



PREFACE

The most iconic and famous German film, Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* has become an enduring image bank for dystopian science fiction scenarios. At the time, the film received mixed reviews and was a commercial flop that bankrupted Ufa and dashed German hopes of competing with Hollywood. American distributor Paramount cut 30 minutes from the film to adapt it for the American market - the missing footage only surfaced in 2008. This dossier reconstructs the historical debates surrounding *Metropolis* in 1927 in Germany and the United States; it also highlights the film's discourses on technology, which have gained new resonance in our Age of Artificial Intelligence. *Metropolis* was the first film to visualize the dialectic of modernity in ways that still speak to us today.

CREDITS

For the full Credits in English with hyperlinks to director, actors, etc., click [here](#) and select All Credits and Versions.

For the film-historical context of *Metropolis*, see Hans Helmut Prinzler's The Chronicle of German Film (1918-1933) [here](#) and scroll down to 1927.

METROPOLIS

EIN FILM VON FRITZ LANG

IDEE UND MANUSKRIFT	THEA V. HARBOU
REGIE	FRITZ LANG
MUSIK	GOTTFRIED HUPPERTZ
AN DER KAMERA	KARL FREUND, GUNTHER RITTAU
BAUTEN	OTTO HUNTE, ERICH KETTELHUT
PLASTIKEN	KARL VOLBRECHT
KOSTUMENTWURFE	WALTER SCHULTZE-MITTENDORF AENNE WILKOMM

DIE GESTALTEN DES FILMS:

JOH FREDERSEN	ALFRED ABEL
FREDER. JOH FREDERSENS SOHN	GUSTAV FROEHLICH
ROTWANG, DEN ERFINDER	RUDOLF KLEIN-ROGGE
DER SCHMALE	FRITZ RASP
JOSAPHAT	THEODOR LOOS
NR 11811	ERWIN BISWANGER
GROTH, DER WACHTER D. HEKZMASCHINE	HEINRICH GEORGE
MARIA	BRIGHTHE HELM

Ab Dienstag, den 11. Januar 1927, täglich:

Wochentags **5** und **8³⁰** Sonabends **3 6 9** Uhr
am Sonntags

Preise der Plätze:
Nachmittagsvorstellung: Mk. 2.-, 3.-, 4.-, 6.-
Abendvorstellung: Mk. 3.-, 4.-, 6.-, 8.-

Vorverkauf für 7 Tage an allen Theaterkassen von A. Wertheim
und im Ufa-Pavillon.

Die Welt-Uraufführung findet als einmalige Festvorstellung
am Montag, dem 10. Januar 8.30 im Ufa-Palast am Zoo statt



UFA-PAVILLON

AM NOLLENDORFPLATZ



One day after the premiere at the Ufa Palast am Zoo, *Metropolis* opened at the Ufa Pavilion at Nollendorfplatz. To promote the film, the theater is presented as a movie set with shiny metal walls and a replica of the giant gong from the film.

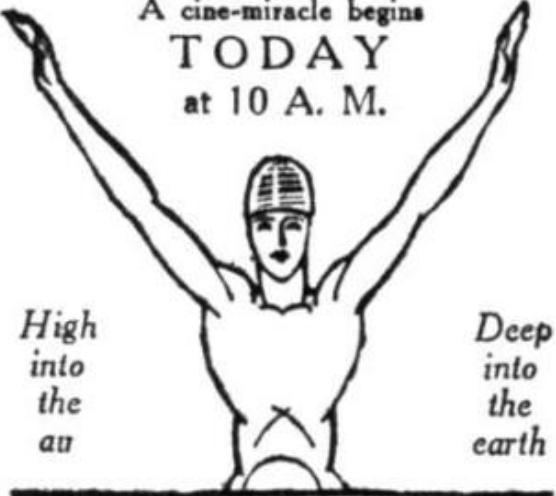


The Ufa-Pavilion at Nollendorfplatz seats 850 (about one-third the size of the Ufa Palast am Zoo).

The American premiere took place in New York at the Rialto Times Square on March 6, 1927

A cine-miracle begins
TODAY
at 10 A. M.

*High
into
the
air*



*Deep
into
the
earth*

METROPOLIS
A PARAMOUNT UFA PRODUCTION

No eye will believe it
No word can describe it
No pen portray it

RIALTO Times
Sq.

TIMELINE

1923

Fritz Lang and his wife Thea von Harbou plan the first scenarios of a science fiction film about modern science versus the occult sciences of the Middle Ages.

1924

Lang visits New York and Hollywood to promote his *Nibelungen* film. He is struck by the sheer scale and verticality of the New York skyline and later claims it inspired the futuristic cityscape of *Metropolis*. In Hollywood, Lang admires the large-scale sets of the million-dollar blockbusters *The Thief of Bagdad* and *Ben Hur*, which were also shown in Berlin in 1924 and 1926. His own big-budget film *Metropolis* (1927) seeks to emulate the epic cinema of Hollywood but to imbue it with German “soul” that rebels against the onslaught of the industrial age and profit-driven mass culture.

1925

Thea von Harbou’s novel *Metropolis* first appeared in serial form in 1925 in the *Illustriertes Blatt*, a supplement to the *Frankfurter Zeitung*. The complete book version was published in 1926 by August Scherl Verlag, a publisher known for pulp fiction, to coincide with the film version. Von Harbou also wrote the screenplay for *Metropolis*. Lang later insisted that he was not a fan of the conventional love story embedded in a science fiction fantasy about technology and its impact on humanity. He said he was interested in “machines.”

1925 - 1926

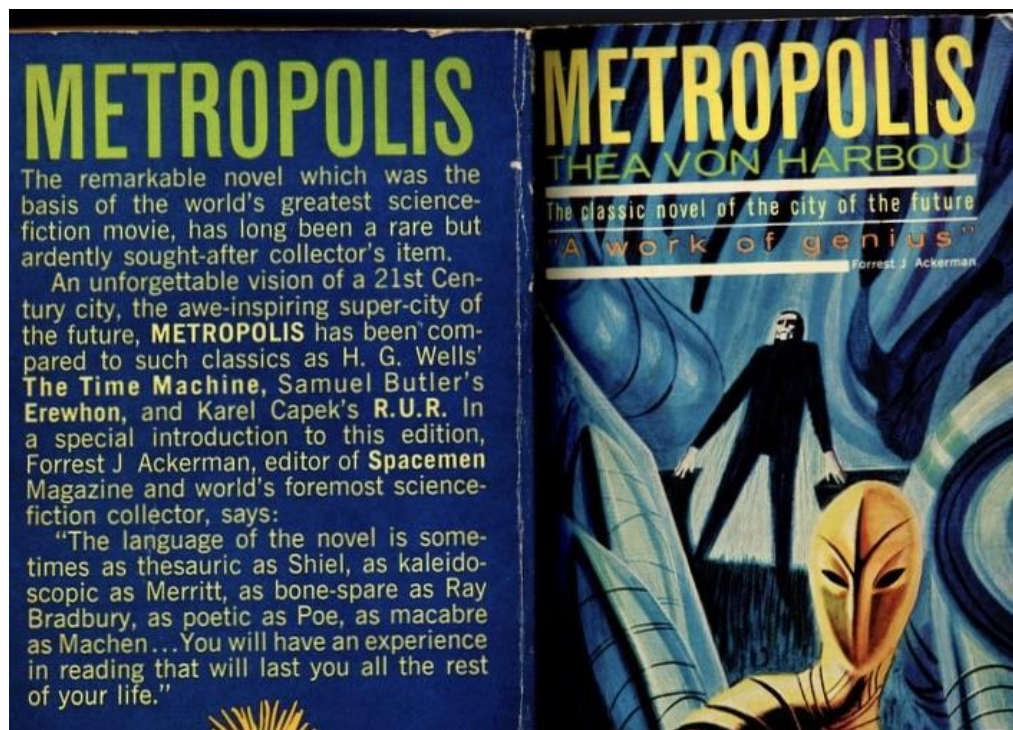
Filming begins at the Ufa studio in Berlin on May 22, 1925 and lasts until October 30, 1926. The film costs 5 million Reichsmarks (about \$1.1 million — or \$20.2 million in today’s money), the most expensive film production in Europe at the time. Four times over budget, it adds to Ufa’s financial problems. In December 1926, for a loan of \$ 4 million, Ufa entered into a partnership with two major American studios, Paramount and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (MGM), to form “Parufamet” as the sole foreign distributor of *Metropolis*. The agreement included reciprocal distribution, whereby the American studios would distribute Ufa films in the U.S. and Ufa would distribute their films in Germany, resulting in record imports of American films. Ufa’s financial difficulties continued, and in 1927 it was taken over by Alfred Hugenberg, a right-wing industrialist and media mogul.

January 10, 1927

Opening night at the Ufa-Palast am Zoo, Berlin's most prestigious movie theater, with 2,500 guests, including leading figures from German politics and society. Critics praise the visual effects but deride the melodramatic plot. The box office is disappointing. After the premiere, the film moves to the much smaller UFA Pavilion at Nollendorfplatz, where it runs for four months with moderate success.

February 1927

Thea von Harbou's novel "Metropolis" is published in English translation as a paperback in the Readers Library with a print run of 100,000 copies, and another 200,000 copies by November 1927. The preface mentions the upcoming movie in New York.



March 6, 1927

Opening night at the Rialto Theatre in New York City, a popular venue for major film premieres with nearly 2,000 seats. What was shown is the American version of *Metropolis*: cut by more than 30 minutes, re-edited and retitled. Fearing commercial failure, Paramount, which owned the rights to *Metropolis* since its bailout of Ufa, decided to align the German film with American tastes in moviegoing. Channing Pollock, an established playwright, simplified the plot by emphasizing the love story at the expense of the film's social commentary on the tension between labor and capital and the role of technology in industrial society.

August 1927

A newly edited and shortened version is re-released in Germany and remains the only version available for nearly forty years. Lang regularly denounces the "butchered" American version as compromising the artistic and narrative integrity of his work.

The 1960s and 1970s

The search for the missing footage begins in film archives in East Berlin, Munich, London, Paris, Australia, New Zealand, and elsewhere. Some prints surfaced that contain scenes, snippets, and even single frames not found in other prints. Enno Patalas of the Munich Film Museum becomes the main force behind examining all existing prints to piece together a more complete version. However, a worldwide search of film archives fails to find the missing footage or a complete original print.

1984

At Cannes, pop music producer Giorgio Moroder unveils a radically new version of *Metropolis* - a postmodern appropriation with a contemporary rock soundtrack featuring songs by Bonny Tyler, et al. This MTV version, only 87 minutes long and colorized, includes spectacular newly found footage given to him by Enno Patalas. A cult film now, Moroder's *Metropolis* inspires countless sci-fi films and music videos that quote or allude to the film. (See the Afterlives section of this dossier.)



1987

A new version of the film is released by Enno Patalas of the Munich Film Museum, which includes all the recovered and restored footage, the rediscovered original score by Gottfried Huppertz, and the reconstructed original intertitles.

1998/2001

The "definitive" digitally restored version (a compilation of all existing prints) is completed — 124 min. Supervised by Patalas and Martin Koerber of the Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek, it comes closer to Lang's 1927 vision than any other version at the time. It is still the basis for the DVD version sold internationally.

2001/2002

In 2001, *Metropolis* becomes part of UNESCO's Memory of the World, which aims to preserve documentary heritage of global significance. In 2002, *Metropolis* is added to the United States National Film Registry of the Library of Congress. The National Film Registry selects films for preservation that are considered "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant" in American film history. The German film is included because of its profound influence in the United States and worldwide.

Summer of 2008

The sensational discovery of the lost footage in a 16mm print of *Metropolis* at the Museo del Cine, a small film archive in Buenos Aires, adds 25 minutes to the film. A 35mm print was purchased by an Argentine film distributor in Berlin in 1927 but was later copied onto 16mm film from a highly flammable 35mm nitrate stock for safety reasons. Because the surviving 16mm print shows signs of considerable wear and tear, it could not be seamlessly integrated into the 35mm copy despite the painstaking work of film restorers. Today's "complete version" illustrates the precarious nature of film as technical medium but also the resolve of archivists and restorers to preserve its history.



February 2010

The fully restored "complete version" (149 min.) is produced by the Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau Foundation, ZDF and ARTE, Museo del Cine, and Alpha-Omega Digital. Its world premiere at the Berlin International Film Festival is hailed as a major cultural event. More than 2,000 people gather in front of the Brandenburg Gate on a snowy night to watch an outdoor screening of the restored classic. It is also shown at the Friedrichstadtpalast with a full orchestra as well as live on television. (The American premiere in Los Angeles follows on April 20.) This complete version, still missing about five minutes, is re-released in various formats, including special Blu-ray editions and high-definition formats for streaming platforms.



See report in *Der Spiegel* (Feb 13, 2010) on the world premiere of *Metropolis* [here](#).

2017

A new 4K restoration of *Metropolis* is based on the 2010 version, but enhanced with the latest digital technology to improve sound and image. The high-definition transfer promises the highest quality visual and audio experience of the film to date.

RESTORATION

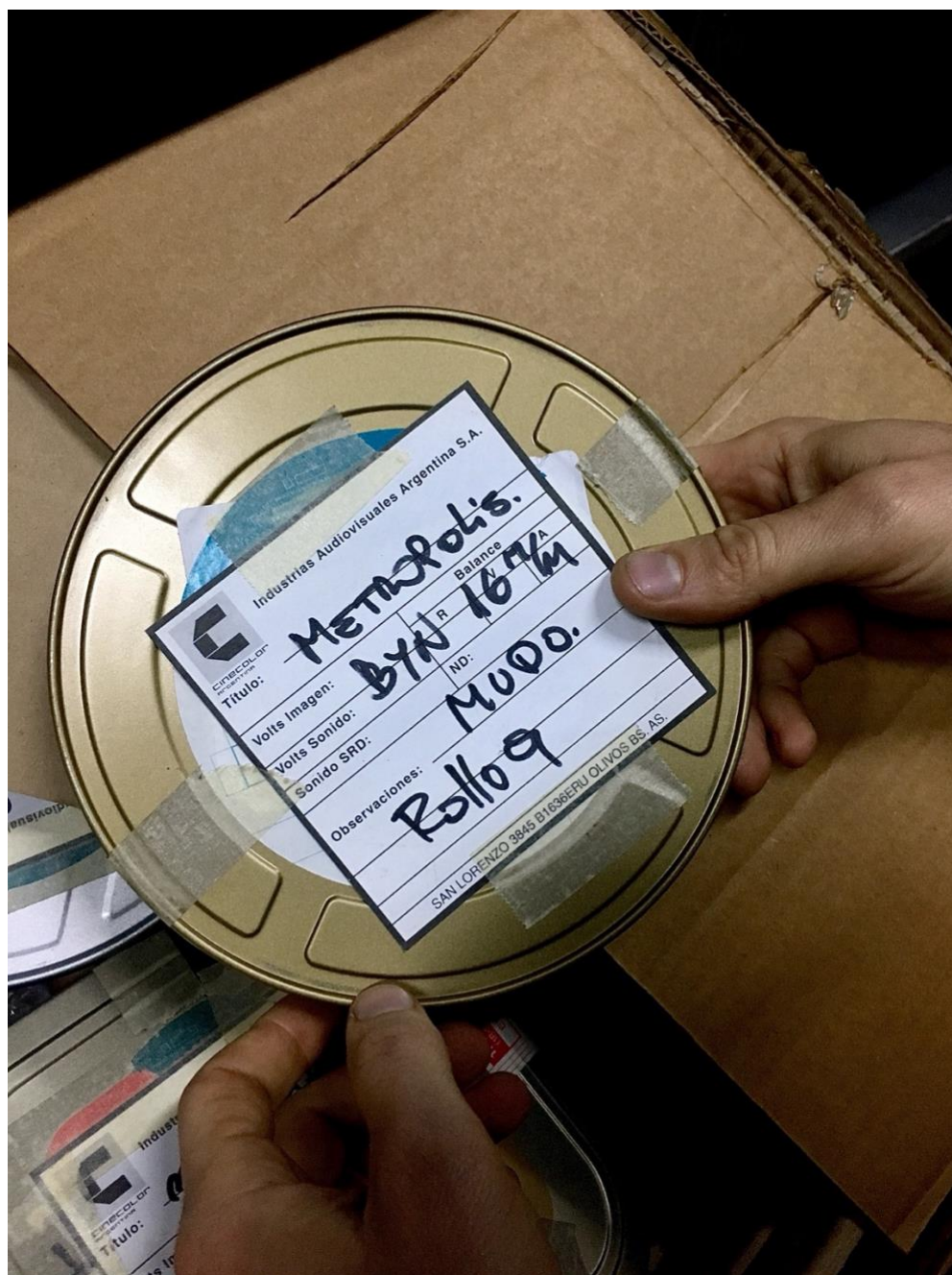


See the following documentaries about the film's restoration:

- [**THE VOYAGE TO METROPOLIS**](#) is a 50-minute documentary film from 2010 about the discovery of the complete print in 2008; for the German version, see [**DIE REISE NACH METROPOLIS**](#).
- [**METROPOLIS REFUNDADA**](#) is a 48-min. 2010 Argentinian documentary (with English subtitles) about the "Refound" film. The trailer "Metropolis Refound" is [here](#).
- **THE METROPOLIS CASE** is a three-part British adaptation of an acclaimed 45 min documentary [**DER FALL METROPOLIS**](#) made by Enno Patalas for German television in 2003. Click here for [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#).
- [**VORHER-NACHHER**](#) is about the film's digital restoration with Martin Koerber (in German).

Additional online materials about the "Story of Metropolis"

- [BEHIND THE SCENES OF METROPOLIS](#) (an 8-min. documentary)
- [METROPOLIS OVER TIME](#) offers a brief reception history with links.
- [THE STORY OF METROPOLIS](#) by Chuck Frownfelter – Cinema Scholars (Dec 2022).
- [ALTERNATIVE VERSIONS](#) of *Metropolis* (IMDb)
- For HUPPERTZ'S rediscovered score (with listening sample), check [here](#).
- Roger Ebert, [Urban Renewal on a Very Large Scale](#)
- David Bordwell, [Metropolis Unbound](#) (2010)
- Emanuel Levy, [Metropolis: Restorations of Fritz Lang's 1927 Masterpiece](#)
- Larry Rohter, [Footage Restored to Fritz Lang's Metropolis](#) (NY Times, May 4, 2010)
- Den of Geek, [Metropolis: The Enduring Legacy of a Pop Dystopia](#)
- Aitam BAR-Sagi, [Metropolis around the World](#)
- Michael G. McDunnah, [Metropolis](#)
- 1927: [Metropolis - How Cinema Changed the Way We See the Future](#)
- David Bromwich, [The Political Lessons of Fritz Lang's Metropolis](#) (*The Nation* 2022)



“Rollo 9” of the 16mm copy of the rediscovered original print from 1927 at the Museo del Cine, Buenos Aires



AN INTERVIEW WITH GIORGIO MORODER (1984)

Q. How did the idea come about to transform a classic silent into a musical film?

A. Three years ago, when Abel Gance's *Napoleon* was re-released, I thought that it would be a good idea to invent on original soundtrack for a silent film. I screened about 20 films and opted for *Metropolis*. At the beginning I only arranged the soundtrack for the first 15 minutes of the film, and I liked it so much that on the spur of the moment I decided to buy the film rights. I subsequently started negotiating with the German foundation which held the rights. At the time, I was producing *Cat People*, and one day I told David Bowie about my project, only to find out that he, also, was in the process of negotiating to buy the rights for *Metropolis* from the same foundation. Given the competition, I raised my bid and, in all probability, paid too much for the rights to this film in order to become the sole owner. And it was only after having bought this German copy that I found out that it's not the "original."

Q. Who holds the rights to the "original"?

A. Nobody, as no "original" copy exists. I've recorded, to date, more than half a dozen versions of *Metropolis* worldwide. When Fritz Lang made the film, it was three hours long; he subsequently shortened it to two-and-a-half hours. When this version was released in the United States, it was considered too long and was re-cut to last no longer than one-and-a-half hours (a version which Lang completely disowned). A few years later, the company which produced the film in Germany (UFA) went bankrupt. Paramount, which bought the film, decreed that the version available in the U.S. (the two-and-a-half hour one) was henceforth the "original," and destroyed the only three hour prints as well as the negative.

In 1936 this two-and-a-half hour version was shortened once more and was given to the Museum of Modern Art in New York, which, in translating the (title) boards, completely changed the sense, as it was little more than an approximate translation. Thus this version became the "official" one, and the Paramount two-and-a-half hour version disappeared.

Nevertheless, I come across three collectors who each possessed a copy different from the MoMA version. The first was an Australian; when he died two years ago, he bequeathed all his films to the Canberra Film Library. The second one lives in Los Angeles, and I met him quite by chance. He had a 35mm copy that contained several seconds of unedited film, which I bought. The third one is based in San Diego and owns a 9.5 mm copy which dates from 1928 — a copy without any additional visual material, but which has subtitles instead of the usual intertitles. That's what gave me the idea to use, for my version, subtitles for all the dialogue.

Moreover, other versions of the film exist in England, Australia, Russia, and East Germany. Of course, all these versions are *Metropolis*, but each one differs in the interpretation of the film - because of errors in translation, or because of scenes that have disappeared, or because of errors in editing.

Q. So what have you done with *Metropolis*?

A. I first of all corrected the translation. Then I re-inserted two scenes which are absent from other versions, one where we see a workman entering Yoshivara, the place of damnation; one where we see the statue of the mother of the hero, who was called Hel, which in German is the name given to a goddess. These scenes had been pulled, probably for censorship reasons. I also rectified the editing of the film in certain spots.

Q. What standards did you go by in choosing the colors that you added to the film?

A. Since this is a science fiction film, no standards really apply. I decided therefore to treat all the interior scenes in sepia; all the dead town in more sustained colors; all the machines in blue; and all the subterranean town in gray. *Red* was used to illustrate the visions and hallucinations of the characters; and gold accompanies the narration, as gold is symbolic of religion, and this is a very present idea in the film.

Q. How did you conceive the soundtrack?

A. I organized five private screenings, and for each one I distributed a questionnaire to the audience. The majority of them requested that the music be rock. Also, to start with, I had only included four songs, and they asked for *more*. As for the choice of singers, I chose according to their voice and personality. And they willingly adapted to my musical choices, as everyone wanted to have a claim in this film which is a legend in the history of cinema. I have a partiality to synthesizers, so I oriented the music toward slightly "new wave" rock. There was absolutely no question of putting hard rock onto this kind of story.

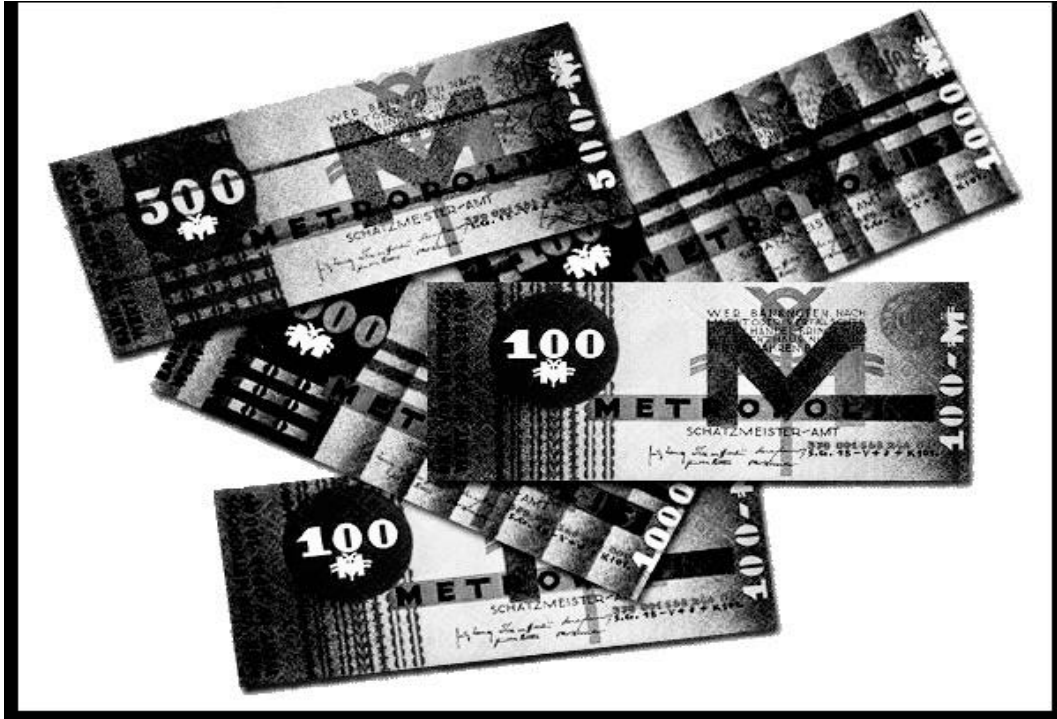
Q. Do you consider *Metropolis* to be a contemporary film?

A. In any event, contemporary directors owe a lot to it! Alan Parker admits to having been largely inspired by it for his film *The Wall*; certain scenes in *Blade Runner* are obviously copied from the city in *Metropolis*; the robot in *Star Wars* strangely resembles Lang's; and Spielberg apparently screened *Metropolis* several times before shooting *E. T.* The film remains avant-garde.

Q. What's most interesting about your version of *Metropolis*?

A. It's the most true to the original story, and the least mutilated by various editing jobs. And it is, above all, at last an opportunity for a whole generation to discover a great film that they probably wouldn't go to see in a silent version.

Source: *Metropolis* Program, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, August 16, 1984



Printed banknotes as currency for Metropolis signed by Fritz Lang, Thea von Harbou, Karl Freund, Günther Rittau, Otto Hunte



Metropolis Courier – the city newspaper for Metropolis

HOME VIEWING



DVD/BLU-RAY

For the US market, we recommend the Kino Lorber DVD/Blu-ray edition, **The Complete Metropolis** (2010), running time 148 min. (English Intertitles). This restoration from 2010 includes the 25 minutes of newly discovered footage and a new recording of Gottfried Huppertz's 1927 score. A film of Friedrich-Wilhelm Murnau Stiftung in co-operation with ZDF and ARTE Restoration carried out by Friedrich-Wilhelm-Murnau-Stiftung, Wiesbaden, jointly with Deutsche Kinemathek – Museum für Film und Fernsehen, Berlin in co-operation with Museo del Cine, Buenos Aires. Editorial restoration: Martin Koerber, Frank Strobel, Anke Wilkening.

Extras: "Voyage to Metropolis," a 50-minute documentary on the making and restoration of the film, and Interview with Paula Felix-Didier, curator of the Museo del Cine, Buenos Aires.

STREAMING

For streaming, we recommend the above restoration, which is available on Lorber's new subscription-based [Kino Film Collection](#) (at \$5.99 per month) or on Kanopy, which requires a library card or university affiliation.

