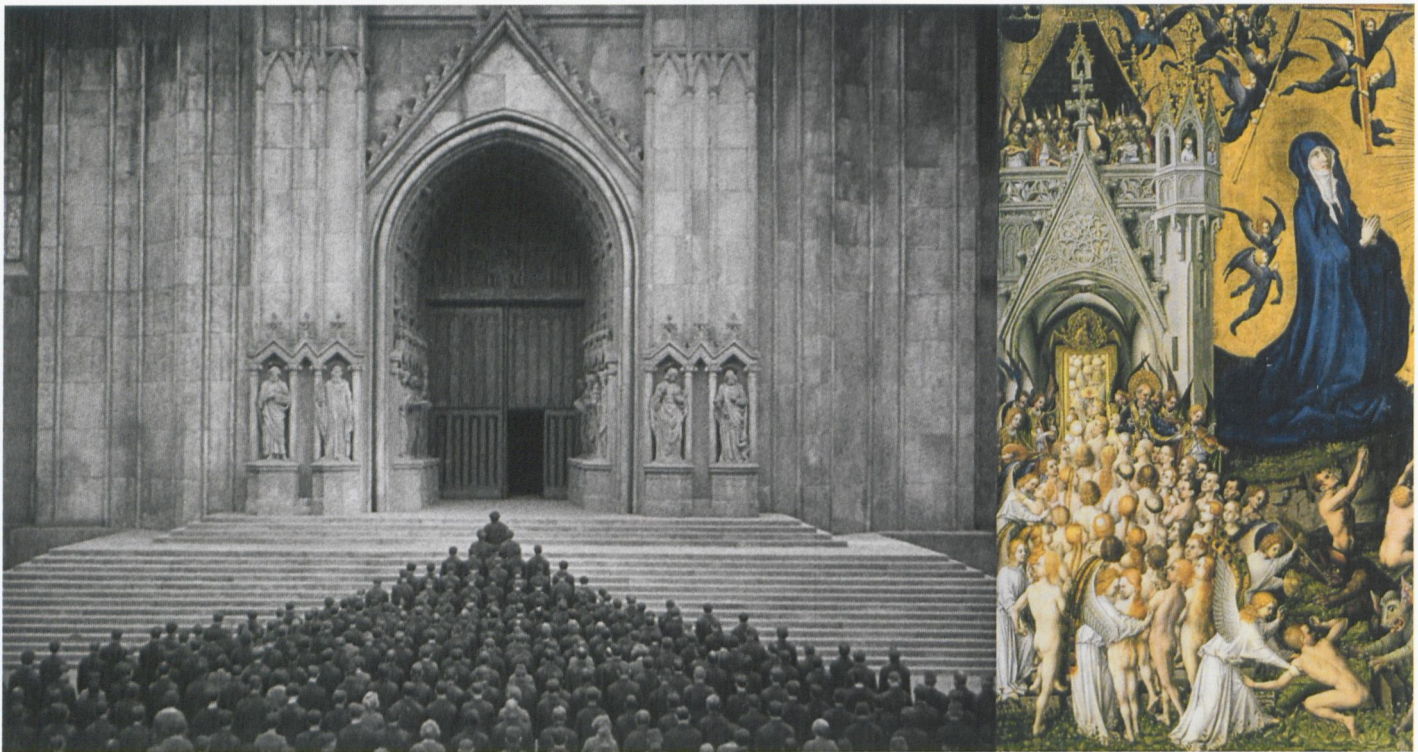


The monk's stance also alludes to an apocalyptic context. For the figure of Desertus getting worked up, Lang cites none other than the figure of Christ from Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* in the Sistine Chapel [Fig. 21].⁵¹ To take another brief look at the woodcut he holds up: it shows the whore on the scarlet animal and holding a "golden cup" in her hand [Fig. 22].⁵² Lang may have borrowed this motif from Dürer's *Apocalypse* [Fig. 23]. In doing so, he used the motif quite literally, but rotated it 45 degrees toward the viewer. Watching the film, we now find ourselves where the men succumb to the whore, as described in the Book of Revelation in the Bible. The woodcut is thus a key image because it becomes the means of interpretation, so to speak. For once one has recognized the key, other scenes can be connected. For example, the death by fire of the false Maria [Fig. 24] refers to the story of the Apocalypse in the Bible, as depicted, for example in a woodcut by Matthias Gerung [Fig. 25].⁵³ Finally, Freder's fight with Rotwang, in which the inventor falls from the roof of the cathedral, is

reminiscent of the archangel Michael's struggle with Satan, whose fall into hell introduced the Millennium.⁵⁴ Once again, there is a reference to Dürer's woodcut of the Apocalypse, which shows the struggle with the monster in the foreground, and the heavenly Jerusalem is already visible in the background on the left, watched over by an angel, and its gate takes the form of a cathedral façade.⁵⁵

of the Apocalypse and the whore of Babylon.⁵⁷ These apocalyptic-biblical allusions together permit a view of *Metropolis* as a decadent den of iniquity doomed to fall.⁵⁸

If we bring all these discoveries together, the film *Metropolis* offers nothing less than the prospect of the beginning of the thousand-year reign of the Millennium. As we know, the Na-



26. Film still from Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* juxtaposed with a medieval altarpiece

In the final scene, when the workers stream to the entrance of the cathedral, one is also reminded of the iconography of medieval altarpieces [Fig. 26]. One thinks of humanity saved and permitted to enter the heavenly Jerusalem after the Last Judgment.⁵⁶ It is all the more astonishing that this context of apocalyptic images has not been acknowledged in the interpretation of the film, especially given that the contrast of the true and false Maria, which is so important to the narrative, has its point of departure in the biblical opposition of the woman

tional Socialist idea of the thousand-year Reich is of biblical origin and can be traced back to the Book of Revelation.⁵⁹ The final reign is preceded by a struggle between good and evil, and the film alludes to its stages in many ways. First, it does so by using motifs from the Apocalypse and, second, by repeating the narrative structure of the biblical story. To bring about the final reign, it is, however, necessary to get rid of Satan (Rotwang) and the false Maria, to remove everything foreign from the body of the people. Various interpreters have

emphasized that the name Rotwang is Jewish in origin and also referred to the Golem motif of the artificial human and the presentation of the inventor Rotwang as a magician. Anton Kaes made the figure of the "Jew Rotwang" and the femme fatale Maria out to be scapegoats who are excluded from the harmonious ending.⁶⁰

If we ask whether there are racist motifs in



Metropolis, we should mention not only the anti-Semitism identified by Kaes but also a significant sequence that has been overlooked thus far. Already in the novel *Metropolis*, the owner of the nightclub, whose name is September, is characterized in a particularly disparaging way: "The proprietor of Yoshiwara used to earn money in a variety of ways. One of them, and quite positively the most harmless, was to make bets that no man—be he never so widely travelled—was capable of guessing to what weird mixture of races he owed his face."⁶¹ The author then

describes the various characteristics that September combines: he is stingy and superstitious like a Scot; his greed is from the Levant; his frugality from China; he has mindless daydreaming from the satisfied bushman; his ecstatic dancing is like that of a Ukrainian. Although the character of September does not appear in the film, Yoshiwara is nevertheless presented as a "racial melting pot." The nightclub shares



27. Film still from Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* showing the Yoshiwara nightclub

28. Film still from Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* showing a multiple exposure shot with three prostitutes laughing at the viewer

its name with the Japanese red-light district of the Edo period, which was famous well beyond Japan's borders.⁶² The Asian-looking architecture of the portal [Fig. 27] and decorative objects, such as Chinese lanterns, reinforce the connection implied by the name. At the same time, the interior of Yoshiwara recalls a chic nightclub with jazz music.

The entertainment district is characterized in a sequence in which we see gambling as well as a shot created by multiple exposure in which three prostitutes laugh provocatively at the viewer: an Asian, an African, and a European woman [Fig. 28]. The censer in which the mechanical Maria is produced at the beginning of her dance is, significantly, borne by several black men, who at the end are replaced by means of a dissolve with sculptures of the seven deadly sins that have come to life. This discovery is all the more significant given that the issue of "race" does not seem to play a role at all anywhere in the film outside

29. Aphorism from Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*: "Mittler zwischen Hirn und Händen muss das Herz sein!" (The mediator between brain and muscle must be the heart!)

of the Yoshiwara nightclub. Elsewhere we find only white Europeans. Yoshiwara, by contrast, is presented in several passages as a place of prostitution and promiscuity—a semantic field to which racial mixing can be added. By superimposing three women of different ethnic origin, Lang alluded to the racial mixing that defined America. The nightclub Yoshiwara is a symbol of an American that is “impure” from a racial perspective.

The racial semantics do not in fact first occur with the motif of Rotwang or the insinuated “racial mixing” in Yoshiwara but already in the aphorism that says that the heart should be the mediator between the brain and the hand. In the novel as in the film, this aphorism initially functions as a paratext: “The mediator between brain and hand must be the heart.” In the film, too, it precedes the action proper [Fig. 29]. It functions as a leitmotif. When Freder and Maria meet at the beginning of the film, because she has come to the upper world with the children, the young man clutches his heart. Later he asks his father: “And where are the people, father, who built your city with their hands?” The alienation between head and hand is discussed again when Maria is telling the story of Babel, as discussed above. Finally, Freder clutches his heart again when he speaks to Maria after her sermon. Maria repeats this gesture as a kind of sign of recognition. So it should come as no surprise that the aphorism should appear again at the end of the film as the final intertitle when Fredersen and the workers, represented by Grot, are reconciled: “The mediator between brain and hand must be the heart!” What significance should we attribute to this leitmotif and aphorism? Is the metaphor of the heart an exhortation to love one’s neighbor and to solidarity?

The metaphor of the heart used in the aphorism is anything but new; after all, the body has been used as a metaphor for the state since

time immemorial.⁶³ But Thea von Harbou updated the image in a specific way. Her aphorism is about the presumption of the thematic part-to-whole relationship of the state. In reality, she was speaking of the community of people related by blood as a prerequisite for the state.⁶⁴ It represents an indivisible ethnic group. The heart is not a metaphor of love but rather the muscle that keeps the blood circulating. For von Harbou, blood as a sign of the unity of a “race” represents the connection and prerequisite for a body politic.⁶⁵ Hence she was following common organological concepts in which the body of the people is compared to the closed circulation of blood.

“METROPOLIS” AND THE THIRD REICH

Lang’s film *Metropolis* was a conflicted project. An advanced technology was used to denounce technology; and the most sophisticated methods were used to cast doubt on the future. The architecture of the high-rise played a central role in this. It was intended to epitomize the soullessness of the modern world. In the context of the film, scholars have rightly referred to Oswald Spengler’s *Untergang des Abendlandes*, but to me Arthur Moeller van den Bruck’s book *Das dritte Reich* (translated as *Germany’s Third Empire*) seems just as important as a point of intellectual contact [Fig. 30].⁶⁶ The term “third empire” originated with the medieval mystic Joachim of Fiore, who prophesied the coming of a third empire of the Holy Spirit after the Age of the Father and the Age of the Son.⁶⁷ Joachim was already prophesying the worldly perspective on a historical last empire. But Moeller van den Bruck updated this medieval historical construction for his own purposes: He identified as the *First Empire* the Holy Roman Empire of the Middle Ages; he characterized as the *Second Empire* the German Reich under Otto von Bismarck. The future *Third Empire* was supposed to be founded on a

combination of nationalism and socialism.⁶⁸ In truth, however, it was the majestic metaphors of mission and fate that Moeller van den Bruck hoped would lend his message of the superiority of the German people an irrefutable certainty. God's place has simply been taken by the nation in the sense of a *Volk*.

It suffices to say here that the millenarianism of this conservative intellectual made use of long-established ideas. The aforementioned book lays out a political dream of conservative intellectuals of the era.⁶⁹ Moeller van den Bruck enjoyed great respect as a cultural historian, theorist of the state, and populist-nationalist



journalist.⁷⁰ Born in Solingen in 1876 and self-taught, he published the eight-volume work *Die Deutschen, unsere Menschengeschichte* (The Germans: Our Human History) in 1905, to name just one of his numerous works.⁷¹ In 1914 he volunteered for the war and was soon working in the foreign department of the Oberste Heeresleitung (Supreme Army Command), where he worked in the press department of the Foreign Ministry. In his magnum opus of 1923, *Das dritte Reich*, he reinterpreted the medieval Christian concept of a worldly final realm of peace for the present and pop-

ularized it, so that it was later taken up by the National Socialists.⁷²

Moeller van den Bruck's *Das dritte Reich* is a promise that does not bear much exposure to light. His explanations of it are strikingly brief, when one considers that just 15 of its two 250 pages enigmatically suggest the future empire. This quite successful book assigned a crucial task for the future to the German people and tried, in a vague way, to build a bridge between socialism and nationalism.⁷³

Moeller van den Bruck's enemies are capitalism, liberalism, Marxism and the values of the Enlightenment associated with the French Revolution. This was not without effects on *Metropolis*. Again and again, the film has shots revealing the unbridled aggression of the workers, to the musical leitmotif of the "Marseillaise." Its depiction of the life of workers under capitalism was just as monotonous, turning human beings into cogs in the production process. Socialism, capitalism, and rule by the few, *Metropolis* teaches us, lead to catastrophe. I hear the same basic tone in the polemical reckoning of Moeller van den Bruck, a member of the Jungkonservativen (Young Conservatives) movement, that is found in the novel and the film. In both, the modern age is defined as a Babylonian interim realm that must be overcome and destroyed to reach the final thousand-year Reich. According to Van der Bruck: German nationalism is the champion of the Final Empire: ever promised, never fulfilled.

It is the peculiar prerogative of the German people for which other peoples vie with us. In the World War the peoples fought against the Empire-for-the-sake-of-the-empire, the Empire-for-the-sake-of-world-hegemony, in which we claimed our very material share. Each of these nations wanted an empire of its own: a sphere and empire of

30. Cover of Arthur Moeller van den Bruck's book *Das dritte Reich* (translated as *Germany's Third Empire*), 1923

*Latin or Anglo-Saxon or Pan-Slav thought. They annihilated our material empire. They still tremble before its political shadow.*⁷⁴

The final three sentences in particular, however, will be remembered; they make clear the world-historical dimension that falls to the ordinary German as the guardian of the West: "The ape and tiger in man are threatening. The shadow of Africa falls across Europe. It is our task to be guardians on the threshold of values."⁷⁵

If one follows Klaus Vondung, the linking of decline and renewal, destruction and redemption, must be seen as the central structural feature of the Apocalypse. The apocalyptic visionary years suggest redemption; political conflict is elevated to the religiously metaphysical.⁷⁶ Redemption only seems possible any longer if the old order falls.⁷⁷ Vondung emphasizes the radicalization that goes hand in hand with apocalyptic thinking and makes the use of violence seem legitimate. The enemy represents evil personified; he is depicted as a "cruel and insidious, a repulsive and revolting animal," which makes the use of extreme violence necessary.⁷⁸ In a much more literal sense than Siegfried Kracauer intended, the film had a prognostic quality. It talks about an emerging thousand-year Reich and vague fantasies of redemption in the Weimar era to which the German people were receptive because they were waiting for a leader.⁷⁹

The legitimacy of the new democratic order was cast in doubt in the circles to which Thea von Harbou and Fritz Lang belonged, and the appeal to the grand narrative of a coming Third Reich to provide meaning was supposed to lend expression to this discomfort with a liberal, democratic modern era.⁸⁰ In that sense, the film's program can be described quite openly as a combative and sacred dramatization of the political. From a national, conservative

perspective, the secular present must have seemed like disoriented activity that risked sinking into chaos unless there was a renewed connection to transcendence.⁸¹ The implicit yet clear message of *Metropolis* is that legitimate political order cannot be the result of human dealings but can only be conceived as the fulfillment of the promise of the history of salvation.⁸² Seen in this way, the film addresses not only the Apocalypse and the thousand-year reign it predicts, but also the phantom pain of the loss of transcendence when the German Reich fell. Accordingly, my political interpretation of the film tries to show the catastrophic willingness of the time to leap blindly into the transcendence of a *Volksgemeinschaft* (community of the people). If we add to this the political context of the Weimar era, the description of the film would have to be changed: *Metropolis* is the story of becoming a state in a *völkisch*—that is to say, racist—sense. My interpretation of the classic film is an attempt to take that political message seriously. It is terrifying to see how naively the film has been interpreted thus far and how it could advance to become world cultural heritage without being questioned.

If we return once again to the aphorism of the novel and the film—the heart as mediator between brain and hand—we can draw parallels between von Harbou's concern and that of Moeller van den Bruck. For it is striking how much the author takes her lead from the preface to *Das Dritte Reich* when she claims a standpoint beyond classes, trends, and parties.⁸³ Moeller van den Bruck had already considered the "overcoming of parties" to be a prerequisite for the future empire in which the people would be united: "Instead of government by party we offer the ideal of the THIRD EMPIRE. It is an old German conception and a great one. It arose when our First Empire fell; it was early quickened by the thought of a millennium; but its underlying thought has always

been a future which should be not the end of all things but the dawn of a German Age in which the German People would for the first time fulfil their destiny on earth.⁸⁴ The metaphors of the hands as symbol of the proletariat or that of the ruler as "human intermediary" are also prefigured in the conservative author.⁸⁵ Moreover, one must also mention the primacy of blood, which precedes all state forms of organization, in Moeller van den Bruck as well.⁸⁶ Finally, one is also reminded of von Harbou's strange formulation that her novel is about an event that grows on the pillar of understanding.⁸⁷

It has long since been known that Thea von Harbou became a member of the National Socialist Party of Germany in 1940 and had sympathized with the new regime from the beginning.⁸⁸ But even her texts from the beginning of the previous century reflect her politically nationalist attitude.⁸⁹ We are indebted to Karin Bruns for a solid assessment of von Harbou's ideas, which need not be discussed at length here. Yet a real notion of how the film *Metropolis* could be seen from a political perspective is illustrated by a diary entry by Joseph Goebbels on March 25, 1927, who saw the film, still in its unabridged version, two months after the Ufa-Palast am Zoo in Berlin: "With the Schweitzers at the cinema. *Metropolis*. Great directing. Subject: insipid, sentimental goings-on around National Socialist ideas."⁹⁰ This remark about *Metropolis* might seem astonishing, since it attributes a clear political message to the film classic—and that is unfamiliar to us from the secondary literature. But it cannot be said of Goebbels that he had only a vague notion of National Socialism.

Exactly what Goebbels meant when he alleged that the film took up National Socialist lines of thought has been sufficiently demonstrated, in our view. It begins with the final apocalyptic struggle, includes the pseudosocialism



at the end of the film, and continues with the suggestion of a *Volksgemeinschaft*, which naturally presumes the exclusion of the inventor Rotwang. Evil has been overcome. The workers and the ruling elite have been reconciled. The final image is revealing. The masses are marching in step in front of the imposing church building. The handshake marks the beginning of a new era [Fig. 31]. The precise conditions of such a future, however, remain completely in the dark. If in the end the inequality between rich and poor, above and below, has been eliminated, and the people of Metropolis are standing in front of the cathedral, it is not a victory for the Christian practice of religion. Rather, the *Volksgemeinschaft* of the residents of Metropolis has come to terms with itself. It and the cathedral are one. The thousand-year Reich can begin in Metropolis.

Translated from the German by Steven Lindberg

This essay is dedicated to my friend Achatz von Müller. I would like to take this opportunity to thank my colleagues Christoph Ziener and Lisa Pribik, who helped me in many ways to produce this essay.

31. Final scene from Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*, showing a handshake between the working and ruling classes

¹ Thea von Harbou, *Metropolis* (Berlin: Scherl, 1926), 7.

² Thea von Harbou originally intended to have her novel *Metropolis*, which was produced in parallel with the screen play, published by Ullstein. It was, however, rejected; Andre Kagelmann suspects this was because certain plot threads were regarded as unliterary and too cinematic. The novel was published in 1926 by Scherl and was serialized, in abridged form, in *Das illustrierte Blatt*. See Andre Kagelmann, *Der Krieg und die Frau: Thea von Harbous Erzählwerk zum Ersten Weltkrieg* (Kassel: Media Net, 2009), 56–57.

³ Harbou, *Metropolis* (see note 1), 7; Thea von Harbou, *Metropolis* (London: Readers Library Publications, [1927]), 13. In the English edition of Thea van Harbou's *Metropolis*, "hand" is translated as "muscle." In the German, the motto of the film would translate as: "The mediator between brain and hand must be the heart." We are using hand in this text as it more accurately captures the intention of the original.

⁴ The metaphor of the heart had many meanings at the time and was widespread. Nevertheless, I mention two influential texts: First, Stefan George's poem "Goethes letzte Nacht in Italien" (Goethe's last night in Italy), which includes a line that refers to the "mittler" (mediator) and "blut" (blood). Second, one also thinks of Ernst Jünger, *Das abenteuerliche Herz* (Berlin: Frundsberg, 1929); translated by Russell A. Berman as *The Adventurous Heart* (Candor, NY: Telos, 2012). See Norbert Staub, *Wagnis ohne Welt: Ernst Jüngers Schrift "Das abenteuerliche Herz" und ihr Kontext* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2000).

⁵ See the introduction to this informative anthology, including numerous sources: Michael Minden and Holger Bachmann, eds., *Fritz Lang's "Metropolis": Cinematic Visions of Technology and Fear*, Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture (Rochester,

NY: Camden House, 2000).

⁶ In the novel, this becomes especially clear at the end when Joh visits his mother and tells her about the dramatic events that have occurred. His story makes his transformation clear. When he reports how the persistent waiting of the workers forced him to react, he agrees to be their leader. That they need a spiritual leader, and not just a company manager, is made clear by the following words: "If we had been living a thousand years earlier, I should, perhaps, set out on the high road, with pilgrim's staff and cockle hat." Harbou, *Metropolis* (see note 1), 272–73; Harbou, *Metropolis* (see note 3), 249.

⁷ Famously, this idea is already decisive in H. G. Wells's *Time Machine* of 1895.

⁸ Wolfgang Braungart, "Apokalypse und Utopie," in Gerhard R. Kaiser, ed., *Poesie der Apokalypse* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1991), 63–102, esp. 91.

⁹ See Bernhard Eisenschütz, "Wege und Umwege zu Metropolis," in Deutsche Kinemathek: Museum für Film und Fernsehen, ed., *Fritz Langs Metropolis* (Munich: Belleville, 2010), 13–33, esp. 24–27.

¹⁰ On this, see Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1947).

¹¹ Tom Gunning, *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity* (London: British Film Institute, 2000), 52–83, esp. 71.

¹² Thomas Elsaesser, *Metropolis* (London: British Film Institute, 2000).

¹³ Deutsche Kinemathek, *Fritz Langs Metropolis* (see note 9).

¹⁴ See Eva Horn, "Die doppelte Maria: Weibliche Führerschaft in Fritz Langs Metropolis," in: Stefan Krammer and Marion Löffler, eds., *Staat in Unordnung? Geschlechterperspektiven auf Deutschland und Österreich zwischen den Weltkriegen* (Vienna: Transcript, 2011), 25–46.

¹⁵ Norbert Grob, *Fritz Lang: "Ich bin ein Augenmensch"; Die Biographie*

(Berlin: Propyläen, 2014), 131–51.

¹⁶ Martin Koerber, "Erneute Notizen zur Überlieferung von Metropolis," in Deutsche Kinemathek, *Fritz Langs Metropolis* (see note 9), 49–63, esp. 50. The various runtimes of the film are: 153 min | 210 min (premiere cut) | 93 min (re-release) | 114 min (1927 cut) | 123 min (2002 Murnau Foundation 75th anniversary restored) | 119 min (DVD edition) (2002 Murnau Foundation 75th anniversary restored) | 80 min (Giorgio Moroder) | 145 min (2010 restored).

¹⁷ See Anke Wilkening, "Das Ende eines Mythos?," in *ibid.*, 65–75.

¹⁸ Harbou, *Metropolis* (see note 1), 37; Harbou, *Metropolis* (see note 3), 31.

¹⁹ Without wishing to go into greater detail here, it should be mentioned that the novel, the screenplay, and the film differ considerably, though the motifs are identical. This would require a study of its own.

²⁰ One even gets the impression that the film embarrassed the Viennese director. As late as the 1960s, he remarked to Peter Bogdanovich: "I had the feeling that *Metropolis* was patched together. [...] The main thesis was Mrs. von Harbou's, but I am at least 50 percent responsible because I did it. [...] I didn't like the picture—thought it was silly and stupid." Fritz Lang, in Peter Bogdanovich, *Who the Devil Made It* (New York: Knopf, 1997), 170–234, esp. 178.

²¹ Just as spectacular as the designs of the enormous architecture for the film were the special effects of Eugen Schüfftan, who developed a special procedure for projecting scenes and objects into the model architecture. Thus scenes could take place in the models and leave a realistic impression.

²² On this, see Jürgen Müller and Jörn Hetebrügge, "Metropolis' als Menetekel der Moderne," in Winfried Nerdinger, ed., *Architektur wie sie im Buche steht: Fiktive Bauten und Städte in der Literatur*, exh. cat., Architekturmuseum der Technischen Universität. Munich (Munich: Pustet, 2006), 187–99.

²³ Arthur Brehmer, ed., *Die Welt in 100 Jahren* (Hildesheim: Olms, 2010; reprint of Berlin: Verlagsanstalt Buntdruck, 1910).

²⁴ Hudson Maxim, "Das 1000 jährige Reich der Maschinen," in *ibid.*, 5–24, esp. 23; this is a translation of Hudson Maxim, "Man's Machine-Made Millennium," *Cosmopolitan Magazine* 45, no. 6 (November 1908): 569–76, esp. 573.

²⁵ Moses King, *King's Views of New York, 1911–1912* (New York: King, 1911); cf. the illustration in Moses King, *King's Views of New York, 1896–1915, and Brooklyn, 1905: An Extraordinary Photographic Survey* (New York: Arno, 1980), chapters on 1903, 1905, and 1911.

²⁶ Gunning, *The Films of Fritz Lang* (see note 11), 34.

²⁷ Dietrich Neumann, "Vorboten und Folgen von *Metropolis*: Film und Architektur auf der Suche nach der modernen Stadt," in *idem*, ed., *Filmarchitektur: Von Metropolis bis Blade Runner*, exh. cat., Deutsches Architekturmuseum, Frankfurt (Munich: Prestel, 1996), 33–38.

²⁸ Bernhard Eisenschitz points out that *Metropolis* had already been announced in the journal *Licht-Bild-Bühne* in June 1924. Fritz Lang and Thea von Harbou completed the screenplay during a private trip together. But Lang did not travel to the United States until October. Nevertheless, later he corroborated the legend that his stay in New York had given him the idea for the film. See Eisenschitz, "Wege und Umwege zu *Metropolis*" (see note 9), 15–16.

²⁹ Fritz Lang, "Was ich in Amerika sah: Neuyork, Los Angeles," *Film-Kurier* (Berlin) 6, no. 292, (December 11, 1924): unpaginated. The text is also reprinted in Fred Gehler and Ullrich Kasten, *Fritz Lang: Die Stimme von Metropolis* (Berlin: Henschel-Verlag, 1990), 207ff.

³⁰ Heide Schönemann has already pointed to parallels between Piranesi's *Carceri d'invenzione* and Lang's visual language, though she did not make a specific connection to *Metropolis*. See Heide Schönemann

and Filmmuseum Potsdam, *Fritz Lang: Filmbilder, Vorbilder*, Reihe Deutsche Vergangenheit 66, exh. cat., Filmmuseum, Potsdam (Berlin: Hentrich, 1992), 96.

³¹ Harbou, *Metropolis* (see note 1), 20; Harbou, *Metropolis* (see note 3), 23.

³² See Gunning, *The Films of Fritz Lang* (see note 11), 56–57.

³³ See *ibid.*, 61.

³⁴ On the use of the subjective camera, see Edward Branigan, *Point of View in the Cinema: A Theory of Narration and Subjectivity in Classical Film* (New York: Mouton, 1984).

See also Jan Marie Peters, "The Subjective Camera: Optical Effects, Meaning, and Emotional Impact," in Frank Furtwängler et al., eds., *Zwischen-Bilanz: Eine Festschrift für Joachim Paech zum 60. Geburtstag* (Constance: Universität Konstanz, Fachbereich Literaturwissenschaft, 2001).

³⁵ See Eisenschitz, "Wege und Umwege zu *Metropolis*" (see note 9), 26.

³⁶ See Jürgen Müller, "Film als Kunst: Anmerkungen zur Film poetik Friedrich Wilhelm Murnaus," in Brigitte Salmen, ed., *Murnau (Friedrich Wilhelm) in Murnau (Oberbayern): Der Stummfilmregisseur der 1920er Jahre*, exh. cat. (Murnau: Schlossmuseum, 2003), 81–95.

³⁷ Fritz Lang, "Arbeitsgemeinschaft im Film," *Der Kinematograph*, no. 887 (February 17, 1924), Reprinted in Rolf Aurich, *Werkstatt Film: Selbstverständnis und Visionen von Filmleuten der zwanziger Jahre* (Munich: Text + Kritik, 1998), 15–19.

³⁸ Lang complained in passing, in reference to the film work of the sworn Nibelungen troupe, of the unity of the Germans, and so it is hardly surprising that every shot represented a "condensed hard day." See Lang, "Arbeitsgemeinschaft im Film" (see note 37), 18.

³⁹ Paul Ickes, "Kritik der Leinwand: 'Metropolis,'" *Die Filmwoche*, January 19, 1927, 60–61, esp. 60.

⁴⁰ Thomas Elsaesser, *Metropolis* (see note 12), 17.

⁴¹ Schönemann and Filmmuseum Potsdam, *Fritz Lang* (see note 30), 54.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 53.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 78–79.

⁴⁴ Georg Bollenbeck, *Eine Geschichte der Kulturkritik: Von J. J. Rousseau bis G. Anders* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2007).

⁴⁵ Schönemann also referred to Brueghel, albeit to the version in Vienna, not the one in Rotterdam. See Schönemann and Filmmuseum Potsdam, *Fritz Lang* (see note 30), 90–91.

⁴⁶ Gunning discovered this quotation; see Gunning, *The Films of Fritz Lang* (see note 11), 58.

⁴⁷ *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung*, 34, no. 38 (September 20, 1925), title page. His great popularity in Germany is demonstrated by the many printings of his autobiography: Henry Ford, *Mein Leben und Werk*, ed. V. Curt and Marguerite Thesing (Leipzig: List, 1923), a translation of *idem*, *My Life and Work* (Garden City, N.Y., Doubleday, Page, 1923).

⁴⁸ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, "On German Architecture," (1772), in John Gage, ed. and trans., *Goethe on Art* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1980), 103–12, esp. 109–11.

⁴⁹ See Thomas Mann, *Grosse Kommentierte Frankfurter Ausgabe: Werke, Briefe, Tagebücher*, ed. Heinrich Detering in collaboration with the ETH Zürich vol. 13.2, *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2009); translated by Walter D. Morris as *Reflections of a Nonpolitical Man* (New York: Ungar, 1983).

⁵⁰ Kracauer wrote: "One film was more explicit than all others: METROPOLIS. In it, the paralyzed collective mind seemed to be talking with unusual clarity in its sleep. This is more than a metaphor: owing to a fortunate combination of receptivity and confusion, Lang's scriptwriter, Thea von Harbou, was not only sensitive to all undercurrents of the time, but indiscriminately passed on whatever happened to haunt her imagination. METROPOLIS was rich in subterranean content that,

like contraband, had crossed the borders of consciousness without being questioned." See Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler* (see note 10), 162–63.

⁵¹ Already in the screenplay, which is preserved at the Berliner Kinemathek, there is a specific instruction for the character's pose: "Single shot: The slender man seen from Freder's viewpoint; he has gone around: 'Hold still, idiot!' He raises his right hand in an angry gesture, but turns away again like that and in the process transforms into the preaching monk from Scene 158 at the footboard of the bed." Thea von Harbou, "Drehbuch Metropolis," Berlin, undated. 548 pp., 406 "images." Handwritten note on page 1: "This manuscript is dedicated to Erich Pommer. Handwritten addition: 'for Herrn Huppertz.'" SDK-12268 (S), p. 320. This fact points to the particular relevance attributed to the cinematic image and makes it plausible that it was based on Michelangelo. Moreover, the reference back to Scene 158 (the sermon in the cathedral) proves that both scenes are about the same motif of the posture.

⁵² Revelation 17:4.

⁵³ Revelation 17:16.

⁵⁴ Revelation 20:3.

⁵⁵ Revelation 21:2.

⁵⁶ In their essay "Metropolis: Jahrzehnte voraus- Jahrtausende zurück," Wolfgang Jacobsen and Werner Sudendorf claim that Erich Kettelhut modeled the Gothic church on the Cologne Cathedral. That is incorrect: it is merely a Gothic pastiche that does not refer to any existing cathedral. Cf. Wolfgang Jacobsen and Werner Sudendorf, eds., *Metropolis: Ein filmisches Laboratorium der modernen Architektur* (Stuttgart: Menges, 2000), 8–39, esp. 22.

⁵⁷ Revelation 17:1–18.

⁵⁸ Significantly, the term "New Babylon" emerged in the 1920s as almost synonymous with dissolute Hollywood, which at the time was shaken by numerous scandals. See Kenneth Anger, *Hollywood Babylon*

(San Francisco: Straight Arrow, 1975).

⁵⁹ Revelation 20:1–6.

⁶⁰ Anton Kaes: "Cinema and Modernity" On Fritz Lang's 'Metropolis,' in Reinhold Grimm and Jost Hermand, eds., *High and Low Cultures: German Attempts at Mediation* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 19–44, esp. 32–33.

⁶¹ Harbou, *Metropolis* (see note 1), 92; Harbou, *Metropolis* (see note 3), 86.

⁶² Stephen and Ethel Longstreet, *Yoshiwara: City of the Senses* (New York: McKay, 1970). A contemporary reception of Yoshiwara can be found, among other places, in Tresmin-Trémolières, *Yoshiwara: Die Liebesstadt der Japaner*, trans. Bruno Sklarek, vol. 4 of Iwan Bloch, ed., *Sexualpsychologische Bibliothek* (Berlin: Marcus, [ca. 1910]); see Tresmin-Trémolières, *La cité d'amour au Japon: Courtisanes du Yoshiwara* (Paris, 1905).

⁶³ See Horst Bredekamp, *Thomas Hobbes, Der Leviathan: Das Urbild des deutschen Staates und seine Gegenbilder, 1651–2001* (Berlin: Akademie, 2012). See also Klaus Bergdolt, "Mikrokosmos und Makrokosmos: Der menschliche Körper als staatstheoretisches Modell," in Otto Depenheuer, ed., *Staat und Schönheit: Möglichkeiten und Perspektiven einer Staatskalokagathie* (Wiesbaden: VS, Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2005).

⁶⁴ On the thematic complex of the body and "biologizing" in the context of nationalism, see Peter Walkenhorst, *Nation, Volk, Rasse: Radikaler Nationalismus im Deutschen Kaiserreich, 1890–1914*, Kritische Studien zur Geschichtswissenschaft 176 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 80–149. Walkenhorst wrote: "This gradual shift of the semantic focus away from cultural criteria toward the idea of a community of shared origin was the expression of a growing biologizing of political thought that

occurred in the last decade before the war under the influence of Social Darwinism, eugenics, and theories of racial hygiene. To the extent that belonging to the "German people" was no longer defined primarily by cultural features but instead by the pseudobiological notion of a 'blood community,' the concept of 'race' replaced the concept of the people." See *ibid.*, p. 101.

⁶⁵ I am referring here to the first chapter of Karin Bruns, *Kinomythen, 1920–1945: Die Filmentwürfe der Thea von Harbou* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1995), in which she worked out the extensive national and racist patterns of thinking and writing in von Harbou's early phase. Bruns summed up: "In the configuration of actors in the novels of the World War I era, blood as an indicator of which race one belonged to was a central element of characterization. [...] Such stereotypical views and narratives schemes of *völkisch* and racist provenance primarily exploit categories of physiognomy and character typology that assume a correlation between (racially determined) physical appearance and psychological and ethical features." See *ibid.*, 10.

⁶⁶ Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, *Das dritte Reich*, Quellentexte zur konservativen Revolution: Die Jungkonservativen 1 (Toppenstedt: Berg, 2006; reprint of Berlin: Ring-Verlag, 1923); translated and condensed by E. O. Lorimer as *Germany's Third Empire* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1934). For an introduction, see Hans-Joachim Schwierskott, *Arthur Moeller van den Bruck und der revolutionäre Nationalismus in der Weimarer Republik* (Göttingen: Musterschmidt, 1962). See also André Schlüter, *Moeller van den Bruck: Leben und Werk* (Cologne: Böhlau, 2010), and, most recently, Volker Weiss, *Moderne Antimoderne: Arthur Moeller van den Bruck und der Wandel des Konservativismus* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2012).

⁶⁷ See, with additional references to the literature, Claus-Ekkehard

Bärsch, *Die politische Religion des Nationalsozialismus*, 2nd ed. (Munich: Fink, 2002), 53–59.

⁶⁸ Moeller van den Bruck, *Das dritte Reich* (see note 66), 244–61; Moeller van den Bruck, *Germany's Third Empire* (see note 66), 242–64.

⁶⁹ See Jost Hermand, *Der alte Traum vom neuen Reich: Völkische Utopien und Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Athenäum, 1988).

⁷⁰ See Claudia Kemper, "Wer soll Moeller van den Bruck sein? Die kulturgeschichtliche Untrennbarkeit von Biografie und Rezeption," *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 91 (2009): 381–407.

⁷¹ A selection of his writings may be found in Weiss, *Moderne Antimoderne* (see note 66), 483–88.

⁷² On this, see Schwiertsch, *Arthur Moeller van den Bruck und der revolutionäre Nationalismus in der Weimarer Republik* (see note 66), 103–16.

⁷³ See also Arthur Moeller van den Bruck, *Jedes Volk hat seinen eigenen Sozialismus*, Schriften an die Nation 39 (Oldenburg: Stalling, 1931). This title is already found as a phrase in the chapter "Sozialistisch" in *Das dritte Reich*: see Moeller van den Bruck, *Das dritte Reich* (see note 66), 24; Moeller van den Bruck, *Germany's Third Empire* (see note 66), 38: "Each People has its own Socialism."

⁷⁴ Moeller van den Bruck, *Das dritte Reich* (see note 66), 260; Moeller van den Bruck, *Germany's Third Empire* (see note 66), 263.

⁷⁵ Moeller van den Bruck, *Das dritte Reich* (see note 66), 261; Moeller van den Bruck, *Germany's Third Empire* (see note 66), 264.

⁷⁶ Klaus Vondung, "Der Preis des Paradieses: Gewalt in Apokalypse und Utopie," in Reto Sorg and Stefan Bodo Würffel, eds., *Utopie und Apokalypse in der Moderne* (Munich: Fink, 2010), 33–46.

⁷⁷ On the apocalyptic crisis of the Weimar Republic and the eschatological atmosphere that went along with it, see David Redles, *Hitler's Millennial Reich: Apocalyptic Belief and the Search for Salvation*

(New York: New York Univ. Press, 2005).

⁷⁸ Klaus Vondung, "Der Preis des Paradieses" (see note 76), 35.

⁷⁹ See Klaus Schreiner, "Wann kommt der Retter Deutschlands?: Formen und Funktionen von politischem Messianismus in der Weimarer Republik," *Saeculum* 49 (1998): 107–160.

⁸⁰ Like Carl Schmitt's *Politische Theologie*, which had been published just a few years earlier, *Metropolis* was a settling of accounts with the basic social order of the Weimar Republic.

⁸¹ Moeller van den Bruck was not alone as a prophet of future realms. One need only think of Julius Langbehn's *Rembrandt als Erzieher*, in which he speaks of a secret emperor. See Julius Langbehn, *Rembrandt als Erzieher* (Leipzig: C. L. Hirschfeld, 1922).

⁸² Yet all of these sketches would have been inconceivable without Friedrich Nietzsche. Famously, in his book *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* (translated as *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music*), the philosopher assigned to art an immense task. Its Dionysian energy that creates community was supposed to counter the reflective violence of modernity. He felt it was necessary to think back on German culture. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari, vol. 1, *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geist der Musik*, 2nd ed. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1980), 9–156, esp. 149–50; translated by Walter Kaufmann as "The Birth of Tragedy," in *The Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: from the *Spirit of Music* (New York, Vintage, 1967), 15–144, esp. 138–39.

⁸³ Harbou, *Metropolis* (see note 1), 7; Harbou, *Metropolis* (see note 3), 13.

⁸⁴ Moeller van den Bruck, *Das dritte Reich* (see note 66), 2; Moeller van den Bruck, *Germany's Third Empire* (see note 66), 13.

⁸⁵ Moeller van den Bruck, *Das dritte*

Reich (see note 66), 114; Moeller van den Bruck, *Germany's Third Empire* (see note 66), 125.

⁸⁶ "But only he may prophesy who becomes to those who are blessed and who are physically and mentally at one with the growth of things that want to become, with the human beings in which that happens, with the Volk from which and for which it happens. Marx was not such a one. He was a Jew, a stranger in Europe who nevertheless dared to meddle in the affairs of the European peoples. It was as if he wanted to acquire a belated right to hospitality from them by helping them out of their miseries and showing them a way out." See Moeller van den Bruck, *Das dritte Reich* (see note 66), 28; Moeller van den Bruck, *Germany's Third Empire* (see note 66), 43 (translation modified).

⁸⁷ "The thought of the Third Empire—to which we must cling as our last and highest philosophy—can only bear fruit if it is translated into concrete reality. It must quit the world of dreams and step into the political world." Moeller van den Bruck, *Germany's Third Empire* (see note 66), 14.

⁸⁸ Andre Kagelmann called von Harbou a "National Socialist sympathizer." His discussions in general tend to be too apologetic. See Kagelmann, *Der Krieg und die Frau* (see note 2), 20–33, esp. 27.

⁸⁹ Bruns, *Kinomythen* (see note 65).

⁹⁰ Joseph Goebbels, entry for March 25, 1927, in Elke Fröhlich, ed., on behalf of the Institut für Zeitgeschichte and with the support of the Federal Archival Service of Russia, *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, part I, *Aufzeichnungen, 1923–1941*, vol. 1/II, *Dezember 1925–Mai 1928* (Munich: K. G. Saur, 2005), 201. Although the diaries of Goebbels have been studied thoroughly, this remark has yet to attract any attention in the literature on *Metropolis*. This is a grave omission given the explosive potential of its content.