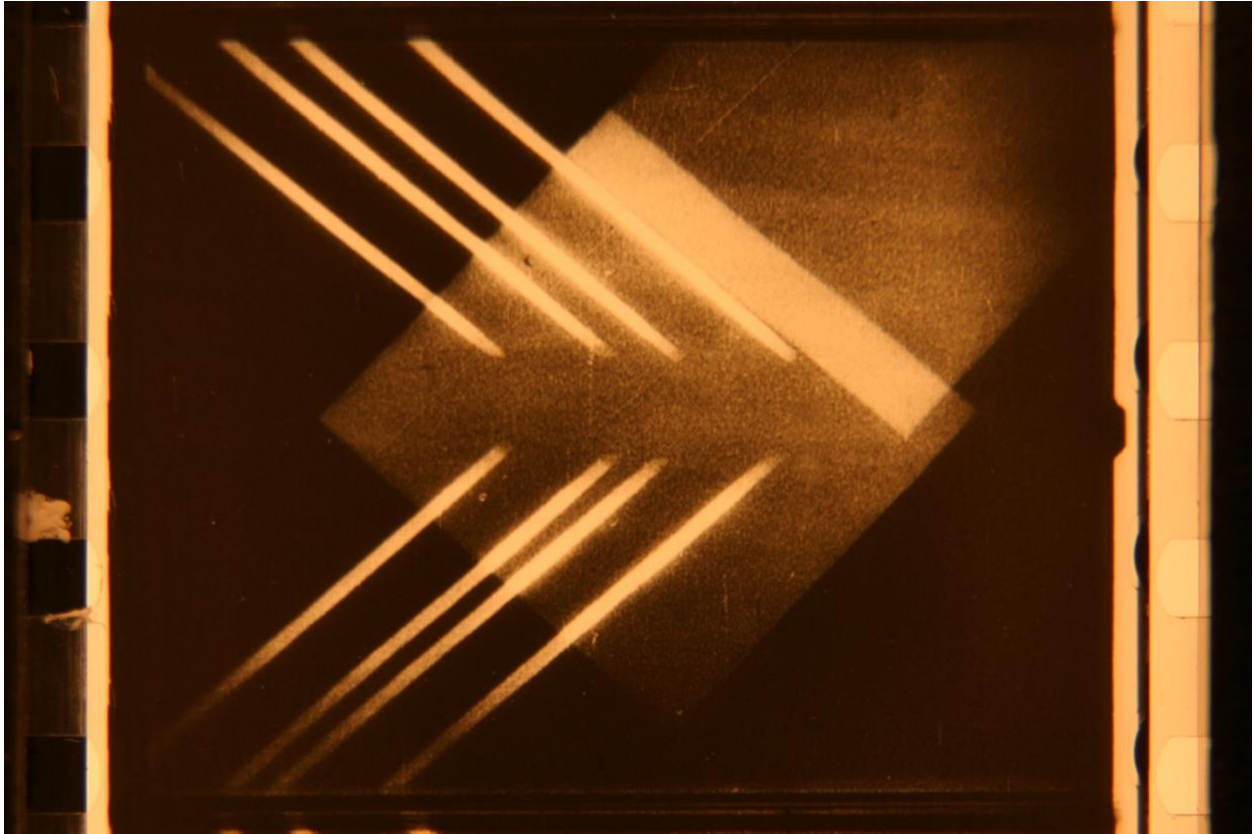


HISTORICAL ESSAYS AND REVIEWS



FRITZ LANG

The Future of the Feature Film in Germany

First published as "Wege des großen Spielfilms in Deutschland," *Die literarische Welt* 2 (October 1, 1926), 3, 6.

Perhaps there has never been an age more determined in its search for new forms of expression than ours. Fundamental revolutions in painting, sculpture, architecture, and music speak eloquently of the fact that people today are seeking and finding their own means of giving artistic form to their feelings. Film has one advantage over all other forms of expression: its freedom from space, time and place. What makes it richer than the others is the natural expressiveness inherent in its formal means. I argue that film has barely passed the first rung on the ladder of its development, and that it will become the more personal, the stronger, and the more artistic the sooner it renounces all inherited or borrowed forms of expression and throws itself into the unlimited possibilities of the purely cinematic.

The speed with which film has developed in the last five years makes all predictions about it seem dangerous, for it is likely to exceed them by leaps and bounds. Film knows no rest. What was invented yesterday is already obsolete today. This incessant search for new forms of expression, this intellectual experimentation, together with the joy that Germans characteristically take in overexertion, seem to me to confirm my assertion that film as an art will first find its form in Germany. For it is not the absence of the desire to experiment, nor the absence of the urge for incessant formal invention (however reliable and fruitful the old remains), nor, above all, the absence of incessant overwork in the name of results, which can only be achieved with that peculiarly German kind of perseverance and imagination of those who are obsessed with the work from the first idea.

Germany has never had, and will never have, the gigantic human and financial reserves of the American film industry. Lucky for us. For this is precisely what forces us to compensate for a purely material imbalance with an intellectual superiority. Among the thousands of examples that support my theory, I would like to highlight just one.

American cinematography is considered the best in the world, thanks to its unparalleled photographic equipment, its film material, and the brilliant work of its technicians. But the Americans have not yet understood how to use their magnificent equipment to elevate the miracle of photography to the realm of the spirit; that is, to make the concepts of light and shadow, for example, not merely conveyors of mood, but factors that contribute to the plot. I recently had the opportunity of showing an American technician some scenes from *Metropolis* in which the beam of an electric flashlight illuminates the pursuit of a young girl through the catacombs of Metropolis. The beam penetrated the hunted creature like the sharp claws of an animal, refusing to let her go, driving her relentlessly forward to the point of utter panic. It brought the amiable American to the naive confession, "We can't do that!" Of course they could. But the idea never occurs to them. For them, the thing remains without essence, unanimated, soulless.

I, on the other hand, believe that in the great German dramatic film of the future the thing will play as important a role as the human character. The actors will no longer occupy a space that they seem to have entered by chance; rather, the space will be constructed in such a way that the experiences of the characters seem possible only in it, seem logical only because of it. An expressionism of the most subtle kind will make the environment, the characters and the action correspond to each other, just as I generally believe that the German film technique will develop in such a way that it will not only become an optical expression of the characters' actions, but will also elevate

the environment of the respective actor to the status of a carrier of the action itself and, above all, of the character's soul! We are already attempting to photograph thoughts, that is, to render them visually; we are no longer attempting to convey the action complex of an event, but to visualize the ideational content of the experience from the perspective of the one who is experiencing it.

The first great gift we owe to film was, in a sense, the rediscovery of the human face. Film has revealed the human face to us with unprecedented clarity, in its tragic as well as its grotesque, its threatening as well as its blessed expression.

The second gift is that of visual empathy: in the purest sense, the expressionistic representation of thought processes. We will no longer participate purely externally in the workings of the souls of the characters in the film. We will no longer be limited to seeing the effects of emotions, but will experience them in our own souls, from the moment of their inception, from the first flash of a thought to the logical conclusion of the idea.

If earlier performers were content to be pretty, pleasant or dangerous, funny or repulsive, the new German actors and actresses will be promoted by the film from bearers of the plot to bearers of an idea. They will become preachers of every creed that man has had since he left his home in the trees.

The internationalism of the cinematic language will become the most powerful instrument available for the mutual understanding of peoples who otherwise find it so difficult to understand each other in too many languages. To give film the double gift of ideas and soul is the task before us.

We will realize it!



Leitworte zum Film Metropolis Berlin 1927

As part of the promotion of *Metropolis*, Fritz Lang speaks about the universal language of cinema. Recorded on a Vox shellack recording. To listen to this 3:45-min. original recording, click [here](#)

Accompanying Words to Metropolis. Spoken by Director Fritz Lang (1927)



Fritz Lang spricht Leitworte zum Film Metropolis Berlin 1927

For transcription and translation, see next page

Accompanying Words to *Metropolis*. Spoken by Director Fritz Lang (1927)

Transcription of: "Leitworte zum Ufa-Film 'Metropolis' – gesprochen von Regisseur Fritz Lang," Vox Records (Sammlung Rodaroda) Matriz-Nr. 1289, 2. Translated by Michael Cowan

FILM ist die Romantik unserer Zeit. Film ist das unerschöpfliche Abenteuer. Film ist sichtbar gewordenes Märchen, ist Bildhaftmachung von noch nie Geschautem und nie mehr zu Schauendem, denn er hat die Macht, geahnte Wunderwelten kommender Jahrhunderte prophetisch vor unseren Augen aufzubauen, eine Brücke zu schlagen zu den nie betretenen Gefilden noch unerreichbarer Gestirne, und Film hat auch die Macht, versunkene Welten wieder hervorzuzaubern, tote Jahrtausende wieder auferstehen zu lassen, so dass Vergangenes wie Künftiges uns gegenwärtig wird.

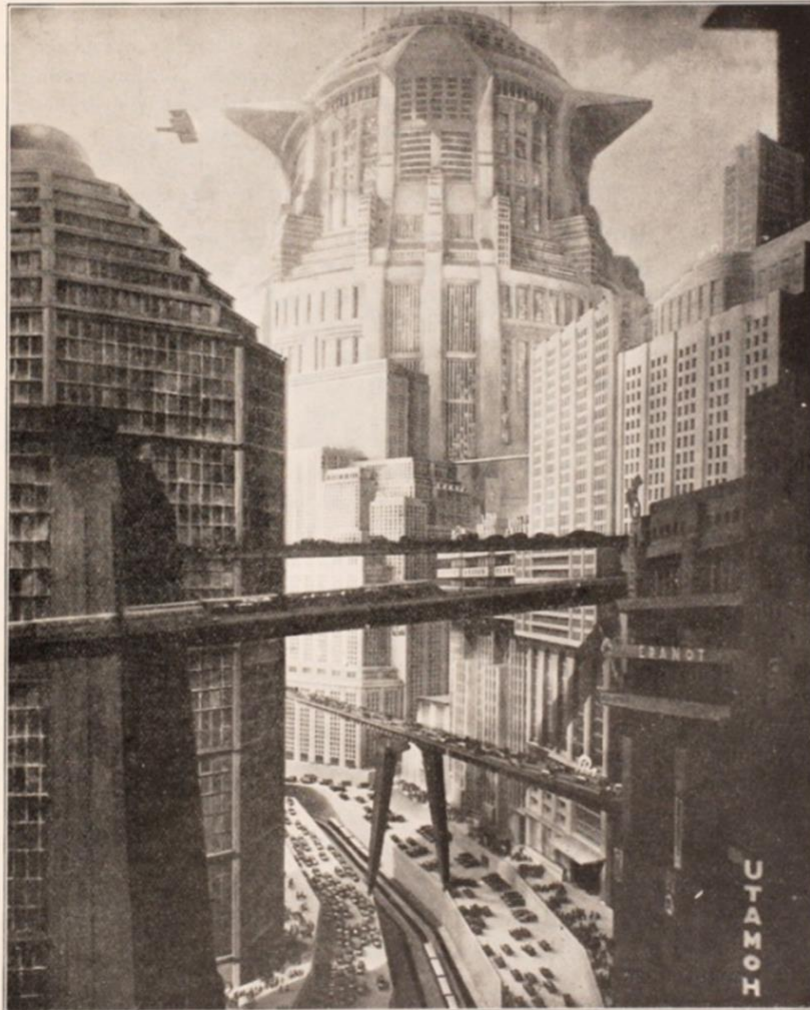
Aber Film ist noch mehr: er ist es, der uns das menschliche Gesicht hat neu entdecken lassen, denn erst durch ihn ist uns wieder aufgegangen, was für ein wundervolles Instrument des Ausdrucks das Menschenantlitz ist, wie rührend in seinem Lächeln wie in seinen Tränen, wie gefährlich in seiner Verschlagenheit, wie abstoßend in seiner Gemeinheit, wie groß in seiner stummen Tragik und wie immer menschlich und darum immer neu. Haben wir je zuvor die Hand eines Menschen so als Instrument seiner Seele erkannt als wenn der Film uns ihr Zittern oder ihr Verkrampfen, ihr Drohen oder Beschwichtigen zeigt? Vielleicht ist die Entschleierung des Menschlichen eine der tiefsten Aufgaben des Films, denn wenn wir es nur recht betrachten, dann sieht uns aus ihr bildhaft eindringlich das uralte Wort entgegen: Da bist *Du*.

FILM is the romanticism of our time. Film is the inexhaustible adventure. Film is fairytale made visible, the ability to picture things that no one has yet seen and things that can never be seen again. For it has the prophetic power to lay out, before our eyes, anticipated worlds of wonder from coming centuries, to build a bridge to unexplored realms of stars we cannot yet visit. And film also has the power to conjure up sunken worlds once again, to resurrect deceased millennia, so that past and future alike might be present to us.

But film is more still. It has allowed us to discover the human face anew. For only through film did we learn again what a wonderful instrument of expression the human visage is, how moving it can be in both its smiles and its tears, how dangerous in its shrewdness, how repulsive in its villainy, how great in its mute tragedy—and how it is always human and hence always new. Have we ever perceived someone's hand to be an instrument of his soul more clearly than we can when film shows it to us in acts of trembling or clenching, threatening or soothing? Perhaps film's most profound task lies in unveiling what is human, for as soon as we observe it correctly, then we encounter, staring back at us vividly from the pictures, that primal phrase: that is *you*.

"METROPOLIS" MAGAZINE

Depicting Scenes, Story and Incidents in the Making of the
World's Greatest Modern Spectacular Film Masterpiece. . .



A Scene in "The Wonder City of the Future."

This "Metropolis" magazine was printed for the London premiere on March 21, 1927. It is a translation of the 35-page special "Metropolis" edition of the UFA magazine published for the German premiere in Berlin on January 10, 1927. The facsimile of this program is embedded in an online article by Fosco Lucarelli of socksstudio.com, interspersed with commentary by the author and citations from secondary literature. This text, which includes the full facsimile of the English edition of UFA's Metropolis magazine, can be found [here](#).

Otto Hunte The master builder of "Metropolis" tells his story

from: Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung, issue for Greater Berlin, No. 12, January 8, 1927, Saturday evening.

I am the only film architect who has had the good fortune to only build for very big films: "The Indian Tomb", "The Mistress of the World", "Dr. Mabuse" and "The Nibelungs".

But when I first skimmed through Thea v. Harbou's manuscript for Fritz Lang's Ufa film "Metropolis", it was immediately clear to me that a work awaited me here that eclipsed everything that had gone before. There were tasks to be solved here that had really never been done before. There were models for Indian temples, the milieu of the Nibelungen film could be studied in the museum, but the architectural style of the future city "Metropolis" could only be found in one's own imagination, because there is no "modern" style from which one could go further in this time, which has no real style, but has so far struggled in vain for new possibilities of expression, especially in architecture.

The preparatory work for "Metropolis" already took as much time as the overall work on the two parts of the "Nibelungen". And the work grew with the technical detailing. Fortunately, today's film technology enables the architect to use a tool that makes things infinitely easier and which until recently was hardly known: the Schüfftan process, which I described in "Metropolis" have made ample use of.

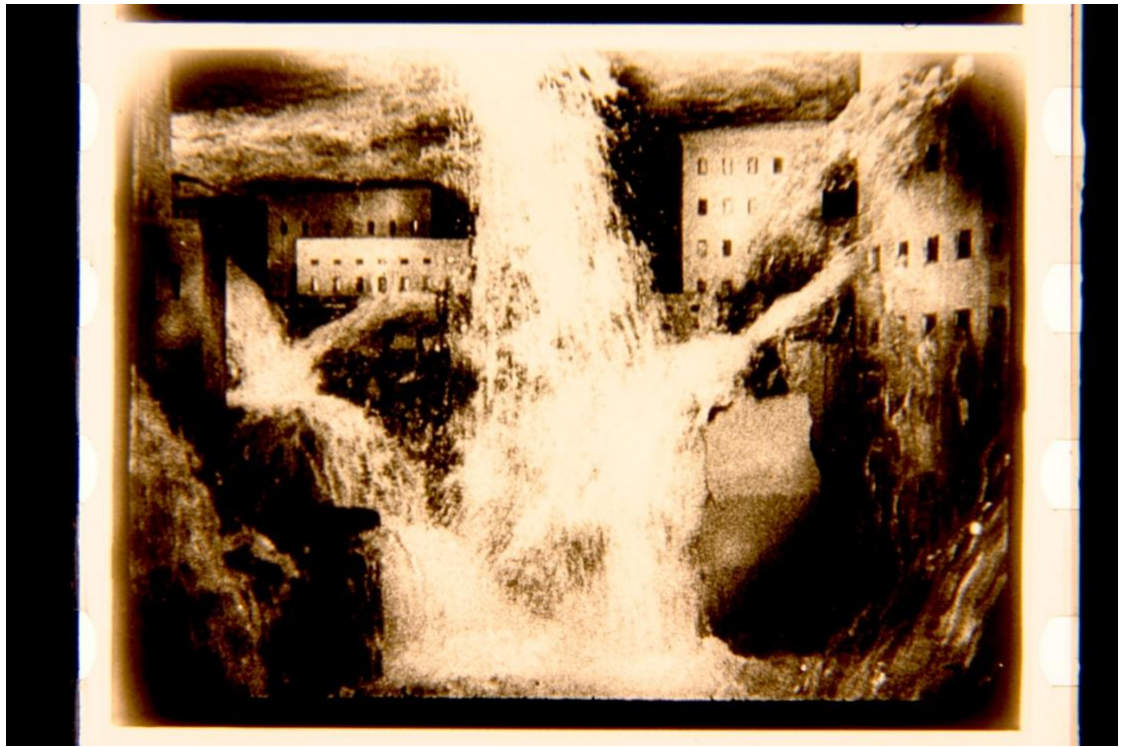
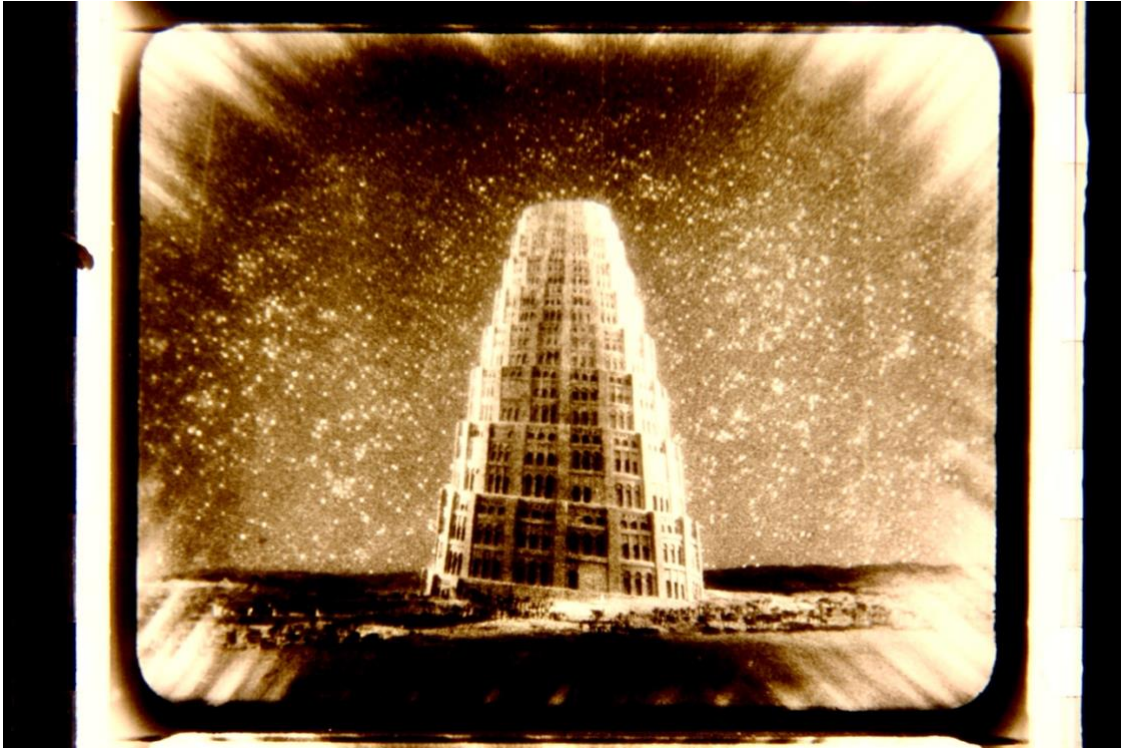
Most of the time and effort went into the construction of the main traffic artery of "Metropolis", at the end of which rises the new "Tower of Babel", which was intended to be 500 meters high, so it couldn't be built in any way. I had to use a miniature model and use tricks to represent the huge amount of traffic on this road. It would go too far to explain all these things in detail, but you can easily imagine the painstaking, meticulously precise work required to bring airplanes, high-speed trains, cars and people into this picture. This work took almost six weeks, and the result flashes before the viewer's eyes in two times six seconds.

One scene in which a trick was ruled out from the outset was the water disaster, where the cement and concrete pavement of the streets is broken up and destroyed by the masses of water. The quantities of water required here

had to be dammed and raised in order to achieve the required pressure. Four reservoirs with a capacity of 1600 cubic meters were built for this purpose, as well as various smaller basins for special applications. To be on the safe side, I had a large motorized sprayer installed in case the water did not have enough force to break through the concrete pavement. When the shot was taken and a huge jet of water was thrown 8 meters into the air, we all thought it was the motorized sprayer, but it didn't need to work at all.

The explosion that destroyed the huge elevators of the workers' city looked much more dangerous than it really was, because the elevators were triggered by a safety gear and plunged into the depths in such a way that *the impression of an explosion* was only created at the moment of impact by pyrotechnic means.

These are some details from the work on "Metropolis", a work that breaks absolutely new ground in both the technical and the artistic, and in which the one is inconceivable without the other. The fact that the difficulties of which I have given these examples have been overcome is proof of the infinite possibilities and development capabilities of film.



CONTEMPORARY REVIEWS

"Metropolis" Ufa film by Parufametfilm / World premiere at the "Ufa-Palast am Zoo.

In: *Licht-Bild-Bühne* (Berlin) vol. 20, no. 9, 11 Jan 1927

Introduction

In addition to its quality as a work of art, "Metropolis" occupies such a unique position as an industrial product that the film deserves special consideration. There is hardly any product in the world that can compete with this movie in terms of production value, and of course we are not just talking about movies. "Metropolis" was made as if to summarize in one powerful manifestation what Germany is capable of today in terms of technical mastery of film. No country in the world can match the scope and technical achievement of the film "Metropolis"; even American films, which consciously set out to master large masses and technical sensations, pale in comparison with this powerful manifestation of the German cinematic spirit. A work has been presented to the world that will force every moviegoer in the world to pronounce the word Germany with a respectful gesture. This fact must be stated before all others.

Direction

Fritz Lang was undoubtedly attracted by the idea of immense dimensions, the vision of a world just before midnight, the dance around the volcano one minute before its eruption. This emotional mood of the director, who is here not only a director of human portrayals, but first and foremost an organizer of an unbelievably overwhelming spectacle of the end of the world, must be given priority in any viewing. Lang's goal was to transform the ancient myth of the Tower of Babel, which man in his presumption wanted to build as high as the sky, into a cinematic image of our time, embedded in a future dream of the last, highest, most terrible realization of all technical possibilities.

It is the awfulness and horror of the human construct, the threatening brutality of quantity, that first determines the director. Buildings and machines are the real pillars of the plot; man has long since become their slave rather than their creator. And so the buildings continue to pile up, relegating the American skyscraper to the status of a toy box and our modern machine world to the background as an unstructured, modest beginner's work.

This is the director's world of thought, into which everything fits imperiously. The theatrical scenes fade into insignificance, the characters are treated as typically as their names: "The Skinny," "Rotwang the Inventor," "Maria," and so on. The dramatic direction also recedes, it is indifferent, because the dead world of things is set in powerful motion and crushes the earthworm. Images of such magnificence have never been seen before, catastrophes have never been brought into a movie image like this. The animation of the steel figure is a technical masterpiece. The construction of the Yoshiwara Palace of Joy is a fever dream. The view of the machine city is a miracle of precise design of gigantic architecture. And when the end of the world approaches, even though it is only machines crashing down, elevators hissing into the depths, water breaking through dense walls, even though it is no longer there, the vision of the end of the world flares up with a power that could never be conveyed to modern people by a more direct depiction of the same motif.

These thoughts clearly define Lang's directorial style and overshadow everything else that is demanded of the movie. When the elements themselves speak, when the voices of the underworld become loud, man plays a modest role. The events take place in the context of the struggle between the elemental forces, which they accompany or illustrate. That is why there is nothing to say about the drama, that is why the battle on the ridge of the cathedral, which seems almost schematic in its direction, is irrelevant to the experience of the movie.

Fritz Lang's direction is to be seen as the creation of a vision of the downfall of the West, as an apparition of the apocalypse, as a movie about the end of the world of technical intelligence. Whether this makes the actual drama fade, whether it makes the psychological structure schematic, whether the director's will is not too powerfully absorbed by the visual expression of a vision of the future in steel and iron - even a skeptical attitude in answering these questions does not affect the impression of the film. Nor can it be said that a painter has created purely visual stimuli of almost unimaginable magnificence. Above all, every viewer will feel something of what theology calls the "eschatological," the mood of the end of the world, the collapse of humanity, the shudder of the abyss that will inevitably open in the future.

Manuscript

Thea von Harbou deliberately wrote a symbolic film manuscript. And as in the novel on which the movie is based, the play of the dead masses is stronger than the human events in the script. It is in the character of this symbolism that the characters lose the immediate freshness of life, that they are less characters than examples of a certain type of person. The lord of the machine city, the man of the heart, the virgin who loves all creatures, the mad inventor, the cold agent, none of them has a specific name or a specific fate. The events that unite them therefore lack the characterization of the truly dramatic: everything is very simple, so as not to diminish the monumental contours of the characters. It is absolutely impossible to judge this script in the same way as one usually judges cinematic poetry. Everything that makes a script strong is missing -- and yet mysterious forces, stronger than man and fate, emerge from every corner, enchanting the brain and the eye.

Presentation

At the center of the film is the figure of Mary, sometimes the Blessed Virgin, sometimes the Babylonian courtesan. Not only the name is important. And this difficult task was placed in the hands of a young novice, Brigitte Helm -- and it was accomplished in a way that demands not only all praise for the young actress, but also all respect for the director, Fritz Lang. It is a feat to portray two completely different characters without the help of even the slightest external means, and the way Brigitte Helm makes the pure virgin and the uninhibited hetaera believable is a great performance. It seems impossible that the girl in the plain gray dress, who has just spoken words of love to the poor slaves, could enchant the sophisticated world of Yoshiwara in the same dress. Her gesture, her face, when she suddenly lifts her dress and throws her garter into the greedy, inflamed crowd of lechers-- that will not be forgotten!

Of the other characters, Rasp makes the most vivid impression as Joh. Fredersen's agent. He is "der Schmale" (the Slim One), and in his strange, dark angularity, which never seems completely transparent, he also has something of a guard machine about him. Klein-Rogge's "Inventor" is all too firmly anchored in the same facial expression; he offers too little in the way of design to make a strong impression. Gustav Fröhlich, who plays the son and the lover, brings warmth and cordiality, but he hardly achieves a profound human form in the movie. This is due to the one-dimensional characterization of the character, out of which probably only a complete genius would have been able to create a truly vivid character. Alfred Abel also fails to inspire the viewer with his usual admiration. But also in appearance he does not have the stature of the Metropolis giant, for whom one would have preferred Jannings or Wegener. Heinrich George's "Master of the Heart Machine" Groth is excellent, a character who is really seen, healed and developed in all his emotions. Here, the schematic is overcome by strong individual traits that do not fail to impress.

A word about the very well-organized extras. They function as flawlessly as life in the wonder city of Metropolis. Lang has de-individualized them, robbed them of their natural existence and transformed them into "hands," a will-less, dark mass that lives out its life in rhythmic lockstep, eternally unchanged, always just a mass and never an individual.

Film Politics

The film Metropolis as a work of art plays no role in the following considerations. The only question is whether a product of this financial magnitude is viable for our industry.

It can be assumed that experts like our readers know where the production costs of this movie have to be recouped. It will all depend on the business in the United States. And even if we want to say from the beginning that we think that the American success will be even bigger than the German one, we have to state so seriously that we think it is unprofessional to risk a multiple of millions just on the chance that the movie will be liked in America. And if not ...? Every business has its risks, but a businessman has to know what risks he can take.

We are convinced of its success in America and hope that it will be in the interest of the entire German industry. But how long will it take for the huge sums of money expected from this film to flow back into the producer's coffers from the fourteen thousand theaters in the U.S.? In this time of crisis, can a company afford to tie up its available credit, its capital, in this way? We do not believe that in our situation it is advisable to commit capital of this magnitude to one film when it could have been used profitably and beneficially for a dozen major films.

Nor should we be told that the idea of this movie required this costly execution. This is not the case. The pure story could have been realized masterfully and in all its refinement with a fraction of the money spent, and the decorative frame can naturally be adapted to the available capital, given the state of our technology.

We would like to summarize our film-political considerations in one sentence: Movies like Metropolis can and must be financed only from profits; from current working capital or even from loans -- don't touch them!

It will not be easy to make a movie like Metropolis again in Germany. Now that we have it, we have to hope that the effort will pay off, at least in an idealistic sense: in an increase in the reputation of German film in the world. And whatever the financial result may be, we have no doubts about the idealistic one. Because Metropolis is a unique work, not only in Germany, in Europe -- we have not been able to find anything like it in the whole world, including the American mammoth films!



HERBERT IHERING

Der Metropolis Film im Ufa-Palast am Zoo

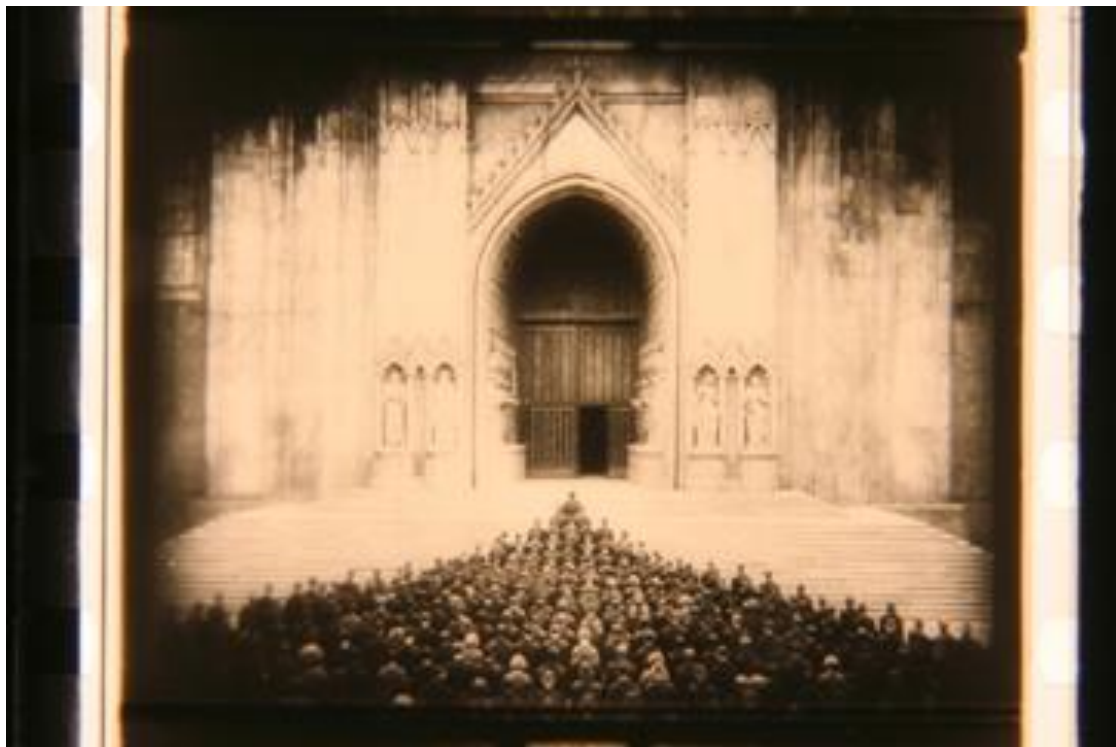
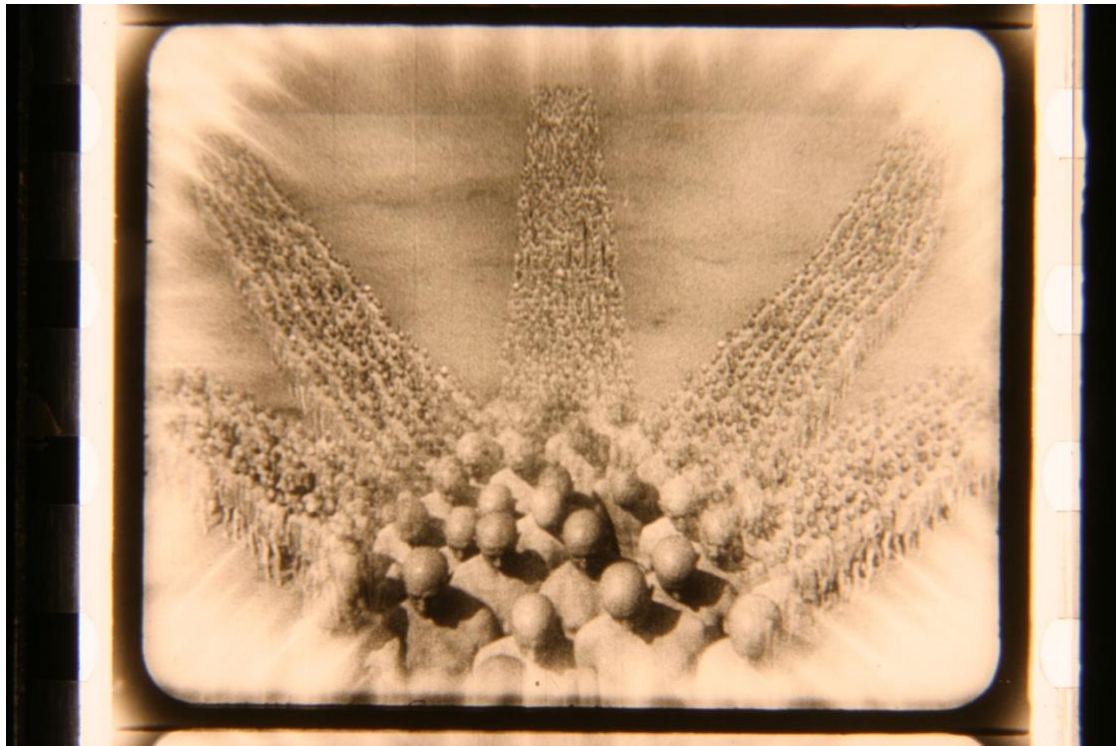
In: *Berliner.Börsen-Courier* (January 11, 1927), late edition, p. 2

People went into this movie with great expectations; details fascinated; the whole thing disappointed. Film - even this one, especially this one - is no longer a question of technical skill. A lot can be done today. Fritz Lang can also do a lot. But to make a worldview film without a worldview is not possible with any skill in the world.

A technical city of the future and the romance of garden arbors; a world of machines and ridiculous individual fates; social world contrasts, and the heart as the mediator between "brain and hand", Georg Kaiser and the Birh-Pfeiffer; "seas, mountains and giants" and a legendary Maria, Alfred Döblin and Thea von Harbou - that is impossible. Workers and entrepreneurs, this struggle is portrayed on film, even if it is set in a future city like "Metropolis". Here, however, it is invented and stylized. Thea von Harbou invents an impossible personal plot that is overstuffed with motifs. Fritz Lang stylizes this carpet pad and lets the motifs take over. Sometimes a medieval dance of death, sometimes a modern dance of death. Sometimes a contemporary stimulus, sometimes an educational stimulus, but never the orientation of the material. The workers, even the machines, which carry their supra-real reality within them, are sometimes stylized (Moloch!). Emotional phrases are always used. Terrible. A factual subject cruelly kitsched up. Effects, not because world views urge explosions, but because the movie wants its tricks. The ending, the tearful reconciliation of employer and employee - appalling.

It is difficult to use harsh words in front of a work that has been worked on with extreme tension for years. But since the failure of the "Metropolis" work will be blamed on the quality film in general, the reasons why this film had to be bad should be pointed out. A modern big movie and Thea von Harbou's backward-looking novel fantasy have nothing to do with each other. If "Metropolis" hadn't featured Alfred Abel as the big industrialist, Heinrich George as the machine master, a new talent: Brigitte Helm as the impossible female role, Fritz Rasp as the new Kühne as a detective who just didn't fit in stylistically with the others, we would have been completely appalled. Mr. Klein-Rogge as the inventor still played enough false theater, while Gustav Fröhlich as the millionaire's son seemed talented but still too restless.





R. A.

"Metropolis:: World premiere in the Ufa Palace at the Zoo.

In: *Die Rote Fahne* [The Red Flag]. Central Organ of the Communist Party of Germany (Berlin) Vol. 10, No. 9, January 12, 1927.

Capitalist incrustation and rationalization grow to fantastic proportions. Its symbol is "Metropolis", the sky-high skyscraper city ruled and directed by a lord of capital. The class division of human society is complete. The working class is now only a component of the machine, a uniform, unspiritual army of human machines. It is banished to the underworld, where the Ichthosaurus apparatuses, fed by powerful elements (such as ultra-electricity), generate wealth for the upper world. -- There, excessive luxury, rationalized luxury life. Paradisiacal gardens for the "sons," air-trained Venus women -- and above all, not yet the "brainless ape-man who controls the world at the push of a button," but the all-powerful trust magnate of Metropolis. -- Into this milieu the director sets a more than bad movie plot.

From the underworld comes Maria, the "good spirit" of the slave of the underworld, into the paradise gardens of the "sons". No wonder Freder, the son of the Almighty, John Fredersen, falls in love with her and ends up in the previously unknown "underworld" in search of her. Destined to be the mediator between brain (read: exploiter) and hand (read: slave), he witnesses some workers being crushed by an Ichthosaurus machine. This and his noble heart lead him to stand next to the machine himself for a day. After several hours, his athletic body feels the claws of exploitation on his neck. With the exclamation: "Father, Father, will 10 hours never end?" he collapses. Although the 100% rationalized workers have no trade union or political organization, from time to time they make a pilgrimage to the catacombs, 2000 meters deep, where "Mary" preaches to the workers. Her motto is: "The mediator between the brain and the hand is the heart. She speaks like Stresemann at the Sangerfest in Dresden: "Only if our people keep their spirit in the age of machines and megacities will we experience a revival."

The mediator comes in the form of Freder. The covenant of love with Mary was sealed. But the strong arm of the dictator of the metropolis intervened. He learned of Mary's "insurrectionary" work in a very romantic way and decided to restore "labor peace" by taking away the workers' faith in Mary. He turns to Rotwang, an inventor who has been working on the artificial man for years. He persuades him to give him Mary's face. Rotwang agrees, but he has terrible thoughts of revenge. Fredersen stole his beloved wife, and so he

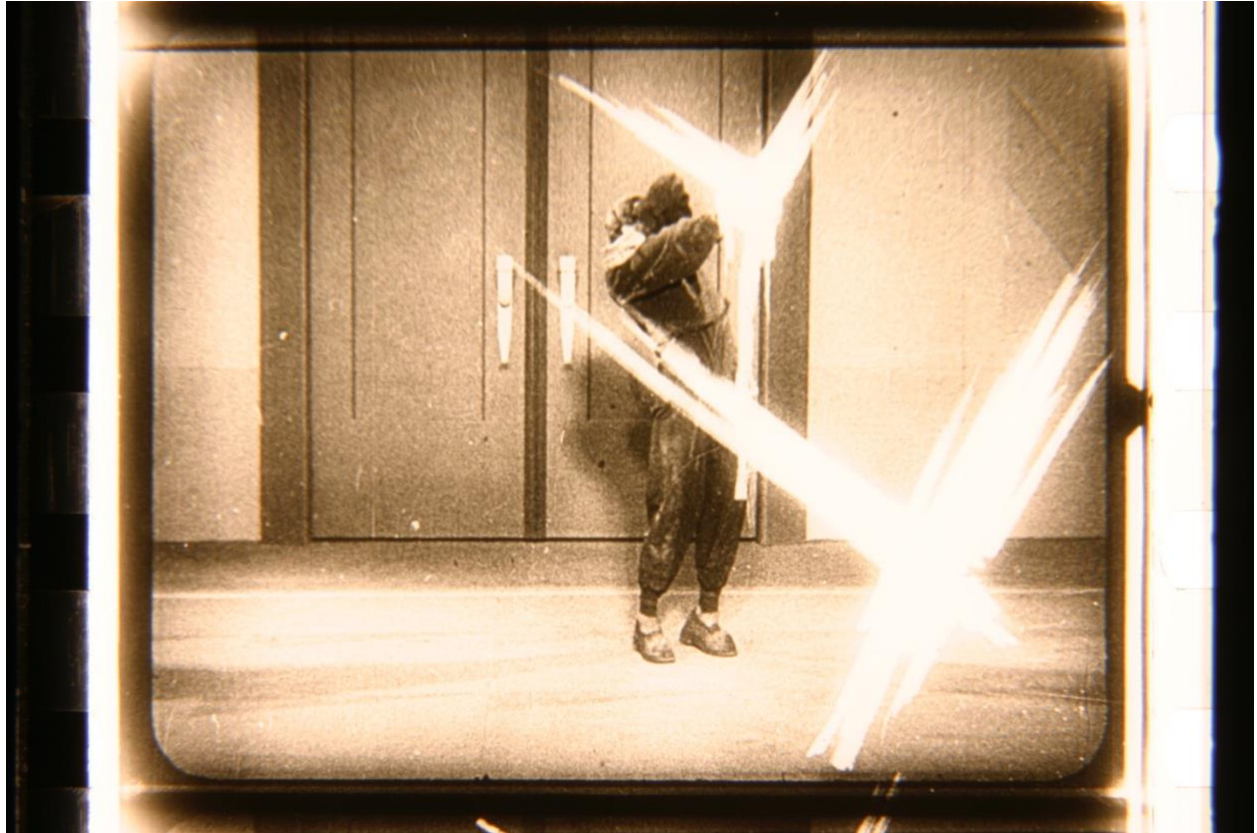
apparently goes along with his plan to destroy his son and his work. The human machine Maria appears, not as a saint, but as a harlot (as if there were such a big difference), and in an act of extraordinary demonic possession she causes the sons of the upper world to kill each other, while in the underworld she "provokes" the workers to destroy the machines. In "Furioso," the "Mediator" -- the "Golden Heart" -- triumphs over all the machinations of the evil inventor.

The workers "let the machines race themselves to death," but fearing for the fate of their children, they turn their rage against the machine Maria, who is burned to death under the dance of an underworld carmagnole. However, the savior Maria has saved the children from the flood of the underworld. Once again, the Inventor takes control of them. A duel between the Inventor's demon and the Mediator takes place at a dizzying height. The Mediator wins. Mary is his. The Dictator arrives. The leader of the workers arrives. The mediator reconciles them. The idea of the workers' community has triumphed. The great coalition is the trump card. Curtain. -- The Reich ministers, who have just emerged from the negotiations on the Citizens' Bloc, are jubilant. We hear that the Social Democratic party executive is considering making the director honorary chairman because of the excellent result.

The director apparently had in mind a utopian film that would contain tendencies of reality. Something for everyone: for the bourgeoisie "Metropolis", for the workers the storming of the machines, for the Social Democrats the working community, for the Christians the "Golden Heart" and the haunting of the Redeemer. Fritz Lang did not create a great utopia, nor did he make dreams come true: But he cannot be held solely responsible for this, because the content of the Ufa films was determined by the management according to the laws of the Neuhofer Stock Exchange.

Apart from the kitschy content, the technical achievement is undoubtedly outstanding and unparalleled in its kind. The illusion of the skyscraper city, the depiction of the machine underworld, the "birth" of the human machine, the flooding and some of the crowd scenes are excellent. There is not much to say about the characters. The new star Brigitte Helm (Maria) should soon fade away. Alfred Abel as John Frederson is a complete failure. The only noteworthy performance comes from Heinrich George as the machine foreman.

The performance lasts 2½ hours. Exactly one hour too long. Even then, the Ufa management will not only succeed in getting 1000 unemployed people to go bald for the "Babylon Tower", but also thousands more (at ticket prices of 2-8 marks).



MAX FEIGE

The Movie "Metropolis"

In: *Der Film* (Berlin) vol. 12, no. 1, January 15, 1927.

The world premiere of the film about which so much has been said took place in the midst of immense excitement. "Metropolis" is a film about technology, and when it triumphantly makes its way around the world, it will probably be celebrated as a victory for German technology. The giant buildings of the City of the Sun, which rival the Tower of Babel, stand in stark contrast to the depths in which the working class population must live. The pulsating life of Metropolis, with its air-omnibus, automobiles, and all the other aids of modern transportation, almost makes today's American traffic conditions seem like small-town life. Otto Hunte, Erich Kettelhut, and Karl Vollbrecht have created masterpieces of architecture in their models, but this artistic form of expression prevails not only here, but also in the engine rooms. Here the photographers, under the direction of Karl Freund and

with the assistance of Günther Rittau, captured the spirit of the action, especially in the scene where the machine is portrayed as a modern Moloch devouring the masses of workers working on it. The cross-fade scenes expressing these horrors were extremely vivid.

According to the idea and manuscript of Thea von Harbou, this utopian city of Metropolis is inhabited by people who feel, suffer, and rejoice like those of our time. In Yoshiwara, the inhabitants of Metropolis are just as exposed to the seductions of the big city as, for example, the provincials in the Palais de danse. This whole Metropolis is portrayed in a similar way to Bellamy's famous "Looking Backward" (from the year 2000) or some of Jules Verne's novels. However, this film reveals social differences that have already been overcome: the social problem described here comes from the working class mentality of the 1880s. The author must have overlooked the democratization of our time. As strong as today's social struggles are, they are not as tense as those described in Metropolis. Today's social movement has created transitions between the completely exploited workers and the purely profit-making corporations. Even if one respects the plot as poetic license, one has to admit that the personified mediator (Gustav Froehlich) is not enough to explain the later reconciliation between brain and hand after the strong tension.

Thea von Harbou has succeeded in depicting the purely human much more aptly than the milieu. Even if the plot is extremely fantastic due to the artificial human, the main protagonists are real people whose characters are close to our understanding. Above all, there is the inventor Rotwang (Rudolf Klein-Rogge), whose character represents the thesis that genius and madness lie close together. This inventor, who apparently makes the impossible possible, who even becomes the creator of the artificial human being, is ultimately nothing more than a poor, jealous madman who was unable to overcome the illness of his childhood sweetheart. He tries to revive the love of his youth as a machine man. In the end, however, he is not satisfied with his own creation; as an old man, he still demands the young, blossoming creature at the center of the plot: Brigitte Helm.

This young actress is the best and most genuine newcomer in the film. She may not be as beautiful as her face on the stylized poster for Metropolis, but she is an artist who, according to informed sources, had to appear physically almost like a machine for the director. The greatest acting performance was given by Alfred Abel as Joh Fredersen. Abel undoubtedly had a very rewarding role that suited him exceptionally well.

The other actors, the afore-mentioned Gustav Froehlich as Freder, Joh Fredersen's son, Fritz Rasp as the schemer, Theodor Loos as Josaphat, Heinrich George as the guardian of the heart machine, Erwin Biswanger as number 11 811, Beatrice Garga, Anny Hintze, Margarete Lanner, Helen von Münchhofen, Hilde Wortscheff, Heinrich Gotho, Olaf Storm, Hanns Leo Reich and all the others who cannot be named here, were also excellent. Also worth mentioning are the sculptures by Walter Schultze-Mittendorf, the costume designs by Aenne Willkomm and the costumes themselves, which were made in the Ufa workshops and by Hermann I. Kaufmann.

Fritz Lang was able to work with this unheard-of living and dead material, with these means he created a movie that is one of the greatest experiences, and yet the course of the plot was not always clearly expressed in his direction.

So there is a gaping dichotomy in this movie, on the one hand the achievements of the year 2000, on the other a mentality and amount of work that we have already overcome 50 or more years ago. Yet Metropolis is a cinematic tour de force. Metropolis is a milestone in German cinema.

Of course, there is much more to write about this movie. Suffice it to say that it was made possible by the quality of our technology, by the excellent Schüfftan process, and that the evening at the Ufa Palast am Zoo was a very big premiere evening. The leading authorities and representatives of art, science and literature had come to see the festive performance. The atmosphere made it clear how important this premiere was. The never-ending applause brought the creators and collaborators of the film back to the stage again and again, including Gottfried Huppertz, who had provided the accompanying music and conducted himself. The Ufa press department itself had published a special edition of the Ufa magazine under the editorship of Stefan Lorant, which was tastefully decorated. The Ufa Pavilion, where the film will be shown from the 11th of this month, has been coated with a silver layer, which makes the building glow with a peculiar brilliance and shows the passing audience in the city what an important work is being shown. If advertising is justified, it is for this film.



HANS-WALTHER BETZ

The Raw Material "Metropolis."

In: Der Film (Berlin) vol. 12, no. 1, January 15, 1927.

The symbolist film poem "Metropolis" is not a drama of fate, but a drama of life, which grows out of an everyday corner of the earth in a shadowy and inescapable way, and speaks to the viewer of the most primitive everyday misery and the misery of the soul. Above the real events, mystically dark and eternally mysterious, above human misery and human hope, the sky arches, the inexorable providence of an experience, powerful in force and effect.

Thea von Harbou has placed all the events that can bind and fulfill people in a world that is timeless and full of a delicate, iridescent fairy-tale glow, a world of spinning Ferris wheels and soaring skyscrapers. There is the realm of intangible symbols that roar in full, heavy chords and finally melt into a harmony that could hardly be written more purely, painfully, and beguilingly.

There is a girl, delicate and weak in her blondness, who looks anxiously at life, immersing herself completely in the darkness of never resolved magical signs that banish the confused meaning of existence with a naïve seriousness rooted deep in feeling and sanctified by the worship of the soul. Thus these hard men, these tortured women of labor, are once again lured into the heart by the longing for the world, but their sacrifice, which the sacrificing superhuman offers himself on the altar of a deity never fully grasped, but feared and suspected, triumphs over all longing, over all love and all hate.

The Uberhuman -- the engineer who delusionally set out to become the creator of a life that would pass through all days without pleasure or suffering, who in his visionary rapture is closer to eternal goals than the heap of these everyday beings around him -- is shattered by his own delusion. His machine-man is doomed to destruction, as is everything that lives a natural life around him. His agonizing striving, which has become a concept in a walking mechanism, tears down all human barriers, unleashes the deepest forces of instinct in a staggering crowd.

Finally, the beloved, the rich man who knows no misery, sees: knowledge dazzles him. He is actually Parcival, who had to go through all the hardships before he became aware of love. This figure is taken from life, frighteningly true and upliftingly beautiful, a vibration of the animalistic, who wields the scepter of the scene with bold gestures.

These people in "Metropolis" pass each other and go part of their way together, they reveal the poetic content of this fantastic drama, they are figures full of uncanny life in which the author's thematic problems are justified.

What Thea von Harbou has captured in these ambiguous characters is probably the personal experience of the creator, who has grown tired of his creatures. In dark premonitions, compressed into colorful, fantastic images, "Metropolis" does not create a world of flourishing life, but is a poem that expresses emotional concerns in passionately moved feelings. It hides more of the painful truth than it reveals.

A conventional philosophy is not called upon to put the probe of its wisdom on a film work full of the powerful power of a poem to test its worth or worthlessness. In the end, it was up to the pantomime to prove that creative art, beyond Harbou's creative power, gives objective validity to a work of such dimensions.



METROPOLIS IN AMERICA

Debates about the adaptation and first reviews after its American premiere on
March 6, 2027:

ANON.

Studio Jottings -- \$2,000,000 German Film

In: *New York Times* (16 January 1927)

THE Ufa production, "Metropolis," which is said to have met with great success in Berlin, is to be released over here by Famous Players. Prints of this production are now in the Astoria studio. Because it will require very careful cutting to bring this picture down from sixteen reels to twelve, there is a chance that it will not be presented here until next Autumn. This film is said to have cost \$2,000,000, and on its success depends the life of Ufa. The story deals with a world where the workers live underground, and an inventor, further to control them, invents an artificial or "Robot" woman. She is made by imprisoning the living model in a glass cylinder, and then the machine "woman" is molded from her. The "Robot," however, turns out to be a "revolutionary machine woman," and incites the workers to revolt. She brings about disaster. Maria, the heroine of the story, is rescued by her sweetheart. The effect of the Robot woman is obtained by the use of elastic plaster, with which Brigitte Helm, the actress who plays the rôle, is covered. This plaster allows free play to the eyes and mouth without cracking or losing its shape. Miss Helm is said never before to have acted in front of the camera. Fritz Lang directed this film, the supervisor having been Erich Pommer, who is now in Hollywood.

RANDOLPH BARTLETT

German Film Revision Upheld as Needed Here

In: *New York Times* (13 March 1927)

GERMAN FILM REVISION UPHELD AS NEEDED HERE

By RANDOLPH BARTLETT.

I AM getting just a little bit tired of the attitude taken by certain writers and other commentators, that anything done to a German moving picture to prepare it for American audiences is automatically and inevitably wrong. I am prepared to support in some detail the opposite position—that with possibly two exceptions, the successes of the German productions in America have been largely due to expert editing in this country.

In certain elements of picture making the Germans have achieved outstanding supremacy. First of all, perhaps, is the element of force. In productions like "Metropolis" there is breath-taking power. In others, such

motive which it represented had to be replaced by another.

A laugh-inspiring bit in a tragic moment was removed from "The Loves of Pharaoh." The hero and heroine were being stormed by a mob, and whenever a "stone" hit any person or any hard substance, it bounced. It was perfect Keystone.

These are mild samples. In the last seven or eight years I have been closely in touch with most of the important productions brought

[. . .] Read more [here](#)

HERMAN G. SCHEFFAUER

An Impression of the German Film Metropolis
In: *New York Times* (6 March 1927)

FRITZ LANG, the German producer, has accomplished a monumental task—the placing of “Metropolis” upon the screen. The title is derived from a novel by his wife, Thea von Harbou, who was also the author of two other grandiose films, “The Indian Mausoleum” and “Siegfried.” For almost two years the author and producer have been working on this “light drama”—working with thousands of hands and with millions of German marks and American dollars—for the film is an “Ufa” production, and the “Ufa” is a combination of American capital and German training. The territory of Neu Babelsberg, between Berlin and Potsdam, was the scene of tremendous happenings, the rise and fall of a strange iron community, of desperate undertakings, of cataclysms of nature, of eruptions of maddened humanity, of the appalling experiments of an inventor bent upon creating an artificial human being, of the triumph of the Moloch Machine over man and the revolt of Man against the Machine. Now and again whispers made their way to the public—whispers of the great doings at the creation of “Metropolis”—of the epic action and the technical triumphs which were to make this film a masterpiece of masterpieces.

[...]

York. But the Babel, the Paradise and the Inferno of "Metropolis" are all sublimated visions of the real America, even where they are meretricious, and that must be accounted as an achievement in itself—a triumph for the vision and creative power of the German author, producers and actors. They see, for better or for worse, America from another angle than ours and this perspective gives the whole a touch of the ideal—just as distance in space often gives us the detachment which is inherent in distance in time. With some of its excrescences lopped off, "Metropolis" will bid fair to become one of the master-films of the times.

"Metropolis," which now is on view at the Rialto, was originally in sixteen reels. For this country it has been cut down to nine. Some idea of the enormous task of producing this film can be gathered from figures furnished by Frederick Wynne-Jones, managing director for Ufa in New York.

Work on this picture involved 310 days and sixty nights. It cost \$1,500,000 and nearly 2,000,000 feet of negative was exposed. There were 25,000 men and 11,000 women extras, 750 children and 25 Chinese. More than 11,000 of the men had shaven heads. The costumes cost 2,000,000 marks and 3,500 pairs of shoes were bought. Altogether 1,600,000 marks was paid out in salaries. Fifty automobiles were in use during the busiest moments on this production.

The trimming of this production is said, by those who saw it in its original form, to have improved it. The names of the characters had been changed for the showings in the United States.

For the full text, click [here](#)

MORDAUNT HALL

A Technical Marvel

In: *New York Times* (7 March 1927)

Nothing like "Metropolis," the ambitious Ufa production that has created wide international comment, has been seen on the screen. It, therefore, stands alone, in some respects, as a remarkable achievement. It is a technical marvel with feet of clay, a picture as soulless as the manufactured woman of its story. Its scenes bristle with cinematic imagination, with hordes of men and women and astounding stage settings. It is hardly a film to be judged by its narrative, for despite the fantastic nature of the story, it is, on the whole, unconvincing, lacking in suspense and at times extravagantly theatric. It suggests a combination of a preachment on capital and labor in a city of the future, an R. U. R. idea and something of Mrs. Shelley's "Frankenstein." Its moral is that the brains and the hands fail when the heart (love) does not work with them. The brains represent capital, and the hands, labor.

The production itself appears to have been a Frankenstein model to the story. Fritz Lang, the famous German director who was responsible for the "Siegfried" film, handled the making of the photodrama. Occasionally it strikes one that he wanted to include too much and then that all one anticipates does not appear.

[...]

For the full text, click [here](#)

SIME

Metropolis

In: *Variety* (16 March 1927)

"Metropolis" has mass appeal over here, but without class appeal of any character. It's a weird story, visionary all of the time, without any degree of unusual imagination and oftentimes monotonous. Withal, a puzzling film that might deceive the most expert picture showman, either way. Yet it holds something that holds the picture audience and will draw to a picture house.

That may be its weirdness or its production or photography or subject matter of 100 years hence or so, or its attempted massiveness of scenes—or that it reels off like a Henry Ford dream—mechanical—human labor of the future.

Without a press sheet exactly what is striven for must be doped out. It appears to be that the mechanical can never wholly substitute for the human labor, nor must Capital entirely exhaust its working people or that the human physical elements may never be mechanically transposed.

These things will fling an ordinary picture audience at their limitations into a turmoil of thought, meanwhile held to some suspense by the supposed vastness of it all; big machinery halls, the huge crowds of labor people; mythical ultra-modern city of 100 years hence with its underground living abode for the laborers, or the perpetual lock step with its dirge that runs throughout the film.

After all of this for the serious

[...]

For the full text, click [here](#)

IRIS BARRY

Metropolis

In: *The Spectator (London)* (26 March 1927)

If "Metropolis" fails to be quite a great film, the fault lies, not with its brilliant German producers, nor with its subject matter, nor with the actual treatment of this picture-parable of life next century. It fails because the cinema as yet fails to be quite adequate as a means of expression.

Here on the screen is a concrete picture of a great city of the future, with its soaring skyscrapers, its aerial traffic-bridges, its clouds of little aeroplanes buzzing about like gnats, its smokeless air, its labour-saving dwellings, its intricate electrical devices and its dependence on machinery. The imagination of Fritz Lang, the director, and of the studio-architects and designers who have brought this vision to "life" proved adequate enough here. The film shows us the making of an artificial human being: shows us television. We can accept these miracles. It shows us, grimly, the standardized mankind which a future civilization keeps buried deep in the bowels of the earth, and uses only as machine-fodder, mere slaves to the machinery on which—we can quite believe—everything depends. These too we can believe in, for we know and recognize and accept these manual workers with their weary backs, heavy hands and dull, hopeless eyes. We can feel with them and for them, when they rebel and destroy the machinery that enslaves them.

But I fear that the intelligent part of the audiences that see "Metropolis" will find it very difficult to admire the peacock-strewn pleasure gardens of the future, in which the free and gilded inhabitants of the skyscrapers of the future disport themselves, heedless of the tragic workmen deep below. It is sad, too, to find that men of the future dress just as hideously as do those of to-day. But the costume is not very convincing, anyhow, in "Metropolis": and though part of the film is conceived in an expressionist mood, and part of it quite naturalistically, some of it is mere picture-postcard. The expressionist parts are far and away the best, and the workmen turn out better than their masters.

The weaknesses of the cinema are most apparent in the story. It is pure melodrama on the D. W. Griffiths plan, and frankly treated as such. So grandiose a theme as that which "Metropolis" attempts to develop demanded, of course, something on the epic scale. The cinema, even here at its best, and full as it is of invention and thrill, is still only at the mental age of seventeen. It is still—quite rightly—far more concerned with its medium than with what its medium may most magnificently express. We cannot delude ourselves about this : for it is a fact.

Yet "Metropolis" is by far the most nearly adult picture we have seen. There are moments when it touches real greatness : in its handling of crowds, not for the sake only of the spectacle, but for what emotion the movement of the crowd can express. Its architecture is beautiful, its pictorial composition frequently superb. The clothing of a robot in human flesh provides as great a thrill as anyone could wish : and there are two other great moments. One comes when the robot, presenting the appearance of the heroine exactly but for a subtle spiritual difference, winks at John Masterman. This gesture, which might so easily have been merely comic, has the effect of some highly dramatic, rhetorical phrase in an Elizabethan play. It tells us everything about the robot. The other moment, which passes half-unperceived, comes when

No. 7, the sturdy foreman of the workers, seeing them revelling amid the ruins of the machinery, recalls them to their slave-mood by a shrill whistle. That tells us everything about the workers.

The photography of "Metropolis" is absolutely brilliant : some of the acting is fine, particularly when it is stylized. Most

of the sub-titles are quite atrocious and many of them highly unnecessary. The one which was essential—explaining that though the robot was created to preach submission to the workers, it in fact preached revolution—was omitted. The moral is, of course, that though man might create mechanical man, even the degree of humanity the machine possessed would endow it with that capacity for disobedience and revolt which has distinguished man since Adam.

I wonder how the audiences in cinemas in the South Wales mining districts and in Glasgow will regard this film? And whether the members of the Coal Owners' Association have been invited to see it?

Iris Barry (1895 – 22 December 1969) was a film critic and curator. In the 1920s she helped establish the original London Film Society, and was the first curator of the film department of the Museum of Modern Art, New York City in 1935.



H.G. WELLS

Mr. Wells Reviews a Current Film
In: *New York Times* (17 April 1927)

I HAVE recently seen the silliest film. I do not believe it would be possible to make one sillier, and as this film sets out to display the way the world is going, I think "The Way the World Is Going" may well concern itself with this film. It is called "Metropolis," it comes from the great Ufa studios in Germany, and the public is given to understand that it has been produced at enormous cost. It gives in one abiding concentration almost every possible foolishness, cliché, platitude and muddlement about mechanical progress and progress in general, served up with a sauce of sentimentality that is all its own.

It is a German film, and there have been some amazingly good German films before they began to cultivate bad work under cover of a protective quota. And this film has

For the full text, click [here](#)

