



Phone: (02) 8007 6824

Email: info@dc.edu.au

Web: dc.edu.au

2018 HIGHER SCHOOL CERTIFICATE
COURSE MATERIALS

HSC English Advanced

Module A: Metropolis
Term I – Week 7

Name

Class day and time

Teacher name

Term 1 – Week 7 – Theory

- Film Analysis
- Homework

FILM ANALYSIS

SEGMENT SIX (THE MACHINE-MAN)

After discovering the workers' clandestine meeting, **Freder's controlling, glacial father** conspires with mad scientist Rotwang to create an evil, robotic Maria duplicate, in order to manipulate his workers and preach riot and rebellion. Fredersen could then use force against his rebellious workers that would be interpreted as justified, causing their self-destruction and elimination. Ultimately, robots would be capable of replacing the human worker, but for the time being, the robot would first put a stop to their revolutionary activities led by the good Maria: "Rotwang, give the Machine-Man the likeness of that girl. I shall sow discord between them and her! I shall destroy their belief in this woman --!" After Joh Fredersen leaves to return above ground, Rotwang predicts doom for Joh's son, knowing that he will be the workers' mediator against his own father: "You fool! Now you will lose the one remaining thing you have from Hel - your son!" Rotwang comes out of hiding, and confronts Maria, who is now alone deep in the catacombs (with open graves and skeletal remains surrounding her). He pursues her - in the **expressionistic scene**, he chases her with the beam of light from his bright flashlight, then corners her, and captures her when she cannot escape at a dead-end.

The next day, Freder vainly searches for Maria in the cathedral. He listens as a monk in the pulpit preaches:

Verily I say unto you, the days spoken of in the Apocalypse are nigh!...(The monk quotes from the Bible) **And I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet-colored beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten thorns.** And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet color, having a golden cup in her hand. And upon her forehead was a name written, mystery, **Babylon the Great, the mother of abominations of the earth.**

Freder then addresses a life-sized statue of the **Grim Reaper** in a display of seven statues representing the **Seven Deadly Sins**: "If you had come earlier, you wouldn't have scared me. But now I beg you: Stay away from me and my beloved!"

Later, Freder tells Josaphat that he will continue to look for Maria: "I must go. I must look on my own for the person to whom 11811 was supposed to lead me."

In Rotwang's laboratory, the Machine-Man sits, looking like an Egyptian deity. Light streams from above. Rotwang takes its hands and speaks to it, revealing his ultimate diabolical plan to displace Fredersen as Master and to take power himself:

You will destroy Joh Fredersen - him and his city and his son.

Then Rotwang threatens the kidnapped Maria, stalking her and announcing his intentions: "Come! It is time to give the Machine-Man your face!" As he bends her over a table, she screams out - and her cries for help through a grating in the ceiling are heard by Freder, who happens to be walking by in the street. Freder attempts to save her (and enters Rotwang's residence, but is trapped inside by doors that open and close on their own), but her pleas are muffled by Rotwang, and she is taken deeper into his laboratory. He calls out for Maria, knowing she is there after finding her scarf, but he cannot locate her.

In the film's most celebrated **creation-transformation scene** set in Rotwang's laboratory, the mad scientist has attached Maria (lying horizontally in a cylindrical clear chamber/capsule) by wired connections and a helmet to the Machine-Man. His laboratory is filled with bubbling beakers of liquid, dials, switches, flashing electrical circuits and arcs, and other contraptions. When he turns a switch, lightning sparks of energy descend from a round ball in the ceiling to the head and foot of the cylinder. Luminous, glowing rings surround and move vertically atop the standing robot, as its circulatory system is energized with Maria's life force, and **Maria's face dissolves into the face of the android**. The real Maria loses consciousness as the **robot likeness becomes flesh and blood**.

According to Andreas Huyssen in *The Vamp and the Machine: Technology and Sexuality in Fritz Lang's Metropolis*:

- **The doubling of Maria**, the use of religious symbolism, the embodiment of technology in a woman-robot and Freder's complex relationship to women and machines, sexuality and technology, gives us a key to the film's **social and ideological imaginary**.
- Historically and stylistically Lang's *Metropolis*, which was **conceived in 1924 during a visit to the United States (including New York)** and released in January 1927, is a **syncretist mixture of expressionism and Neue Sachlichkeit**, and, more significantly, a syncretist mixture of the two diametrically opposed views of technology we can ascribe to these two movements. More precisely, the film works through this conflict and tries to resolve it. Ultimately the film, even though it pretends to hold on to the **humanitarian anti-technological ethos of expressionism**, comes down on the side of *Neue Sachlichkeit*, and the machine vamp plays the crucial role in resolving a seemingly **irreconcilable contradiction**.

Neue Sachlichkeit

The **New Objectivity** (in German *Neue Sachlichkeit*) is a term used to characterise the attitude of public life in Weimar Germany as well as the art, literature, music, and architecture created to adapt to it. Rather than the goal of philosophical objectivity, it was meant to imply a **turn towards practical engagement with the world—an all-business attitude**, understood by Germans as intrinsically American: "The *Neue Sachlichkeit* is Americanism, cult of the objective, the hard fact, the predilection for functional work, professional conscientiousness, and usefulness".



- For his indictment of modern technology as oppressive and destructive, which prevails in most of the narrative tradition, the context of the film makes it clear that in every respect, it is **male domination and control which are at stake**: control of the real Maria who represents a threat to the world of high technology and its system of psychic and sexual repression; domination of the woman-robot by Rotwang who orders his creature to perform certain tasks; control of the labor process by the Master of Metropolis who plans to replace inherently uncontrollable living labor by robots; and, finally, control of the workers' actions through Frederson's cunning use of the machine-woman, the false Maria.
- On this plane, then, the film suggests a simple and **deeply problematic homology between woman and technology**, a homology which results from **male projections**: Just as **man invents and constructs technological artifacts which are to serve him and fulfill his desires, so woman, as she has been socially invented and constructed by man, is expected to reflect man's needs and to serve her master**. Furthermore, just as the technological artifact is considered to be the quasi-natural extension of man's natural abilities (the lever replacing muscle power, the computer expanding brain power), so woman, in male perspective, is considered to be the natural vessel of man's reproductive capacity, a mere bodily extension of the male's procreative powers. But neither technology nor woman can ever be seen as solely a natural extension of man's abilities. They are always also qualitatively different and thus threatening in their otherness. It is this **threat of otherness which causes male anxiety and reinforces the urge to control and dominate that which is other (this post-war anxiety is consistent with the need to redeem and restore a damaged masculinity in the wake of Germany's World War One defeat)**

According to feminist film critic Gabriela Stoicea in *Re-Producing the Class and Gender Divide*:

- Maria a serious **threat to paternal authority** and to the **social divide between the rich and the poor**, it then makes sense for the capitalist ruler to produce a uni-dimensional robot-like prototype-the incarnation of "pure" female sexuality cleansed of all maternal feelings.

According to critic R. L. Rutsky in *The Mediation of Technology and Gender*:

- The black, mechanical form of Rotwang's female robot - its form is feminine even before its birth, or rebirth, in the figure of Maria - serves to replace his lost love Hel, just as his black prosthetic hand replaces his lost one. Unlike Fredersen, whose possession of the woman/ mother takes place under the imprimatur of a **paternal, phallic law**, Rotwang must **piece together a simulated, mechanical copy**, onto which he will conjure the shape, and the inverted spirit, of the woman/mother. Rotwang, in other words, invests this technological replacement not only with an electrical, but with an emotional/spiritual charge. The **technological object-itself becomes defined by its reproducibility, by its status as a substitute**.

SEGMENT SEVEN (THE YOSHIWARA CLUB AND FALSE MARIA IN THE CATACOMBS)

In the next scene, the **evil False Maria, portrayed with her left eye drooping slightly shut**, is in the office of Master Fredersen - he orders her to initiate his plan:

I want you to visit those in the depths, in order to destroy the work of the woman in whose image you were created!

Freder rushes in, completely disoriented (the **camera image rotates and flashes**) to find Maria in the arms of his father, and he collapses, falling dangerously ill. On his sick bed, the feverish, delirious Freder notices an invitation given to his father from Rotwang - who "requests the pleasure of your company at dinner and to see a new Erotic Dancer." A group of wealthy, tuxedoed men, including Joh Fredersen and Rotwang, watch as the false Maria rises on a stage platform in the depraved nightclub, and begins her lascivious performance of an almost-nude, hip-swiveling Salome-style dance. The lustful men in the audience watch in amazement - their **lecherous, fixated eyeballs seen in a montage**. The erotic dancer is portrayed as the one that the cathedral monk had spoken of, the **whore of Babylon riding on a beast with seven heads**. "For her - all seven deadly sins!" The distraught Freder imagines, in a hallucination, that the Grim Reaper statue comes to life, playing a leg bone like a flute during her dance. In his vision, the Reaper swings his sharp scythe and cries out: "Death descends upon the city -- !"

The false Maria's dancing incites men, **lured to her treachery and seductiveness** at Yoshiwara's, to become angry and aggressive toward each other. Freder cannot believe what he hears, that Maria is having a dangerous effect on the city: "And this woman, at whose feet all sins are heaped is also named Maria." Freder asks: "The same woman who those in the depths look up to as a saint --?!" Freder reminds Josaphat: "Many now go to the city of the dead, to a woman who has proven herself as true as gold...But the mediator must appear!"

The Thin Man reports to Fredersen in his office: "Only their hope for a mediator is keeping the workers in check." "Whatever happens tonight," Fredersen instructs the Thin Man in his office, "it is my express order to let the workers do as they will..." Meanwhile, Rotwang holds the real Maria captive, telling her about Fredersen's ultimate plan to stir up rebellion among the workers, to have them abandon their machines, and then quell the workers with brutal force:

Joh Fredersen wants to let those in the depths use force and do wrong, so that he can claim the right to use force against them....When you spoke to your poor brothers, you spoke of peace, Maria...Today, a mouthpiece of Joh Fredersen is inciting them to rebel against him...

Maria is devastated by news of the false Maria: "She will destroy their belief in a mediator!" But then Rotwang informs her of his own double-cross: "...but I have tricked Joh Fredersen! Your double does not obey his will - only mine!" In the attic with Maria, Rotwang grows ever more intoxicated by his triumph over Fredersen: "And I tricked Fredersen twice over -! For I concealed from him that his son wants to be your brothers' mediator - and loves you -!".



At the same time, on the altar in the catacombs, the **false and fanatical robotic Maria preaches a new message of protest and violent revolt** to entice and agitate the working class to rebel:

You know that I have always spoken of peace...but your mediator has not come...You have waited long enough! Your time has come -! Who is the living food for the machines in Metropolis -!? Who lubricates the machine joints with their own blood -?! Who feeds the machines with their own flesh --?! Let the machines starve, you fools- ! Let them die -!! Kill them - the machines -!!

Freder and Josaphat proceed down into the catacombs where they find the **false Maria preaching dissension**, and aghast, Freder cries out twice: "You are not Maria -!!! YOU ARE NOT MARIA -! Maria speaks of peace, not killing -! This is not Maria -!!" One of the workers recognises Freder, and denounces him as the Master's son -- "Kill him, the dog, in his white silken fur - !!!" With his bare fists, Freder bravely fights off an assault of the workers, resulting in one of them being fatally stabbed. Another worker shouts out for them to abandon the underground workers' city: "Get your women, your sons, from the workers' city! Let no one stay behind! Death to the machines -!!!" After the workers march away en masse, as a ferocious, club-wielding mob, to destroy the machines in the Underground City, Josaphat and Freder attend to the wounded worker, who recognises that Freder is truly "faithful after all" - before he dies.



According to critic Michael Cowan in *The Heart Machine: "Rhythm" and Body in Weimar Film and Fritz Lang's Metropolis*:

- Rotwang's experiment, by infusing the robot with the life-force of organic rhythm, transforms what was an obedient machine—Rotwang's *Maschinenmensch*—into an **agent of uncontrollable sexual chaos**. In this sense, Rotwang also creates a precise counterpart to the controlling "heart machine" at the center of Fredersen's industrial city.
- False Maria also institutes an alternative **rhythmical spectacle** with her famous erotic dance at Yoshiwara's. In a scene reminiscent of Claire Lescot's sexualized soirées in *L'Inhumaine*, Maria arrives atop a giant pedestal held up by a circle of **nearly-nude black male figures bearing primitivist tribal attire**.
- Maria's subsequent **Josephine-Baker-style dance**—which Lang's editing stages as an **ever accelerating rhythmical frenzy**—will then **send her male audience into convulsions**, causing them to lose all self-control and attack one another before the stage.
- In terms of its effects upon its audience, **Maria's erotic spectacle recalls the belief, widespread in the early 20th century, that violent or erotic representations in the cinema could provoke an atavistic regression in spectators**. Through **editing, close-ups and superimposition**, Lang gradually reduces Maria's spectators to a collage of lustful eyes. Through this **emphasis on the staring eyes**, Lang presents the male audience here not so much as **voyeuristic**—in the sense of a **distanced, controlling gaze**—but rather as **mesmerised, Maria's rhythmical spectacle causing them to lose all self-control**.

According to Andrew Webber in *Fritz Lang's Metropolis: Cinematic Visions of Technology and Fear*:

- The extraordinary **montage of lustful kaleidoscopic eyes** that gaze at Maria presents a spectacle of male desire as fixated, in every sense, at the phallic stage.
- The montage of eyes can thus be understood as reproducing the uncanny effects of **technological proliferation, of the organic becoming artificial**
- The profusion of eyes in these cut-up visual effects would thus appear to match the classic form of the **Freudian uncanny**: the compulsively repetitive representation of the primal lack which is **male castration**.



According to Joséphine A. Zmolek in *Metropolis: A Vision of Power, Body and Myth*:

- In Freder's second hallucination, he sees the false Maria, Futura, in her lurid Salomé dance at Rotwang's house. He imagines the **Whore of Babylon, riding the beast of seven heads and ten horns**: The woman dressed in purple and scarlet, and glittered with gold and jewels and pearls, and she was holding a gold wine cup filled with the disgusting filth of her fornication; on her forehead was written a name, a cryptic name; "Babylon the Great, mother of all the prostitutes and all the filthy practices on the earth." (*Rev: 17:4-6, The Jerusalem Bible*)
- Jensen views the **polar Marias as epitomising "the division between the free rulers and the machine-like workers they control"**, contrasting humanity and the antagonist machine.
- Springer argues that False Maria represents the male fear of women and of machines. Springer provides: "Industrial-age machine bodies tended to be associated with phallic power whether they were pumped up male superheroes or aggressive phallic women like the robot Maria. 19th and early 20th century patriarchy used the machine metaphor to fortify its sense of power; **the machine as phallus declared men's invincible dominance over women**".



SEGMENT EIGHT (WORKER REBELLION)

Joh Fredersen breaks into Rotwang's attic. He battles with his old rival, overcoming him. Maria is free. She races to the city's town square where the workers and their families have assembled under the direction of the false Maria. She rallies them and urges them to follow her: "Women and men, let no one miss today -! Death to the machines -!!" She leads them to the elevators that take them to the machines. One woman declares there is total support for the worker revolution: "Not one man - or woman remained behind -!" - although the children have not been evacuated. After ripping through outer iron gates, the mob storms the M-Machine and rushes toward the Heart Machine, the power house of Metropolis. Grot closes the gate and tries to notify Fredersen. Using an advanced videophone-communications system, Joh Fredersen speaks with chief foreman Grot and learns of the impending crisis. He sternly orders: "Open the gates!" Grot warns Fredersen that if the Heart Machine is destroyed, it would shut down energy for the city: "If the Heart Machine is destroyed, the entire machine district will end up in ruins." Finally, Grot obeys Joh Fredersen's order and opens the gates. The workers race to the Heart Machine, and confront Grot who stands alone to defend the machine:

Have you gone mad - ?? If the Heart Machine is destroyed, the entire workers' city will be flooded -!!

But his warnings are ignored and he is overwhelmed. The false Maria causes the Heart Machine to overheat and short-circuit until it disintegrates, causing the pumps to stop turning which then **produces a cataclysmic flood**. After running from Rotwang's home, the real Maria comes upon the workers' city where she witnesses the **failure of the machines**. Water ruptures through the street and begins to flood the Underground City - the workers' quarters. She sounds the alarm in the transit, town-square area of the city with the giant gong and gathers some of the worker children together there to rescue them from the rising waters. The children clamor for high ground with arms outstretched, to be evacuated to safety.

The **exploding Heart Machine and M-Machine cause the lights of the city to extinguish**, witnessed by Joh Fredersen who now sits in his darkened high-rise office. The Thin Man informs the shocked Fredersen: "Do you know that your son is among the workers?" He asks: "I must know! Where is my son?!!!" The Thin Man replies: "Tomorrow, thousands will ask in fury and desperation: Joh Fredersen, where is my son -!", but Fredersen refuses to listen.

Grot finally gets the attention of the workers, who joyously and obliviously celebrate the machines' destruction by dancing in a large circle. He reprimands them for their senseless, irresponsible actions which brought about the destruction of their children:

Where are your children??! The city lies underwater, the shafts are completely flooded -!! Who told you to attack the machines, you idiots? Without them you'll all die!!"

They scream back an answer: "It's the witch's fault -!" He responds: "Find the witch, this is all her fault -! Strike her dead -!!" and leads them on a witch-hunt rampage to find "the witch."

Back at Yoshiwara's, the false Maria celebrates and dances with the tuxedoed men, urging them: "Let's all watch as the world goes to the devil!!".

According to feminist film critic Gabriela Stoicea in *Re-Producing the Class and Gender Divide*:

- The return to a repressed femininity had been announced from the very beginning of the rebellion by a **musical reference to the French Revolution**, in which thousands of women fought but were similarly excluded from politics by the end of the insurgency.
- In the sequence where the false Maria rallies all the adult inhabitants of the workers' city on the central plaza, a **shot of the female cyborg moving her head convulsively accompanies an acoustic reworking of the Marseillaise**. The same musical score continues in the next shot, in which two women run out of the tenements toward the camera. By the end of the film, however, no women remain in the crowd. The **renewed invisibility of workers' wives in the final shot of *Metropolis* suggests that motherhood has first been demonized, then put in its proper place along with hedonistic female sexuality, as male workers' patriarchal interests are reactivated**. If the upper and the lower classes cannot unite to pursue a common political goal, they can still co-exist peacefully in the face of a **common threat, namely woman, with all her excesses**.

According to critic Michael Cowan in *The Heart Machine: "Rhythm" and Body in Weimar Film and Fritz Lang's Metropolis*:

- Harbou's novel's obsessive preoccupation with stone and vital waters provided the groundwork for the famous flood sequence in the film version of *Metropolis*.
- The film recalls Harbou's **allegory of the spring (a symbol of the lush growth of springtime and fecundity)** in the many images of water smashing through the geometric stone buildings of the underground city. But while the film retains Harbou's critique of rationality, it largely plays down the positive connotations of the flood to present the unleashing of vital forces more specifically as a **source of danger**. Like the novel, the film draws a **direct parallel between the images of flooding water and the movement of the revolting workers as they tear down every barrier on their unstoppable flow toward the machine rooms**.
- This **formless flowing mass** is, of course, unmistakably coded as feminine, marked as it is by the presence of the workers' wives, who appear in this scene for the first time in the film. If this characterization of the masses as a feminine flood recalls the paranoid male fantasies investigated by Klaus Theweleit, it also recalls the understanding of primal rhythm by reformers like Bode, who **championed the rhythms of nature as a feminine, liquid element opposed to the masculine activity of rational segmentation**.
- The **cinema of rhythmic contagion** (reflected in False Maria's erotic dance in the Yoshiwara club) stands diametrically opposed to the heart machine, and it **must be brought under control at the end of the film**. As Siegfried Kracauer recognised, this exorcism occurs not only through the burning of the bad Maria, but also through **the re-ordering of the mass flood into a perfectly geometric mass ornament**. The crowd's unified and disciplined movement in the final handshake scene seems to suggest that the "heart machine"—mediating between the body and the intellect, nature and technology—has once again regained its function of **imposing order over life's formless flows**.



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According to Bergvall in *Apocalyptic Imagery in Fritz Lang's Metropolis*:

- The flooding of Metropolis can be likened to the Old Testament flood but it has an even stronger connection to these apocalyptic lines from Revelation. The flooding in the film is caused by a mob comprised of workers who have been incited by the robotic Maria, and indeed this overflowing, destructive mob is the manifestation of the apocalyptic beast. Lang brings this out through visual cues, since the mob scenes (both with the workers and later with the Metropolis elite) are depicted with the robotic Maria "striding the beast," just like the Whore of Babylon strides the dragon in the emblematic woodcut from: The satanic connotations of this beast become clear when the false Maria incites the mob to kill Freder, resulting in Georgy being stabbed in Freder's stead. Both mobs are unleashed in an apocalyptic Witches' Sabbath presided over by the false Maria, repeatedly called a "witch" in the intertitles.
- However, a Witches' Sabbath typically ends at the break of dawn with the tolling of church bells. In the film **this defeat of darkness by light is illustrated by the true Maria twice tolling a bell**, first to save the children from the flood and then, even more iconically, by swinging on a rope attached to the cathedral bell as she attempts to escape from Rotwang. This climactic scene is intercut with images of the robot woman being stripped of her disguise as Maria's double (as she is burned on the stake as a witch), and is followed by Freder overcoming Rotwang, who tumbles to his death at the base of the cathedral.

What does the scene of the flood, recalling its allusions to the Old Testament flood, suggest about the role of religion in Lang’s film? What perspective on religion is Lang offering by likening it to the mediator between the head and the hands (especially in light of the film’s final scene situated in front of a cathedral)?

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FINAL SEGMENT

As Maria finishes bringing the children to safe refuge, she is spotted by Grot and the mob, who believe that she misled them and tried to drown their children. Grot cries out: "The witch ! the witch -! There she is -! there she is -! Where are our children, you witch -?! Burn the witch. - To the stake with her!!!" Suspecting nothing, Maria tries to speak. But the mob roars and throws hammers at her. Maria is hit. Only at the last minute does she escape the mob's wrath. Pursued by the mob, Maria runs headlong into the revellers from Yoshiwara. Grot grabs the false Maria and orders: "To the stake with her -!" While laughing wickedly, she is dragged and hoisted onto a large pyre of wood, tied up to a column, and burned. In the confusion, Freder believes that his beloved real Maria is being sacrificed in the growing flames, and screams out in despair while held back by the crowd: "MARIA --!!!" As the flames leap upward and burn the flesh of the false Maria, her **metallic robotic shape metamorphoses and dissolves** into view.

During the witch-burning, Rotwang confronts the real Maria nearby. The now-insane scientist, fearing the mob will seek retribution against him, also believes she is: "Hel -! My Hel -!!" He chases her into the cathedral, where she hangs onto a swinging bell rope, sounding another alarm. When Freder realizes that the burning witch is the false robotic Maria, he looks up at the cathedral where he sees Rotwang pursuing the real Maria, and he rushes to come to her rescue. As they fight on the cathedral's rooftop, watched by the workers (and his horrified father) standing below, Josaphat tells Grot that the children are actually safe: "Your children...saved -- !!!" - the workers are overjoyed by the news. In a struggle on the cathedral's rooftop, Rotwang loses his balance, tumbles backwards and falls to his death. Maria is saved and vindicated.

Joh Fredersen is convinced to **reconcile with the workers**, after having seen his son battle against the evil Rotwang, and demonstrate his strong love for Maria. The workers march in **disciplined formation to the front entrance of the cathedral**, where the reformer Maria urges Freder to be the mediator between Grot (representing the workers), and his ruling father/Master Joh Fredersen.

There is the promise of a new, more equal synergy between the rulers and the ruled:

Head and hands want to join together, but they don't have the heart to do it...Oh, mediator, show them the way to each other....

Freder joins the hand of Grot (representing Labor) and his father (representing Capital) - becoming the Mediator between the classes, united by the Heart in Love:

THE MEDIATOR BETWEEN HEAD AND HANDS MUST BE THE HEART!**According to Anton Kaes in “Metropolis: City, Cinema, Modernity”:**

- The ending of *Metropolis*—the **reconciliation between capital and labor**, which has been called simplistic, foolish, reactionary, and worse—is in fact an **accurate expression of contradictory tendencies in the mid-1920s that have to do with German reactions to modernity, technological progress, and instrumental rationality.**
- Modernity, in Max Weber's often-quoted definition, means above all the **progressive disenchantment (*Entzauberung*) of the world, a result of myth and religion being superseded by rational and secular thought.** Intertwined with the rise of capitalism, free-market economy, democracy, and mass culture, **modernity had a more destabilising effect in Germany** than in France, England, and the United States because Germany lacked an established democratic tradition. **Everything capitalist modernity stood for—its challenge to authority, its drive for unbridled economic competition, its disavowal of spiritual and religious values, and its commercialisation of culture—collided head-on with still intact patriarchal, feudal, and authoritarian structures.**
- Although the German battle against modernity goes back to the mid-nineteenth century (culminating in World War I), it was the Weimar Republic, Germany's first democratically elected government that revealed the contradictions within modernity itself. In their magisterial *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (Dialectic of enlightenment, 1947), Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer voiced the suspicion that **the rationality characteristic of the joint projects of enlightenment and modernity might rest on a logic of domination and oppression.** Writing in the aftermath of two world wars, of Hiroshima and the holocaust, they argued that the desire to dominate nature entailed the domination of human nature; the quest for human emancipation was thus transmuted and hardened into a system of universal oppression. The legacy of the Enlightenment spirit that informed modernity meant, in short, **the triumph of instrumental rationality.**
- *Metropolis* lays out a host of reactions to the nexus of modernity, capitalism, and rationality—including religion, superstition, irrationalism, sexual abandon, Expressionist idealism, and revolutionary zeal—only to reaffirm in the end a somewhat modified instrumental rationality.
- Contextually, both the **failed socialist revolution of 1918-19** and the successful fascist takeover in 1933 responded to forces unleashed by modernity in Germany, *Metropolis incorporates both reactions to modernity*, the failed workers' revolt (in the film cynically masterminded by capital) as well as the insidious right-wing takeover that stands for what might be called “oppression with a heart.” At the end the workers again march in formation to watch their foreman shake hands with management, as Freder and Maria, the idealistic young couple, look on.

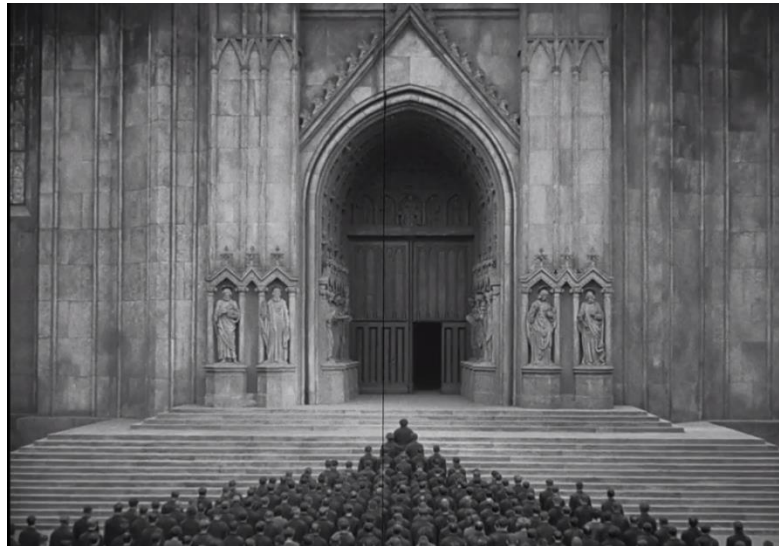


- Who then is excluded from this harmonious ending? Rotwang falls to his death from the rooftop of the Gothic cathedral while fighting with Freder, and the female robot is burned at the stake. **What remains is a transformed community that again embraces technology, a technology that is now free, the film insinuates, from “Jewish control” and romantically infused instead with German spirituality.** It is the kind of community (*Gemeinschaft*, not *Gesellschaft*) that reactionary modernists such as Jünger, Werner Sombart, and Oswald Spengler had emphatically valorised in their writings throughout the 1920s. ***Metropolis's linkage of modern technology, cultural pessimism, and totalitarian ideology prefigures the National Socialists' resolve to emancipate technology from capitalist exchange and “Jewish materialism.”***
- *Metropolis's* ideological trajectory is part of a larger debate among German sociologists and philosophers about the **“intellectual and spiritual revolution,”** which, Ernst Troeltsch stated in 1921, was a “revulsion against drill and discipline, against the ideology of success and power...against intellectualism...against the big *Metropolis* and the unnatural...against the rule of money and prestige.” This reaction against capitalist modernity was itself perceived as revolutionary and utopian in the 1920s. Troeltsch put his hopes in the youth movement, and it is no coincidence that *Metropolis* also places the task of spiritual renewal in the hands of the young.
- Lang's *Metropolis* offers one of the most fascinating and complex contributions to the vigorous 1920s discourse on modernity. Its **message is ambivalent, suggesting that the undoing of modernization and technological progress would bring only self-destruction.** This ambivalence is evident in the images that **fetishise technology even as they display its cataclysmic power.** The **machine is the object of fascination and terror, of savagery and myth; its faceless power contrasts with the individualism of the German Expressionist narrative, in which a son rebels against his father and an entire industrial system.** Clearly the Expressionist utopia of Georg Kaiser's *Gas plays* and Ernst Toiler's *Die Maschinenstürmer* (The machine wreckers), which advocate revolution and a radically anti-technological humanism, had itself become dystopian in the context of the modern industrial society that Germany unquestionably was in 1927. Still it was impossible to dismiss **utopian Expressionism, with its idealistic, impractical, and old-fashioned emphasis on the heart (and, in a wider sense, on community) and its rebellion against unrestrained instrumental rationality.**
- The idealism of *Metropolis* should be seen, however, not as a “fault” of the film but as a historically explainable and valid attempt to fight those tendencies of modernity that have undeniably shown themselves to be cruel and dehumanising. Viewed in its historical context, the film thus **dramatises the reaction of German modernism against an overpowering modernity,** one that had undermined and negated its emancipatory and utopian potential.



Term 1 – Week 7 – Homework

As the workers move forward behind Grot towards the cathedral, they are **advancing in the shape of a wedge, returning to the rigid, symmetrical patterning of the workers in the early scenes. The chaotic surge of people in the scenes of destruction has been curbed, but it has been replaced by rigidity and orderliness.**



Retrospectively, this organisation of bodies into a tight formation is something we associate with the **mass rallies of the Third Reich.**

There is also another contextual association. In his analysis of the undercurrents to the thinking of the members of the Freikorps (the extreme rightwing militia group of the Weimar years, i.e. future Nazis), **Klaus Theweleit** devotes a whole section of his analysis of *Metropolis* to **metaphors of floods and flowing.** Repeatedly, the Freikorps used such metaphors to **refer to the hated Bolshevism**, which had to be opposed by the rigidity of the members of the Freikorps, **characterised by Theweleit as 'soldier males':** 'If anything is to move, it should be ... as *one* man, in formation; on command as a line, a column a block; as a wedge, a tight unit. Death to all that flows' (1987: 230). Unfortunately, that is also what we see at the end of *Metropolis*.

What perspective does the ending of *Metropolis* offer? Do you think the film’s final utopian vision suggests that there can be equality between capital and labour? If not, does the ending represent, as Siegfried Kracauer has argued, a ‘policy of appeasement’, in other words, ‘that the industrialist acknowledges the heart for the purpose of manipulating it’?

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You may attach additional writing paper if needed.

End of homework

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