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The Cinematic Cathedral

A SKETCH

1.

In Fritz Lang's film *M - Eine Stadt sucht einen Mörder* [M - A City Seeks a Murderer] from 1931, there is a shot that, at first glance, does not seem significant for the further development of the narrative. The child-murderer sought by the police and the underworld is hiding in an office building after the criminals who have discovered him have been pursuing him across Berlin. Three men are waiting in front of the office complex, concerned that the perpetrator might escape them by mixing in with the workers at the close of day. They are therefore keeping watch on the entrances, when suddenly a siren goes off and the people increasingly begin to stream out into the courtyard. One of the watchers cautions the others to stay alert and shouts: 'And now, watch like a hawk!'

We stand with the camera at the centre, in front of the office building, and watch the employees hurry away in all directions on foot and by bicycle. But we do not just see. We also hear snippets of these people's conversations as they relate their travel plans, their complaints and the events of their workday. We hear the bell of a bicycle and the horn of a car zooming past. It is a dynamic scene that sounds cacophonous in the confusion of voices and noises. Yet the injunction to 'watch like a hawk' is also directed at the viewer. In film-historical terms, this sequence is noteworthy insofar as it makes reference to the very first film of all time, *La Sortie de l'usine Lumière à Lyon* [Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory], from 1895, by the Lumière brothers, which is considered as marking the beginning of the new art form. This film contains a similar sequence, in which we see workers passing through the gates of a factory and hurrying away in all directions into the evening.

[fig. 01-03]

The camera of the Lumière brothers was, as Siegfried Kracauer wrote in his *Theory of Film*, 'turned towards the world'. Their films 'were played out in public, in locations teeming with people'. By Kracauer's account, they presented 'life in its uncontrollable and unconscious moments, a confusion of transient, constantly dissolving forms, as only the camera has access to'.[1] Indeed, both the barely one-minute-long film of the cinema pioneers and Fritz Lang's short sequence represent the staging of confusion. The streaming away of the people in all directions, their abrupt stopping and unpredictable going again, the appearance of the car, the sudden change in direction, the cacophonous chaos of words and sounds. All these are the components of our modern urban experience.

In his thriller, the Austrian director stages the world as a mix of technology and anonymity. In modernity, we no longer know what is hidden behind the faces of other people. Thus, in Fritz Lang's film, everyone suspects everyone else of being a child-murderer. The city becomes an oft-depicted paradox. Here, many people live together, and yet each remains on his own. *M* recounts the horrific story of a child-murderer, pursued by all of Berlin. He has already killed eight victims, and a ninth child is missing. Uncertainty and hysteria spread everywhere. 'Who is the murderer?' The motif of this question shoots through the film at the start like a visible thread. It springs forth at us in great big letters from bills on the pillars and infiltrates us in scraps of conversation. The police are under pressure.

The thriller is one of the earliest German sound films and it seems reasonable to suppose that the director used the Lumière reference to signal to film-lovers that the technology of sound opened up the possibility of a new beginning.

In our era of elaborate sound design, the level of sound in *M* may seem rather sparse, as it eschews any kind of non-diegetic music. By the same token, however, it is positively chilling in its minimalism. Upon closer examination, it is not so much that the handling of the sound is limited by primitive technology but rather that it is distinguished by the highest degree of efficiency and creativity. In Lang's film, the telephone is always ringing, invisible clues are collected, and yet in the end it is a blind man who recognizes the perpetrator, which finally leads to his capture.

Through the figure of the blind beggar – of which there are several in *M* – the director thematizes the conflict between sound and image. The blind war veteran may not have recognized the child-murderer by sight, but he can still identify him by the melody he whistles: the famous motif from 'The Hall of the Mountain King' in Edvard Grieg's *Peer Gynt*. Lang plays with the conflict between silent and sound film. He stages acoustic identity in order to make the decisive leap in the aesthetics of film more visible, or rather, more audible. In stylistic terms, in the transition from Expressionism to Neue Sachlichkeit (New Objectivity), the film marks a new formal beginning.

The way Lang depicts the murder of little Elsie Beckman, the first victim, is breathtaking. A balloon is caught in the lines of a telephone pole. Its human form is immediately recognizable. Its paper arms and legs seem to want to cling to the wires, but the wind moves the little balloon person back and forth until it is finally torn away. The toy belongs to the child who has just been murdered. Although we did not see it happen, still we were there at the scene of the crime with the camera: a ball bounces into the frame and comes to a stop. A balloon floats upward and gets

[fig. 04]

fig. 01-03
filmstills from: Fritz Lang, M - Eine Stadt sucht einen Mörder [M - A City Seeks a Murderer], 1931.

fig. 04
filmstill from: Auguste and Louis Lumière, La Sortie de l'usine Lumière à Lyon [Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory], 1895.

caught in the telephone lines. Movement comes to a halt and loses direction. It cannot be told in more elemental terms. The persuasive power of these images rests on the laconic means with which something unbearable is represented here, just as the camerawork in the film in general pulls away in the most spectacular way. Repeatedly, Lang chooses extreme views from above or below, as if he were investigating the social space of the city. Seeing is inextricably bound up with power relations. Who is looking down on and up to whom?

This cinematographic language goes hand in hand with a general tendency towards objectification and reification that is clearly manifest in *M*. Recall the group of children playing at the start of the film, who are presented in an extreme view from the top. Or when at the beginning, we see the garret with the laundry hung out to dry while we hear the voice of the anxious mother calling for her daughter. The absent people become as if identified with the clothing. People are meant to appear like things and things like people. This produces an alarming coldness. The familiar becomes alienated. No expressionistic 'alas' or 'woe is me' is needed to demonstrate the estrangement of this world. It suffices to raise the camera, and the play of the children appears doll-like, as if we were looking down on marionettes.

At the same time, the camera in *M* takes on a life of its own. It roams around inquisitively, as if it were the necessary vehicle of curiosity in action. There are no limits put upon it. It wanders through walls and closed windows. It satisfies our lust for images and precisely in that act reveals our distance to the world. Lang stages the city as a labyrinthine place, as a synchronism of the asynchronous. In this task, he not only builds upon film history but also finds inspiration in the photography and painting of his time. In this regard, not only are the Neue Sachlichkeit compositions of abstract still-lifes and empty streets worth mentioning, but George Grosz and Otto Dix's preoccupation with serial killings and the murder of women comes to mind as well.

What is particularly spectacular is that the director lets us see with the eyes of the perpetrator. At first, we follow him with the camera through Berlin. We are practically on his heels. But then there is a cut, and suddenly we find ourselves in his place and see a little girl through his eyes. The director thus taxes us with a shocking experience, and indeed we must feel caught. The border between normality and abnormality seems permeable. The fact that at the start of the film we, as viewers, follow the as-yet unknown murderer at every turn without seeing his face builds up the suspense. For a long time, the fiend remains a shadow, a kind of cipher and a blank. We observe him as he stands with his back to the window and writes; we become familiar with his character profile through a graphological investigation – until, finally, we see his face in the mirror in the form of a grimace he makes at himself. Henceforth, the director makes us into accomplices – accessories – of the murderer played with unsettling intensity by Peter Lorre. We follow him as he prowls through the city.

Moreover, the relationship of image and sound in *M* opens up new possibilities of filmic narration. In numerous montages, the conjunction of image sequences and dialogue is used efficiently to juxtapose the police investigation, the concurrent conference of the gangsters and the investigating policemen, a conversation between the Minister of the Interior and the Chief of Police, or the Commissioner's reading of the case file. The narrative is extremely compacted. It is an absolute mystery how the director manages to convey the impression that we are hearing the melody from *Peer Gynt* whistled by the murderer inside our very own heads. Once again, we are forced to identify with the murderer. The future of film may bring many more technical changes, but with *M* the early days of cinema come to an end. Lang uses montage sequences. He employs forms of asynchronous editing, where at the end of a sequence, the voice and the image no longer fit together. Film is for the first time in complete possession of all its narrative possibilities.

Very few directors have left as significant a mark on the early history of film as Fritz Lang. And perhaps it is precisely his *oeuvre* that makes evident that the avant-garde can take many forms. If we reflect on this concept in more detail, we realize that the word avant-garde signals a substantive change in emphasis. If, since the nineteenth century, artists had recognized the necessity for their production to overcome previous developments, the concept of the avant-garde radicalizes this notion. Without a doubt, such an imperative for historical artistic change rests on the precondition of the awareness of one's own modernity. It becomes an agenda. Artists do not just react to the present, but rather anticipate the future. Paul Cézanne still compared himself to the prophet Moses, who may have led the Israelites into the promised land, but was not allowed to set foot in it himself. The notion of the avant-garde secularizes the old image of the artist as prophet and emphasizes the irreconcilable conflict between those who forge ahead and those who follow. It conceives of the problem of artistic validity as a necessary conflict. From here on in, the artist is no longer enveloped in some form of romantic or religious aura. He is a fighter.

2.

In 1913 Kurt Pinthus published his legendary *Cinema Book*, a testament to the enthusiasm with which the new medium was received by the generation of poets such as Max Brod, Walter Hasenclever and Paul Zech.[2] For many of the day's directors, the way to film led first through theatre.

Ernst Lubitsch, Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau and Wilhelm Dieterle, to name a few, began their careers as actors in Max Reinhardt's troupe at the Deutsches Theater in Berlin. The important theatre director had such a lasting influence on so many film-makers that the critics of the Weimar era had already noted it. This is evidenced in how closely intertwined film was with the avant-garde tendencies of the time. The above directors drew inspiration not only from the material of theatre, but also from the works of visual art. Fritz Lang even described himself in an early text as a 'painter' and prior to embarking on his career as a film-maker, had planned to devote himself to painting and sculpture.[3] A self-portrait survives, in which he had obviously oriented himself on a work by Egon Schiele.[4] His colleague Murnau initially wanted to be a teacher, but then studied art history in Heidelberg, where he was discovered as a theatrical talent by Max Reinhardt, whom he followed to Berlin, where his work with film began.[5] When we think about early cinema and its directors today, we usually forget that well into the 1920s, the film of the previous century had had difficulties being recognized as an art form. It did not fit with the established aesthetic ideals of the time since – like photography before it – its identity was undeniably technical. Cameras were required to produce it and projectors to actually display it. If it came down to having style in the sense of personal handwriting, film would be defined by the flaw in the equipment.

For early film theory, then, there could be only two possibilities to demonstrate the artistic character of film: either one wormed one's way into the existing artistic paradigms and stressed, for instance, the 'painterly quality' of the images; or one ascertained that the previous system of arts, with its received aesthetic principles, had been thrown overboard by film and developed a new one. This contrast defined the theoretical endeavours of the era. On one hand, the directors styled themselves as painters or authors. On the other, film became the focus of attention as the embodiment of a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, with all that this entailed. On the whole, it is above all this idea of film as a *Gesamtkunstwerk* and of film-makers as a creative community that had the greatest appeal at the time.

One is put in mind of the well-known passage about the necessity of the collaboration of the arts by Richard Wagner, who wrote: 'No individual art form today can any longer invent anything new; and that goes not only for the visual arts alone, but also no less for dance, instrumental music, and poetry. They have all now developed their highest capacities so that they can continually reinvent themselves in drama, in the *Gesamtkunstwerk*.'[6] Ricciotto Canudo was one of the first to describe the new artistic character of film as a *Gesamtkunstwerk* when he referred to film as the 'seventh art' in his 1923 essay, *Manifeste des Sept Arts* [Manifesto of the Seven Arts].[7] Here, he welcomes film as

an *art de totale synthèse* (art form of total synthesis) and wants to identify it as the vanishing point of all traditional arts. Euphorically, his text proclaims: 'We need film in order to finally create the *Gesamtkunstwerk* towards which all the arts have been aimed since time immemorial.'[8] In this regard, art has the fundamental task of transcending the individual person, or the individual ego, which the Italian critic describes as *un oubli esthétique* (an aesthetic forgetting).[9] For Canudo, the task of film is to integrate the individual art forms into a *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Towards the end of his reflections, his essay takes on some truly utopian traits as he sketches out the process of the elevation of modern life to a new level of unity, in which not only the arts but absolutely everything merges into everything else and is harmonized with one another.[10]

Canudo provides this apotheosis of film with a crowning conclusion when he promises the reader a golden age, the first hour of which has supposedly already begun. It is noteworthy what high expectations the critic places on the new medium – as if film were capable of turning back the advancing fragmentation of modern life and bringing people into harmony with their environment. And although Canudo's ideas seem rather fanciful today, the concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* that he advocated is what defined the debates about film in the 1920s.[11]

Shifting the perspective from France to Germany makes this clear as well – for in the German context, an equally visionary and influential work was Béla Balázs' book *Der sichtbare Mensch* [Visible Man] of 1924. Balázs was interested less in the art status of film, the elevation of film to a 'high art', and rather more in its collective character. In this respect, he wrote that film was the folk art of the twentieth century. In contrast to a theatrical performance, film has the capacity to reach a real mass of people. And in the popular imagination, it had long since taken on the role that had once been played by myths, legends and folk tales.[12] Balázs presents the first theory of silent film in the German language, whereby his text sketches out nothing less than the possibility of transitioning from a culture of the book to a culture of the image. In order to communicate the specific collective art form of film one needs not just a theory but also convincing metaphors. Particularly suggestive in this connection are the 'images' of the cathedral and the medieval masons' lodges, which we should touch upon at least briefly, since in Germany these images have their origin in Balázs' text.[13] If Hugo's novel still vividly depicts how book printing inherited the art of the cathedral, now it is film that becomes the successor of the book and, as Balázs claims, makes man visible again in an emphatic sense. Film, by his account, becomes the new cathedral. How seductive and omnipresent the cathedral metaphor was at the time as a symbol of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* of film will be evidenced by further sources.

In 1927 the famous film set designer Robert Herlth – who may be considered an early collaborator of Lang on his film *Der müde Tod* [Destiny] – gave a fiery speech before the German film set designers' club, over which he presided. The impetus towards cultural warfare in this speech, which was printed in the journal *Filmtechnik–Filmkunst*, is striking. Repeatedly, Herlth calls for a German art of film, in contrast to an American or Russian one. He condemns what he sees as too great an orientation on the 'Americans' and urges greater cohesion among the film-makers. The text revels in military metaphors and speaks of the front and of stages, which at the least call up associations with the notion of the avant-garde. The very first sentences of Herlth's text already make clear that film-makers are engaged in a war. It is a battle of national cultures. In general, the enemy is identified as consisting of Americans and Russians. In the context of the speech, to begin with, we should first establish that, most likely, many of the listeners had shared the experience of World War I with the speaker, so that the military jargon points to a collective experience and demands solidarity in the sense of a community of suffering of old combat veterans.

Suddenly, however, Herlth employs a pathos-laden image in relation to the question of successful film-making: 'That evening, there was talk of the medieval mason's lodge, with which the community was compared. And then I asked: Is it justifiable, the way things stand today, to maintain this comparison? The comparison with men for whom craftsmanly pride was one with artistic humility? The sculptors, the painters, the stonemasons, the chisellers, all those who created the cathedral as a common endeavour, and who often took turns filling the position of the master builder.'[14] The cathedral here is made to figure in equal measure both as the image of national cultural heritage and as a programme of national renewal. By Herlth's account, the cathedral of German film will also have to prove itself, will have to demonstrate that its architecture is solid and will prevail in the battle of cultures. The metaphor of the cathedral, then, goes hand in hand with the self-assertion of German art and the battle of national architectures.

A similar tendency can be seen in the speech given in 1926 before the German Cameramen's Club by Karl Freund – probably the best German cameraman of that time. It was seductively titled 'The Cameraman's Calling' and began in the best idealist tradition by denying the technical character of film and comparing the camera with the graphic artist's pencil, the painter's brush, or the sculptor's chisel. The cameraman, Freund warns, must not reduce his work to its technical aspects; he must not demean himself by lowering himself to the level of a 'specialist precision mechanic'.[15] Freund then proposes a series of the most common-sense measures to arm oneself against the looming 'American threat'. Finally, he calls for artistic groups or associations that would devote themselves without a trace of vanity to the task that film as a *Gesamtkunstwerk* demands. It is thus not surprising when he conjectures that a new spirit would then pervade the studios and professes his belief in film as a *Gesamtkunstwerk*.[16]

When two well-known film-makers such as Herlth and Freund make reference to the idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in their work, the prevalence of this concept is evident. At the same time, it brings to mind the opening of Walter Gropius's *Bauhaus Manifesto* of 1919, which calls for the unification of craft in building: 'The ultimate goal of all art is the building! The ornamentation of the building was once the main purpose of the visual arts, and they were considered indispensable parts of the great building. Today they exist in complacent isolation, from which they can only be salvaged by the purposeful and cooperative endeavours of all artisans. Architects, painters and sculptors must learn a new way of seeing and understanding the composite character of the building, both as a totality and in terms of its parts. Their work will then re-imbue itself with the spirit of architecture, which it lost in salon art.'[17]

Whether the focus is on the cathedral, the building or the mason's lodge, it is evident that such metaphors and concepts also face an opponent: the individualism of modern man. This opponent was crucially identified in Friedrich Nietzsche's well-known work, *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music*, which, famously, deemed the overcoming of the individual to be the most important task of modern art.[18] In this text, Nietzsche holds out the prospect of nothing less than an all-encompassing cultural renewal, which seems like the return of a golden age. The prevailing form of modernity, oriented on France, is defined negatively as an Apollonian fragmentation which must be countered with a unifying, Dionysian quality.

The philosopher formulates diffuse anxieties of alienation and laments the lack of a unifying myth. In propagating national culture and its heritage as an anchor of salvation, he envisions a life of sensual immediacy. 'We value the pure and powerful core of German being so highly', Nietzsche writes, 'that we dare to expect that it, in particular, will excise these forcefully implanted foreign elements and we deem it possible that the German spirit will come back to its own senses.'[19] The philosopher calls for the 'rebirth of German myth' which, on his account, arose with Martin Luther and found its contemporary fulfilment in Richard Wagner. At the end of Chapter 23, Nietzsche sketches the idea of a comprehensive German renewal when he writes, giving voice to the hope for a future leader: 'And if the German should hesitantly look around for a leader who would bring him back to his long-lost home, the paths and byways of which he barely knows any more – then let him only listen for the delightfully enticing call of the Dionysian bird that sways above

him and can show him the way there.'[20] In his tragedy text, the philosopher presses for cultural conformity and calls for the 'unity of artistic style in every form of expression in the life of a people'.[21] Instead, he says, the Germans live in a 'chaotic confusion of every possible style' and lack an 'original German culture'.[22] Modernity does not appear as an exciting and stimulating phenomenon. Rather, the philosopher posits a general cultural decline and critiques the 'market-fair motleyness', which scholars consider to be 'modernity as such'.[23] No other work has been as influential for progressive artists as well as for conservative German cultural critics à la Julius Langbehn or Arthur Moeller van den Bruck as this text.

3.

The fact that film directors also took part in the debate surrounding film and modernity is once again evident in the example of Fritz Lang. For instance, if we examine his text 'Arbeitsgemeinschaft in Film' (Working Communities in Film), which was published in 1924 in the film journal *Kinematograph*, it too is no exception in its nationalism. The focus here is quite explicitly on the German film community, which collaborated to produce Ufa's high-profile, two-part *Die Nibelungen* – a film that, as the director expressly emphasized, was 'not created in the American style'. What is also interesting is the director's identification with a painter: 'For I knew that he [the cameraman, Karl Hoffmann] would take everything that I had dreamed up about the vivid images of the Nibelungs as a *painter* and give it reality through his rendering of light and shadow'. In passing, against the background of the production work with his close-knit 'Nibelung troupe', Lang calls for German unity in general. The director certainly knew how to produce sentimental kitsch. The Nibelung project and Lang's statement seem like an echo of Nietzsche's demand for the return to a specifically national culture and an engagement with German material.

Just three years later Fritz Lang produced his *Metropolis*, for which his then wife Thea von Harbou wrote the screenplay. The film is famous for its aesthetic of radical modernism.[24] Prior to the making of the film, the material had first appeared as a serial novel, and then again as a book published by Scherl Verlag, which makes clear that the project originally came from von Harbou. The intermeshing gears in the opening credits, the spectacular urban sets with their bizarre skyscrapers, dark corridors of streets and elevated railways between which aeroplanes fly, the Moloch-like giant machines in the underground city – all this creates the impression that the film is intoxicated by nothing other than an affirmative aesthetic of technocratic modernism.[25]

Upon closer viewing, however, the aesthetic of the film is marked by a subversive recourse to artistic tradition. On an iconographic level, aside from references to contemporary art, Lang develops a plenitude of motifs taken from the history of European art and literature that manifest an astounding inherent connection to high culture.[226] Lang and von Harbou work over Dürer's woodcut series on the Apocalypse, Hieronymus Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights*, Pieter Bruegel's *Tower of Babel*, Michelangelo's Christ from the Sistine Chapel, Arnold Böcklin's *The Plague*, the Newton Cenotaph by Étienne-Louis Boullée, and many more.[27]

It has repeatedly been emphasized that in Lang's film, the spectacular images and the kitschy plot are incongruous. The film unites a love story with a striking critique of capitalism. It tells of a future world in which the workers are oppressed by a ruling class and forced to labour underground. This division only comes to an end when the son of the master of Metropolis falls in love with a young worker named Maria. In the end, a rebellion does away with the unjust regime and brings about a new order. But before this happens, the master of Metropolis joins forces with the inventor Rotwang, who has constructed a robot that looks like Maria in order to manipulate the workers.

In order to highlight the critique of capitalism, the film begins with the parable of the Tower of Babel, the first high-rise in world history. As Maria narrates the biblical story, the film images show an architect looking at a model of the tower. In its allegorical character, the tower sequence stands for the failure of the human endeavour to erect megalomaniacal urban structures. At the same time, it vividly demonstrates the alienation between the worker and the planner. Moreover, the oppression of the masses of workers banished underground throws a decidedly negative light on the technological attainments of the society of Metropolis. What is also interesting is the juxtaposition between the skyscrapers that embody modernity and the venerable cathedral at the centre of Metropolis. Befitting the cathedral, the organized underground workers refer to themselves as 'Gothics'. In end effect, it turns out that in their science fiction film, Lang and von Harbou indulged in a distinct form of antimodernism conveyed in hypermodern images.

Lang's aesthetic ambition as a film-maker was aimed less at the representation of movement and more at monumentality. The director generally eschewed the art form of montage, which we would have immediately associated with the cinema of the Russian Revolution. Lang's goal is grandeur. It is as if the medieval formal sensibility for distant vision and great magnitude were translated into the medium of film. This impression is heightened through the juxtaposition of interior and exterior spaces. The interior spaces are contrasted against the powerfully looming height of the skyscrapers. Long and medium shots are alternated. The film conspicuously avoids close-ups. The camera keeps its distance. The architecture and the sets are at the centre of the film. Mid-range and close-up shots belong to the play of gestures.

There is of course no judgement of quality intended with this line of argument. On the contrary, closer examination reveals that the film employs many of the possibilities of cinematographic language. In this regard, *Metropolis* has much to offer as well. At the very beginning, there is a race staged among the young men of the city, during which the actors run behind the camera, which is mounted on a vehicle. Through a clever use of cross-cutting, the tempo is gradually increased. There are other tracking shots and camera movements that are noteworthy, but this doesn't change the fundamental tableau style of the film. The towering buildings that block the horizon and the sky are the dominant impression.

The dissolves and multiple exposures have a great urgency. The sea of eyes of the lecherous night-club denizens during the false Maria's dance is of striking intensity. From the start, the multiple exposures bring about visionary insights – for example, when an apparently harmless machine becomes the Moloch, or the massive crowd of the workers for the tower's construction rushes by from all directions. There are also marvellous details to be found. As Fredersen and Rotwang are studying the map of the underground city, for instance, a superimposed shot shows the workers running up to worship Maria. Moreover, the director makes use of the stylistic means of the subjective camera. When Freder first lays eyes on Maria in the Eternal Gardens, this is staged as if the young man had had a vision. Lang repeatedly experiments with the filmic space and knows how to dramatize his narrative by playing with aesthetic limits.

Central to the interpretation of the film is the previously ignored context of apocalyptic imagery – after all, the juxtaposition between the real and the false Maria, which is so important for the narrative, has its origins in the Biblical opposition between the Woman of the Apocalypse and the Whore of Babylon. The Thousand Year Reign promised in the Book of Revelation precedes the battle between good and evil, the dramaturgy of which *Metropolis* plays upon in many respects. The conclusion of the film aims for nothing less than the beginning of the Thousand Year Reign of which the biblical text relates. The satanic inventor Rotwang, who seems to be conceived as a Jewish stereotype, and the *femme fatale* Maria are precluded, as scapegoats, from joining in the harmonious ending.

An intellectual touchstone for the novel and screenplay of *Metropolis* was Arthur Moeller van den Bruck's book, *The Third Reich* (1923), in which a medieval construct of history is instrumentalized for national purposes in the expectation that in the wake of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation and the German Empire under Otto von Bismarck, a future 'Third Reich' would follow. The latter would be based in the association of Nationalism and Socialism, which may be considered the political essence of the film and would later be taken up by the Nazis. Contrary to Kracauer's claim, *Metropolis* is not a vaguely pro-to-fascist film, but rather the history of the formation of a state in a national – that is to say, racial – sense. This is also substantiated by a reaction that no one likes to reference from a particular viewer who was in a position to know – namely Joseph Goebbels, who associated the film with the 'National Socialist line of thought' in his diary.[28] This assessment is consistent with regard to the apocalyptic final battle as well as to the pseudo-socialism at the end of the film, and the suggestion of the national community that, indeed, rests upon the exclusion of the inventor Rotwang. Evil is overcome. The workers and the elite are reconciled. What remains are 'only Germans'.

The appeal to the suggestively meaningful major narrative of an impending 'Third Reich' will have lent a striking form of expression to the unease with the ideas of liberal-democratic modernity prevalent in the circles around Thea von Harbou and Fritz Lang. In this respect, the programme of the film may be described as a blatant, militant and religious staging of populist national identity. That Fritz Lang's film required an enormous artistic effort should be clear. It was conceived as a work that attempted nothing less than to define a national film aesthetic – to erect a cinematic cathedral, so to speak. In that endeavour, *Metropolis* consciously entered into competition with other epic films such as *Cabiria*, as well as with national and political icons such as *Birth of a Nation* and *Battleship Potemkin*.

As we have seen, Nietzsche's text inspired such diverse thinkers as Walter Gropius, Ricciotto Canudo and Béla Balázs. The metaphor of the cathedral also brought forth progressive as well as conservative readings, since it is on one hand an emblem of national tradition and identity, and on the other a *Gesamtkunstwerk* in which all the trades are interconnected in a positive way. The ambivalence of modernity was reflected in Lang's works as well. In only a few years he would experience a dramatic shift that would ultimately compel him to emigrate to America. If in *Metropolis* modernity is still characterized as an exploitative system that gives form to human hubris in its skyscrapers, in *M* Lang retreats to a position of observation. The city and technology are neither good nor bad. They are a part of our modern environment – as, by the way, is film.

Endnotes

1 Siegfried Kracauer, *Theorie des Films. Die Errettung der äußeren Wirklichkeit*, Frankfurt am Main 1993 (2nd ed.), p. 58.

2 See Kurt Pinthus, *Das Kinobuch: Kinostücke*, Fischer-Taschenbuch-Verlag, Frankfurt am Main 1983.

3 See 'Fritz Lang: Arbeitsgemeinschaft im Film', in *Der Kinematograph*, no. 887, 17 February 1924, reprinted in Rolf Aurich, *Werkstatt Film. Selbstverständnis und Visionen von Filmleuten der zwanziger Jahre*, Munich 1998, pp. 15–19.

4 See Heide Schonemann, *Fritz Lang: Filmbilder, Vorbilder*, ex. cat., Filmmuseum Potsdam, Berlin 1992, p. 8.

5 See Jürgen Müller, 'Film als Kunst. Anmerkungen zur Filmpoetik Friedrich Wilhelm Murnaus', in *Murnau in Murnau. Der Stummfilmregisseur der 1920er Jahre*, ed. Brigitte Salmen, exh. cat., Schlossmuseum Murnau, Munich 2003, pp. 81–95.

6 Richard Wagner, 'Das Künstlertum der Zukunft', in Richard Wagner, *Dichtungen und Schriften. Jubiläumsausgabe in zehn Bänden*, ed. Dieter Borchmeyer, Frankfurt 1983, vol. 5, p. 261.

7 Ricciotto Canudo, *Manifeste des Sept Arts*, Paris 1995 (1st ed. 1923), pp. 7–15.

8 Canudo, *Manifeste*, p. 8. Tr. by the author.

9 Canudo, *Manifeste*, p. 8.

10 Canudo, *Manifeste*, p. 14.

11 'L'Art Septième concilie tous les autres'. Canudo, *Manifeste*, p. 14.

12 See Béla Balázs, *Der sichtbare Mensch*, Frankfurt am Main 2001 (1st ed. 1924), pp. 10–11.

13 See Balázs, *Der sichtbare Mensch*, p. 16.

14 Robert Herlth, 'Form und Inhalt', in *Werkstatt Film*, eds. Rolf Aurich and Wolfgang Jacobsen, Munich 1998, p. 25–28, here p. 28.

15 Karl Freund, 'Die Berufung des Kameramanns', in *Werkstatt Film*, pp. 19–25, here p. 21.

16 Freund, 'Die Berufung des Kameramanns', p. 24.

17 For more on this, see Magdalena Bushart, 'Am Anfang ein Missverständnis. Feiningers "Kathedrale" und das Bauhaus-Manifest', in Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin, *Stiftung Bauhaus Dessau*, Klassik Stiftung Weimar, Modell Bauhaus, Hatje Cantz Verlag 2009, pp. 29–32.

18 See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geist der Musik*, eds. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari,, Sämtliche Werke. Studienausgabe in 15 Bänden, Munich 1988 (2nd ed.), vol. 1, pp. 9–156, here p. 29.

19 Ibid. pp. 23–24.

20 Ibid. p. 149.

21 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtungen. Erstes Stück: David Strauss der Bekenner und der Schriftsteller*, Sämtliche Werke, vol. 1, pp. 159–242, here p. 163.

22 Ibid. p. 163.

23 Ibid. p. 163–64.

24 On the political interpretation of the film, see Jürgen Müller, 'Babelsberg/Babylon. Fritz Lang's Metropolis Reinterpreted', in *Berlin Metropolis. 1918-1933*, ed. Olaf Peters, Neue Galerie, New York 2015, pp. 136–61.

25 See also Jürgen Müller and Jörn Hetebrügge, '"Metropolis" als Menetekel der Moderne', in Winfried Nerdinger (ed.), *Architektur wie sie im Buche steht*, Munich 2006, pp. 187–99.

26 For more information about citing art in early film, see Jürgen Müller, 'Schnell und langsam. Anmerkungen zur Filmpoetik Friedrich Wilhelm Murnaus', in *Kunsthistorische Arbeitsblätter*, vol. 3 (2003), pp. 47–56.

27 See Müller, 'Babelsberg/Babylon', pp. 140–60.

28 'With the Schweitzers at the cinema. Metropolis. Great directing. Content: vapid, sentimental stuff in the National Socialist line of thought'. Joseph Goebbels, entry for 25 March 1927 in *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels, Erster Teil, Aufzeichnungen, 1923–1941*, ed. Elke Fröhlich, vol. 1/II, December 1925 – May 1928, Munich 2005, p. 201.

[138] filmstills from: Fritz Lang, Metropolis, 1927. Screenplay: Thea von Harbou. Production: Ufa. From left to right: Fredersen, ruler of Metropolis, meets the android for the first time; view of the town: modern architecture fills the whole picture; conciliation in front of the cathedral.