

Metropolis: A Vision of Power, Body and Myth

The outstanding characteristics of *Metropolis* revolve around power, body, and myth. As the reader will see, the majority of critical essays about the film revolve around power, the phallic interpretation of gaze and the Freudian interpolation of mythic structure. They tend to ignore myth as the narrative structure supportive of the embodied experience of ritual and Lang's extraordinary exploration of the interaction between body and machine. Under Lang's direction, the workers of *Metropolis* unite to become one body; the workers become parts of the machine. Rotwang himself is a cyborg, and Futura the sentient robot becomes more human than her human counterpart. As any student of early modernist film knows, mythological archetypes dominated German expressionist film. Upon closer scrutiny of the appropriation of mythic structure, a polysemy of texts emerge. This interaction of myth, body and machine is precisely what makes possible multiple interpretations of *Metropolis*.

Through animistic, rationalistic, gothic, modernistic, and posthumanistic musings, the author hopes to invigorate continued discussion into the Lang *Metropolis* text as exemplar of the overarching zeitgeist of modernity.

Enlightenment and Myth

Walter Benjamin exemplified the paradox of modernity in his analysis of the collector:

Modernism sees itself as enlightenment capable of containing the mythic chthonic violence of the collector's destructive passion. The opposition between modernist and collector is emblematic of the opposition between enlightenment and myth, that is, of myth as a form of reversion to the past that does violence to modern life. (qtd. in Abbas, 1989, p. 217)

Like our own time, representations of myth and the occult are reduced to shock and novelty exemplified in contemporary Hollywood spectacle. Still, these arcane systems form the bedrock of our cultural genealogy. The "violence to modern life" does not lie in the myth in and of itself, but in the blind faith that is imposed upon that myth. The mythic ideal then becomes ideology; false consciousness that supports any ideology is the true violence. An essential contribution of modernity was that it pressed for social awareness which demanded social responsibility in a time when shock and novelty were the flavor of the day. The city landscape had become the allegorical cauldron of modernity: the metallic metropolis evoked the rational machinations of science and the ancient symbolic and mythological repertoires were edited for their superfluous ornamentation. The dirty-nails grit of the common man and the detached reign of the bourgeoisie lived in vertical exclusivity.

I am the collector and *Metropolis*, the subject/object of my "gaze," is a perfect vehicle for my exploration into modernity, the anticipation of post-modernity and the post-human *machina sapiens*. According to Abbas:

One of Benjamin's most important insights on the relation between past and future, arrived at in part though a reflection on the problematics of collecting, is that as the past itself can be rewritten, so that the past does not lie safely in the past, so the future too, the not yet written, does not lie safely in the future...If this is indeed the case, then language, memory, and experience, these constituent elements of our modernity, are the genuine sites of a cultural politics: both a politics of resistance to the potential erosion of language, memory, and experience in modernity; and a politics of anticipation alert to emancipatory strategies. (1989, p. 237)

Within the “destructive”, even iconoclastic, intent of the collector, dismemberment results and here we find the optimistic potential suggested by Abbas. It is interesting to note, too, that Armour (1978) quotes Lang saying, “In these days when people no longer have religious beliefs, when we no longer believe in Hell, the only thing we fear is pain, and pain is the result of violence in some form or other” (p. 35). To equate destruction with violence may, in and of itself, not be the same thing; still their complementary personalities work well within the theme of the collector and the architecture of power in gaze.

The Collector’s Gaze

The figure of the collector, more attractive the longer one observes it, has not been given its due attentions so far. One would imagine no figure more tempting to the romantic storytellers. The type is motivated by dangerous though domesticated passions. (Walter Benjamin qtd. in Abbas, 1989, p. 216)¹

As pointed out by David Bathrick and Andreas Huyssen (1989, p.15), Benjamin’s collector, “preserves experience in the objects he collects, for a time when authentic experience no longer seems possible, when only a semblance of experience is still possible via the collected objects.” Within the preservation of experience of an object, the precipice of fetishization is dangerously near, and yet, the collector expresses an affinity to harness the “authentic experience” even though the “authentic experience” is but a simulacra of the original object. The simulacra, then, is a reconstruction of the deconstructed authenticity. What remains is a new invention, removed from its original context and redefined to serve in its new function. The artifact, objectified by the gaze of the collector (Abbas, 1989), is vulnerable to a social construct of reinterpretation. If you see gaze as the furthering of the patriarchal system of power relationships, then it is a phallic act of penetration. However, Foucault (1985) revealed that within the early Greek texts, gaze was the “genesis of desire,” not because the desired was objectified, but rather the eyes were an “opening through which the soul is reached” (p. 40). Gaze then became the exact opposite, yonic as opposed to phallic:

Like Benjamin’s collector, we too stand at a crossroads, looking to a past, telling a story with the texts from that past. Rereading as collecting, collecting as producing a new gaze at the objects, a gaze that refuses to subject the object to preconceived notions, a gaze that opens up the texts of the past to the queries of the present and discovers new visions, new layers in a body of works that remains as alive as ever. (Bathrick & Huyssen, 1989, p.16)

I find Abbas’, Bathrick’s and Huyssen’s interpretations of Benjamin’s collector provocative, metaphorically appropriate of modernity, and hence, I use these analyses to springboard into my investigation of *Metropolis*.

A brief review of the various philosophies of corporealism and anti-corporealism, and the locus of the mind/body split seems warranted. Plato, supporting his theories of denial of the senses in the allegory of the cave, described three types of men: 1) gold, whom were ruled by the head and corresponded to reason; 2) silver, whom were ruled by the heart and corresponded to courage; and 3) bronze, whom were ruled by the belly and corresponded to the senses. Aristotle, whom Synnott (1993) quoted “all men by nature desire to know” (p. 132), did not advocate sensorial denial as such, but divided the senses into “human” and “animal” (Synnott, 1993, p. 132). Later, Christ much more tolerant of the senses, did not promote asceticism. Saint Paul,

^{1 1} Both Lang and Benjamin were collectors. Lang had traveled extensively in his youth; he had had an exhibit of his exotic collections planned for Paris premiere in 1914, but WWI broke out and, as an Austrian citizen, Lang was arrested as a threat to France. His exhibition never took place (Jensen, 1969, p. 10).

however, preached that “the senses themselves are at fault” (Synnott, 1993, p. 133). Here sins of the flesh, the infamous Seven Deadly Sins, are born. The early Church, developed by St. Paul, “institutionalized this ascetic tradition” which was supported by Chrysostom, Augustine, Jerome, Thomas Aquinas, Ignatius Loyola et al, in their preparations for the Second Coming (Synnott, 1993, p. 136). The ascetic tradition, the abnegation of the body and the militant anti-corporealism, severely reigned throughout the Middle Ages. Synnott commented, “Christians, therefore, were very ambivalent towards the senses. Necessary for life, they could however, lead to damnation; they could be enjoyed, but not too much; they reflected God’s goodness, but could lead into temptation”(1993, p. 138).

Ptolemaic theory inspired Copernicus and Galileo and their descriptions of the motion of heavenly bodies, Boyle’s theory of gases, electricity, and magnetism, and Descartes’ invention of analytical geometry (Lavine, 1984). More importantly, Descartes further supported the claim that reason was the most important element in human nature which sustained the theory of the mind/body split, and according to Lavine, “all of nature can be explained by the mechanical motion of material substances...like the mechanical workings of a clock” (1984, p. 117). Synnott pointed out that “Descartes’ division of homo sapiens into soul and body effectively allocated the soul to the church and the body to science in a clear ‘separation of powers.’ The division within the self coincided with and reflected the division within society [and Hobbes] used the inorganic metaphor of machines to explain the body, and the organic metaphor of the body to explain politics”(1993, p. 23).

By exposing the occult through a rationalization of nature, science served the Church, the power of the Christian deity still intact. The historical landscape changed dramatically; not only was progress gained, but “democratization and the material improvement of society” (Hahn, 1991, p. 146). The old nature secrets betrayed, nature became demystified, approachable, and consequently, vulnerable to the reconstruction of man’s invention. Hahn stated:

Whereas in ancient times, man and the universe were considered first as the byproducts of a creator to be contemplated and imitated, since at least the 19th century, the scientifically informed mind has been prepared to substitute his mental prowess for that of God...thus it is that the modern scientist is potentially in as good a position to construct the universe and manipulate it according to his modern era, understanding has become a means of control (1991, p. 155).

Vaccinations were developed by Jenner in 1795. By 1853, a Parliamentary action mandated smallpox vaccinations. Hence, the body became state property (Synnott, 1993, p.26). Claudia Springer, in her work *Electronic Eros: Bodies and Desire in the Postindustrial Age* (1996), suggested that Lang “depicts an absolutely patriarchal society” and in Fredersen’s collaboration with Rotwang, “we see science serving the state, using its specialized knowledge to assist in the suppression of dissent. The power of science and the state resides entirely in wealthy men who use their strength to maintain control over women and working-class men, who, it can be argued, have been feminized by their subordinate position” (pp. 151-52).

Synnott observed, “These [18th century] medical advances contributed to more relaxed and positive attitudes towards the body. They also accelerated the trend from sacred to profane attitudes: the magic bullets work better and quicker than prayer” (Synnott, 1993, p.27). The move from the sacred to the profane paralleled the “authentic experience”(or sacred) as reinvented by the simulacra; the profane, as a reinterpretation of the original experience. As we moved from the sacred to the profane new theories about the body emerged.

Darwin's observation led him to conclude that the mind was dependent on the body. Feuerbach said, "The individual is an individual only in this, his corporeal life" (qtd. in Synnott, 1993, p. 24) and, as Synnott noted, Nietzsche reverses the mind/body split, the "distinctive feature of homo sapiens is no longer mind but body" (p. 25). Marx and Engels, in *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1843), uncovered critical evidence in the unyielding exploitation of the working class in the pursuit of capital: "bodies are disposable assets" and the worker "becomes an appendage of the machine" (qtd. in Synnott, 1993, p.24). Taylor (Scientific Management) and the Gilbreths (Time and Motion Studies), conducted research in maximizing worker efficiency: "production, greater production at any price." (Giedion, 1948, p. 98). Ford replaced scientific management with the "new tools of production": the automatic assembly line (Giedion, 1948, p. 120). Lukács attacked the assembly line "for fragmenting the personality of the worker" and the field of industrial psychology emerged; psychologists noted the "disappearance of the soul through work... a loss of individual experience" (Kaes, Jay, & Dimendberg, Eds., 1994, p. 394). Freud broke ground in psychoanalysis with his theories of the psychological and the somatic.

The Frankfurt School was committed to scrutiny of the social, cultural, and psychological consequences of life in the modern city and "theorized about the impact of urban environment upon patterns of human association and consciousness" (Sharpe & Wollock, 1987, p. 3). In their text *Visions of the Modern City*, Sharpe and Wollock described the urban experience as a "new spatial order", a product of the "Age of Capital", characterized as "rational, impersonal, alienated, unemotional, and autonomous" and as the "corruption of mental life":

The urban environment shapes an aesthetic perception, which in turn produces a new form and vision of the city. The city is the locus of modernism, and each aspect of the city life seems to generate or demonstrate a characteristic of this artistic movement—multiplicity of meaning, loss of sequential or causal connection, breakdown of signification, and dissolution of community." (p. 5)

Within the city we have returned, in a sense, to the occult: "...the city has become opaque—the city once had a face that we could see and comprehend, but now it is hidden from all but the specialist" (Sharpe & Wollock, 1987, p. 18).

An Overview of Past Analyses

Willy Haas (1927), although complementary of Lang's *mise en scene*, criticized Lang for his "noncommittal attitude" of *Metropolis*: "It is always the same, a genre that does not even want to tackle the bitter and the sweet aspects of life, the real concerns, the real longings, the really burning existential questions..." (qtd. in Kaes, Jay, & Dimendberg, Eds., 1994). Siegfried Kracauer (1947), on the other hand, praised Harbou for the script but derided Lang for his "penchant for pompous ornamentation" of the "ornamental groups...but it is nonsensical to force them into such groups while they are listening to a comforting speech... [from Maria] during their leisure time" (p. 149) It appears Kracauer denied the body as a communicative language/text and had missed the importance of Lang's choreographic literacy. *Metropolis* evoked Laban movement analysis in Lang's effective use of counterpoint in posture and gesture which utilized the techniques of effort/shape and space/harmony. Even if Lang had no understanding of Laban, certainly he was informed by scientific management, time and motion studies, the phenomena of Fordism and the critiques of Marx, Engels, Simmel, et al. These body allegories indicated that the worker had been entirely consumed; the workers only "meat" as Marvin Minsky, developer of artificial intelligence, would say; devoid of any consciousness or

sentient. As “meat” the working class of *Metropolis* is denied leisure which is the sole property of the bourgeoisie in the higher level of the Club of Sons.

Although Kracauer (1947) negated an essential element of the movement *mise en scene*, I appreciate his read of the final moments of the film:

On the surface, it seems that Freder has converted his father; in reality, the industrialist has outwitted his son. The concession he makes amounts to a policy of appeasement that not only prevents the workers from winning their cause, but enables him to tighten his grip on them. His robot stratagem was a blunder in as much as it rested upon insufficient knowledge of the mentality of the masses. By yielding to Freder, the industrialist achieves intimate contact with the workers, and thus is in a position to influence their mentality. (p. 163)

In the film Joh Fredersen, “the brain” and Grot, “the hand” are happily joined, mediated by the Christ-Heart Freder. How are we to believe that Grot is acting on behalf of the Workers? Didn’t the workers attempt to execute Grot as he protected the Machine, the real Heart of *Metropolis* (Harbou, 1947), and wasn’t it Grot who spied on the Workers on behalf of Joh? As Gunning points out “everyone hates this ending” (2000, p. 78) for precisely this reason. Conversely, I think it most appropriate, consistent with Lang’s nihilistic and fatalistic affinities; definitely preferable over the sacharine ending of Harbou’s novel. Armour (1978), however, quoted Lang as saying that Kracauer’s thesis was “100% nonsense-facts twisted to fit a confected theory” (fn., p. 172). Lang (1926) in his article, *The Future of the Feature Film in Germany* (Kaes, et al., 1994), stated:

Actors will no longer occupy a space that they appear to have entered by accident; rather the space will be constructed in such a way that the characters’ experience appear possible only in it, appear logical only on account of it. An expressionism of the most subtle variety will make surroundings, properties, and plot conform to one another, just as I believe in general that German film technique will develop along lines that not only raises it to the level of an optical expression of the characters’ actions but also elevate the particular performer’s environment to the status of carrier of an action in its own right and, most important, of the characters’ soul! We are already trying to photograph thoughts, that is, render them visually; we are no longer trying to convey the plot complex of an event but to make visual the ideational content of the experience seen from the perspective of the one who experiences it. (p. 622)

Lang perceived *mise en scene* as the primary aesthetic which would liberate the film text. The *mise en scene*, Lang’s own metaphorical Tower of Babel, would promote the “internationalism of the filmic language” and become “the strongest instrument available for the mutual understanding of peoples” (Kaes, et al, 1994, p. 622).

Raymond Bellour, Philippe Demonsablon, Michel Mourlet, and Stephen Jenkins offered wonderful insight into Lang’s *mise en scene* in Jenkins’ *Fritz Lang: The Image and the Look* (1981). All four wrote of the dialectics evocative of the “Lang-text”: Lang’s *mise en scene* was a tightly structured architectural semiological Freudian mythfest. For Mourlet, the provocative visual trope was paradoxically Lang’s nucleus of difficulty: “The elimination of chance, the constant domination of forms by an architecture in which each part determines and is answerable to the others, result in a fascination or an inability in the spectator to escape the discipline of the film” (p. 12). Demonsablon observed that Lang’s dialectical *oeuvre* maintained a competitive duality that “here spirit and matter put each other to the trial, and in this interchange the visual elements converge with the idea which justifies them” and he stated “the film’s task is to

describe a labyrinth, not to deliver its secret, which is none of its concern” (p. 23-25). Bellour was intrigued by Lang’s nihilistic portraits: “We sense the effort, the temptation offered by possibilities, the distance between the wish and its object, something akin to typical manifestation of a *mise en scene* assured of its power, but invariably a little disheveled and wearied too...with him, *mise en scene* alone, attains myth” (p. 36).

Jenkins (1981) examined the “Lang-text” of Fate “by constructing a reading which inserts -forcefully- the question of the significance of the female presence” (p. 38). In his examination of the two Marias as the primary antagonists, he revealed a fissure that supports the position that the objectification of gaze is not necessarily phallic. Instead the objectifying gaze easily shifts from the oppressor to the oppressed who becomes the oppressor who becomes the oppressed and so on,² much like Baudrillard’s perpetual simulacra. The gazer and the gazee are polar opposites as well as twins; and Lang’s film audience actively participates in this volley of gazes. Tom Gunning (2000), in his thorough work, The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity, noted Lang’s gaze shifts and throughout his chapter devoted to *Metropolis*, repeatedly asked of Lang and his audience, “Who wields the power in *Metropolis*?” (pp. 53-83). This, above all other insights into *Metropolis* I have read, is the key question and in turn, answers all others.

For example Jenkins (1981), in applying Tzvetan Todorov’s theory of equilibrium,³ positions Maria as upsetting the equilibrium when she arrives (miraculously, I might add) at the door of the Club of Sons with children of the underground worker city gathered about her skirts. Maria gazes at Freder who is subjected to her ultimate agenda. “These are your brothers,” Maria says. Freder returns the gaze asking of his man servant Slim “who was that?” not “who were they?” (p. 83). Jenkins identifies Maria as the primary “problem”; the question of “the brothers” is only secondary, as evident in Freder’s response, because the class struggle will be “automatically resolved when the Maria ‘trouble’ has been worked through” (p. 83). Freder then leaves the Club of Sons and vertically descends Metropolis in search of Maria and his “brothers.” When Freder enters the machine room, the steam obscures the “object of the spectator’s gaze” (Jenkins, 1981, p. 84) which is then followed by an assertion of Freder’s gaze; but “the denial of patriarchal authority, signified by this simple play around the power of different looks, is depicted as intolerable” (Jenkins, 1981, p. 84). What Jenkins doesn’t say is that this “denial of patriarchal authority” through the hot potato game of gaze is a metaphor for restating what Gunning (2000) had asked: “Who wields the power in Metropolis?”

Freder in obsequence of the object of his desire (gaze), joins the masses at Maria’s rally which threatens “the Law of the Father” (Jenkins, 1981, p. 83). Maria, as Virgin Mother and John the Baptist, is gazed upon by her adoring disciples; she returns (or deflects) the gaze and Freder is held metaphorically captive. She kisses him, and he closes his eyes in ecstasy. Freder leaves with Maria’s promise to meet him in the cathedral and the promise of the fulfillment of his desire. Rotwang ultimately intervenes to thwart this promise, and, as Jenkins suggests, prevents Freder from gaining access to the object of his Oedipal desires (1981, p. 85). Jenkins

² See Paulo Freire’s Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970) for a thorough explanation of mechanisms of oppression to service the disempowerment of the oppressors.

³ “The minimal complete plot consists in the passage from one equilibrium to another. An ‘ideal’ narrative begins with a stable situation which is disturbed by some power or force. There results a state of disequilibrium; by the action of a force directed in the opposite direction, the equilibrium is reestablished; the second equilibrium is similar to the first but the two are never identical.” (qtd. in Jenkins, 1981, p. 77).

cleverly wields commonly accepted interpretations of Freudian analyses. In one brief paragraph he has invoked gaze, castration and Oedipus.

Later, Joh fires Josephat his secretary, with a very stern and accusational gaze, because “he believes Josephat knew of the mass uprising.” Freder pleads with his Father, “You don’t know what it means to be dismissed by you!” and with a paralyzing gaze, Joh smites him down. The disinterested, detached Joh can be seen as the Old Testament Jehovah whom is willing to flood, drown and destroy the masses and the city he built. All the sacrifices to Moloch and himself are not enough, and thus he allows for the sacrifice of his own son. Freder slowly, step by painful step, retreats into the dark and when out of eyeshot, runs out the door to intercept Joseph.

Evocative of Benjamin’s collector coupled by Freud’s analysis of “fetish”, Jenkins posits, “The real Maria can no longer be the object of Freder’s desire, exemplified by his fetishizing the torn scrap of dress he finds on the floor of Rotwang’s” and Freder is forced “back under the sway of the Law of the Father which dictates the terms by which he must view Maria” (p. 85). Jenkins defends his position by reasoning that the scene in which Freder, who thinks he is seeing the real Maria, finds Futura in the arms of his father (Jehovah in consort with the Whore of Babylon) was staged to reinforce the castrating patriarchal power structure: Maria becomes mother harlot, representing disequilibrium; no longer the virgin girlfriend.

The shock of seeing the false Maria and Joh together sends Freder into a state of panic and disequilibrium; the scene ends with a shot of Freder descending into the Underworld. Next, a jump cut reveals Freder lying ill in bed. A series of parallel jump cuts ensues with Freder watching through clairvoyant lens the realtime unveiling of Futura at Rotwang’s. Freder gazes upon the dance of Salomé, the Whore of Babylon straddling her seven beasts with ten horns, and the figure of Death flanked by the Seven Deadly Sins. Finally, the scene crescendos, and Freder, having been suspended in tense arousal, collapses in his bed. Jenkins suggests that Freder’s hallucination embodies his fear of castration and exhausted, falls back into his bed: “the idea of Maria as object of desire has been associated with the threat of castration, the text works to remove the robot Maria, now superfluous” (p. 86). Jenkins’ argument that “the text works to remove the robot Maria” would be better supported if instead he concluded that Freder fell back in an orgasmic exhaustion rather than any fear of castration. Georges Bataille would see orgasm as associated with death which would explain Freder’s hallucinations of Death and the Seven Deadly Sins. Dadoun (1991) echoes Bataille when he observes that Maria, after the transfer of her consciousness to Futura, “drained, lets her head fall to one side, in a primal gesture suggesting both orgasm and death. The creative act is done” (p. 145). Up until this point Freder has been ineffective and impotent, running hysterically from scene to scene. In his vision, Maria is longer the virgin, but the whore; as the object of his clairvoyant gaze, he “has” Maria and when he’s finished, he has no use for her, therefore she can be removed as the antagonist and equilibrium can be restored. This interpretation better supports Jenkins’ theories of male gaze instead of the weakly girded castration theory. Freder already exhibits effeminate qualities. I don’t think castration is an issue here.

Obviously, the *mise en scene* is not as rigidly interpreted as Mourlet posited, nor is it regulated to Bellour’s nihilistic visual tropes. Lang and Harbou have provided a cacophony of heterogeneity that typifies the gestalt of the Weimar Republic.

Mise en Scene Paradigms

Lang writes, “[The] filmic language will become the strongest instrument available for the mutual understanding of peoples, who otherwise have such difficulty understanding each other in all too many languages” (qtd. in Kaes et al, p. 623). Below are what I believe to be five intersecting philosophical blueprints that drive Harbou’s novel and Lang’s *Metropolis mise en scene*.

| I. Nature Religions | II. Age of Reason | III. Gothic | IV Industrial | V. Post Human | <i>Metropolis</i> | | |
|---------------------|-------------------|-------------|---------------|------------------|-------------------|-------|--------|
| Upperworld | Head=Reason | Heaven | Superego | Sentient Machine | Club of Sons | Head | Joh |
| Middeworld | Heart=Courage | Earth | Id | The Word | Machine | Heart | Freder |
| Underworld | Belly=Senses | Hell | Ego | Manual Tools | Worker’s City | Hands | Grot |

The manual tool, as extension of the body, is seen by Bataille as the Fall. The word, as extension of the mind, is seen by McLuhan as the Fall. The computer is seen by some as the portal to omniscience and, as such, is the extension of the soul. Minsky sees the sentient machine as the ultimate human evolution; the Return to Paradise. By merging the first four paradigms with insight into the fifth, Harbou and Lang masterfully constructed a radical film that encapsulated competing ontologies of the modernist era.

The retelling of the Tower of Babel in the opening scenes of *Metropolis* undergird this thesis. The Old Testament Tower of Babel was a ziggurat. *Metropolis*, as the “New Babylon,” can be compared to a ziggurat. Walker wrote, “The ziggurat was the Mesopotamian version of the Mountain of Heaven [...] its summit was a meeting place between deities and mortals” (p. 113). Campbell wrote in *Occidental Mythology: The Masks of God*, (1991), “The Tower of Babel story [...] original to the Bible [...] reverses the meaning of the ziggurat, which was not meant to storm and threaten heaven, but to provide a means by which the gods of heaven might descend to receive the worship of their slaves on earth. (p. 113). The retelling of the Tower of Babel “functions primarily as a political parable about class and power divisions [...] the city-state as a human body, with workers conceived as ‘hands’ and planners as ‘brains’” (Gunning, 2000, p. 57). The workers of *Metropolis* do not question the division of labor nor do they question the architecture of power systems. What the workers question, or rather, what the rebel-rouser Maria questions, is the problem of communication between the “hands” and the “brains” (Gunning, p. 57). For all intents and purposes, it would be easy to conclude that Harbou and Lang perpetuated Nazi propaganda that proselytized the “natural” division among labor forces, “communication” being the only “problem” of the day. After all, *Metropolis* was one of Hitler’s favorite films. It is in the *mise en scene* of *Metropolis*, however, that a much subtler sentiment is exposed.

As observed by Mircea Eliade (1964), in order to affect transformation in the physical plane of the Middeworld, the shaman, in an ecstatic state (which is synonymous with a state of dismemberment), travels up and down the *axis mundi* accepting guidance from “spirits” of both the Upperworld and the Underworld. In the diagram above, the three worlds Upper-, Middle-, and Under- correlate with the three levels of *Metropolis*: the Club of Sons, the level of the Machine, and the Worker’s city. In *Metropolis*, the overriding tension apparent is the reconciliation between Labor, the worker “hands” and Capital, Joh the “brains,” to ensure that the “machine” at the Middeworld level continues to function as the “life force” and protector of *Metropolis*. Campbell writes in *Primitive Mythology: The Masks of God* (1991, p. 68-69): “...the labyrinth, maze, and spiral were associated in ancient Crete and Babylon with the internal organs of the human anatomy as well as with the underworld, the one being the microcosm of the other” (I will return this discussion momentarily, including Dadoun’s Freudian analysis of the

Worker's City and the connecting catacombs as a "feminized space"). The elevator used to transport the workers from their city below in Underworld, to the heart of the machine, Middleworld can be seen as the *axis mundi* of *Metropolis*. Paul Zmolek (2000) writes:

In Christianity the labyrinth is utilized as a contemplative device symbolizing the ascent to heaven, in other systems it represents the journey to the underworld. An initiate descends into the "womb of the earth" to be reborn as an adept. The shaman's journey requires him to "die", descend to the underworld where he is dismembered, his body eaten, before being resurrected to the upperworld before returning with the god's gifts to the world. This death and resurrection ritual, in various permutations, is played out in almost every religion known to mankind.

According to Eliade (1964), the spirits of the Upperworld tend to be more removed from the corporeal Middleworld, therefore, the shaman relies on the spirits of the Underworld to assist in his/her task. It must be noted, that in Gunning's analyses (2000, p. 61) he mistakenly exchanges the animistic *daemon* with the Christian manufacture, *demon*. Pagels (1995) states that the concept of Satan "...is a reflection of how we perceive ourselves and those we call 'others'" (p. xviii). The "others" exist both inside and outside of society in a state of liminality: liminality is a condition of ecstatic ritual and is associated with shamanizing. The Greek word *daemon* originally referred to the Elementals: "...beings occupying a place between men and spirits, resembling men, (women), and spirit...they resemble neither spiritual creatures nor material beings, yet are composed of the substance which we may call spiritual matter..." (Hall, 1977, p. 105). The liminal daemon, then, was renamed the evil Christian demon. The Christian God could not be held responsible for the terrors which had been set loose on the medieval man: the church needed a scapegoat (aptly named). The transition was easy; the befallen Angel Lucifer was already symbolically responsible for evil unleashed in the world. The demonic "interpretation" that Gunning projects can then be reinterpreted and a much deeper internal logic is revealed.

It is only through the shaman's death and resurrection that he can gain knowledge and then affect transformation on the Middleworld. It makes sense then, that Christianity was able to absorb pagan death and resurrection rituals: the Church instituted Christ as the ultimate shaman, and thus, the Church had to outlaw shamanistic practices to prevent empowering new shamans. The shamanistic practices that remained were systematically absorbed by the priests and the sacraments they performed.

Gunning (2000) observed that Freder "is more vulnerable and even feminine" (p. 64), subject to fits of fainting, visions and spells, and is prone to hysteria. Eliade (1964) would say of the shaman, "Only certain especially gifted souls, dreamers, visionaries of hysterical temperament, can be chosen" (p.58). Hysteria, attributed as a feminine construct is seen as a feminine disease. The world *panic*, traceable to the god Pan, is defined as hysteria. The myth that women are susceptible to a plethora of physical and emotional disorders is widely accepted, perpetuated by Freud's analyses of the Victorian woman and a traditionally male dominated medical profession. Freder as the Shaman, both male and female and the mediator between Capital and Labor, vertically ascends and descends the *axis mundi* of *Metropolis*.

Perhaps now is the place to turn the reader's attention to an examination into Moloch and sacrifice, the personification of Death, and the mythology of the Nordic goddess of the Underworld, Hel. Morgan and Morgan, in their witty book *The Devil*, (1996) describe Moloch as:

A terrifying devil, Moloch serves as chief of the army in Hell. He was once a Canaanite deity, worshipped by early Semites who sacrificed their firstborn children in the fires of his temple located just outside Jerusalem. Moloch's face and hands are smeared with the blood of murdered children and the tears shed by their grieving mothers. (p. 95)

Gunning provides a delightful caveat with his contribution of the Greek god of time, Kronos, in the image of the Grim Reaper, Father Time: "Kronos in Hesiod's *Theogony* castrates his father Uranos with a sickle given him by his mother. He in turn devours his own children until killed by Zeus" (p. 75). Moloch demands sacrifice which leads to death and castration; Kronos, as Father Time, symbolizes death and castration. Time, a product of the age of reason and the mind/body split, is used symbolically throughout the *mise en scene*; Freder is even symbolically crucified on the clock manometer while he's crying out "Father, Father -I did not know that ten hours could be torture!" much in the same way Christ called out on the cross "Father, Father; why have you forsaken me?"

Roger Dadoun (1991), using Freudian analysis to compare the Hitler cult with the allegories of *Metropolis*, compared Moloch as metaphor for Auschwitz, the "anus of the world": In *Metropolis* these images are fused in a layer of destructive and sadistic anality, concretely and compactly expressed in Freder's hallucination of Moloch. As human operators fail to watch over their machines, a series of explosions takes place...But this fiery fantasy consumption...is further complicated, indeed contorted, into an anal scene of sadistic domination: if we reverse the motion, the unbending black columns of workers who climb toward the mouth-hole become streams of fecal matter expelled or excreted from the anal orifice. A hallucinatory fusion of organs and functions gives rise to a monstrous chiasm [*sic*], which the Nazis put into practice: the mouth excretes ("filth" flowed from Hitler's mouth) and the anus devours (Auschwitz)...The phallic organization of *Metropolis*, which serves to cover the primal scenes and, in my view, to mask the horror of sexuality, incorporates this strong anality and thereby reinforces itself with fecal power in order to enclose the libidinal economy within a rigid structure and orient it toward destruction. (pp. 157-58).

Dadoun's scatological descriptions are horrific, yet his arguments provoke further examination. Joh ordered Grot to endure the workers destruction of the machine, which resulted in power outages and the flooding of the Worker's City; a self-administered fast and high colonic to flush out the impurities within the body of the city.

Freder's false consciousness is revealed in his vision of the consuming Moloch; and within Freder's vision we see the false consciousness of the workers as they unceasingly and voluntarily sacrifice themselves to the monstrous Moloch/Joh. Dadoun and Springer (1996) view *Metropolis* as a Freudian mosh pit which supports their theses that *Metropolis* represents the ultimate patriarchal ideology and Freder illustrates the Oedipal trajectory. Perhaps all interpretations at this point are but only impositions and we are all guilty of reading way too much into it. As Freud said, "Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar."

Paul Zmolek (1997) in his unpublished manuscript wrote, "Freud linked the ritual of human sacrifice to an unresolved Oedipal conflict on the societal level. He conjectured that the sacrificial victim represented the collective father. By offering human sacrifice, the community's men were symbolically resolving their own Oedipal desire to kill their own fathers and thus be able to bed their mothers" (p. 17). Zmolek rejected the Freudian interpretation of ritual as societal neurosis and concluded that human sacrifice had devolved from sacred to political act. According to Zmolek, the ritual of human sacrifice had exhibited three major permutations:

“1) Actual human sacrifice for a communal based ritual of seasonal regeneration; earthly and heavenly affairs are intimately connected; 2) Symbolic reenactment of the sacrifice of the man-god who exists between the planes of heaven and earth; initiates hope to escape the earth to reach heaven; 3) Actual sacrifice of a multitude of victims for the creation of political power; heaven is not a concern” (p. 27). Zmolek concludes:

Hitler was elaborating upon the model that the Church had provided with the Inquisition: the church’s ruthless torture and killing of Jews, heretics, and mid-wives accused of witchcraft served admirably in the church’s goal of expanding its political power[... .] The Holocaust was human sacrifice conducted on a grand scale for the creation of power; regeneration and resurrection of, not the body nor the soul, but the body politic. This type of sacrifice is not meant for the gods, but rather, the mobs. The political body could not bear the guilt of the sacrifice it demanded; the sacred victim must bear the guilt for his own death. The Jews were perfect sacrificial victims because they already bore the guilt of killing Christ...the guilt of the sacrifice has been placed upon the victim; effectively banishing all taboos and constraints against sacrifice. The scapegoat is not banished to the land of Azazel; the scapegoat is driven to the slaughter.(p. 28)

In many of the critiques I have read, Rotwang is accused as the “evil” magician. Although Gunning subscribes to this idea, he also admits that Rotwang had become the scapegoat of *Metropolis* (p. 78). The actor who plays Rotwang, Rudolf Klein-Rogge, curiously enough, was Thea von Harbou’s second husband; Fritz Lang was her third.

Rotwang represents the ancient mystical systems that had been absorbed and systematically demonized by the men of science and the Church. In Harbou’s novel, the house of Rotwang “was older than the town...older, even, than the cathedral” (1975, p. 55), and that the city *Metropolis* was built from the locus of this house, much like Salt Lake City and the nucleate Mormon Tabernacle. Harbou describes the house as protected by the Sign of Solomon, the five pointed star. This deserves closer scrutiny. Walker (1988) describes the pentagram as a sign of protection, used by sorcerers to form a barrier against evil influences “wherever sorcerers required protection from any demonic forces that their magic might call up” (p. 189). The five pointed star is also the, “Star of Bethlehem, Solomon’s seal, pentagram, wizard’s star, devil’s sign, witches cross... Associated with magic, paganism, devilry and Christian mysticism” (Walker, 1988, p. 72). The pentagram with one point downward, represents the “head of the Horned God” (Walker, 1988, p. 72). Walker points out that at a Gypsy wedding it was “customary for the bride and groom to cut the apple, revealing its pentacle and eat half apiece, after intercourse. Such marriage customs may suggest the real story behind Eve’s sharing the apple with her spouse” (p. 480).

Futura is first revealed standing inanimate under a downward pointed pentagram. The other important detail about this house was that it was the only human dwelling at the Middleworld level and Rotwang had direct access to the catacombs, the womb of the earth, the Underworld.

Dadoun (1991) argued that the robot Futura represented the “severed phallus of Rotwang, who ha[d] been symbolically castrated, his hand cut off,⁴ for having dared to lay hands on Mother Nature, for having ‘had’ her to use a slang term” (p. 142). Personally, I think it’s a bit

⁴ Dery (1996) writes: “A rogue technologist challenges the Fates and loses his right hand -the hand that symbolizes logic and rationality, in Jungian psychology-to a thunderbolt of divine retribution” (p. 116).

much, but it is based in his interpretation of Freudian analysis and it does makes for amusing reading.

Lang and Harbou place Rotwang in a curious juxtaposition. His ancient knowledge is replaced by science, and yet, why is it that Rotwang holds the power of *Metropolis*, or to put it crudely colloquial, but aptly suggestive of castration theory: why does he have Joh Fredersen by the “balls”? The American film version as any student of *Metropolis* knows, neutered the essential content of Freder’s mother, Hel.

Joh’s dependence on Rotwang and the rivalry between the two was never fully explained in the American version. Originally, Hel and Rotwang were in love, but Joh stole Hel away from Rotwang. Hel, in Nordic mythology, is the goddess of the Underworld and the protector of unbaptized children (Guerber, 1992; Walker, 1988). Springer (1996) argues that the Worker’s city and the catacombs, represent a “feminized space”; a female sexuality which has been repressed by the patriarchal order (p. 153-54). This supports the myth of Hel as goddess of the Underworld but denies Hel any power over the upper levels; in this case, the bourgeoisie. Walker describes Hel as:

Goddess of the fiery underworld that became the Christian hell, although it was not a place of punishment originally. The Germans said the Mother Hel was a fire mountain, and the emperor Theodoric became immortal by entering her womb by way of a volcano. (p. 355)

Likewise, Rotwang’s secret passage into the Underworld Worker city could be compared to a volcanic rupture.

According to Harbou, Maria/Futura was made in the image of Hel. Ennos Patalas (1991) says of Rotwang’s creation:

Hel prefigures the new, artificial woman as her double. She would not merely be “born for him”; she would be born of “him”-daughter and lover in one. He gives this artificial woman the features of the girl with whom the dead woman’s son has fallen in love, so as to have him be destroyed by her double. Thus he takes revenge not only on his rival, but also on the son who denied himself to Rotwang when his mother conceived him by another. He fantasizes the desired son as the offspring of his lover’s infidelity which in turn allows him to motivate and rationalize his sadistic lust. (p 167)

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)

These two visions, according to Gunning, embody the “primal terror” of apocalypse (p. 76). Spengler wrote: “The Mary myths and the Devil-myth formed themselves side by side, neither possible without the other. Disbelief in either of them was deadly sin. There was a Mary-cult of prayer, and a Devil-cult of spells and exorcisms” (qtd. in Campbell, *Creative Mythology*, 1991 p. 49).

Jensen (1969) views the polar Marias as epitomizing “the division between the free rulers and the machine-like workers they control” (p. 65), contrasting humanity and the antagonist machine. Springer (1996) argues that Futura (also known as Delusion as cited in Harbou, 1975) represents the male fear of women and of machines. Springer fails to acknowledge, however,

that the robot Maria is more corporeal, more passionate, more sensual perhaps more human than the real Maria. She has been given a beating heart and a circulatory system. Futura is extremely fluid unlike the erect image 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. (p. 154)

Springer's arguments are problematic: Futura is both sensual and "aggressively phallic," representing both the patriarchal fear of women and the patriarchal fear of machine. The patriarchy would not loathe the phallus, their own virility, unless of course they, too, were objectified by the same body loathing as institutionalized by science and the Church. Phallic power and castration power are not the same thing. The real Maria, with her Victorian rigid demeanor, does not become her yonnic counterpart until she senses a physical threat (from Rotwang's hunt in the catacombs) and her senses are aroused: her heart is racing, she is alert, eyes wide open, and most importantly, sexuality evident by the thrusting forward of her pelvis.

The inconsistencies apparent within Freudian interpretations support my preference to look for my answers in mythic systems. Jungian analysis with its collective unconsciousness, archetypes, animus and anima might provide a better model than its psychoanalytic predecessor. Abstract cosmological, magical and spiritual systems do not exist as the exclusive territory of the mind and consciousness; contrarily, the body and the brain are entirely interdependent upon one another. The appendages of man were tools; a physical connect between cause and effect still intact. As our brains developed (as well did the macro-social), so did further abstractions of our extension systems: science and the word.

The Age of Reason, sanctified by the Church, rationalized body loathing as personified in Plato's allegory of the cave. The Underworld of spirit helpers and Elementals became synonymous with contempt of the senses; the "belly" seen as man's sensorial weakness. The Church conveniently expanded on these prevalent anti-corporealisms and devised the concept of the Devil and his underworld of Hell:

The revolution of the devil's religious role as a frightening villain in the war for men's souls began early. Certain ambiguous passages in the book of Revelation had prompted generations of Christians to predict a millennium, when the just would get their dessert, and the tired world would be reborn. For centuries the year 1000 was popularly considered to mark the inception of heaven on earth, and much medieval patience and piety was buttressed by hope for the great day. But by 1100 confidence that the millennium would come as predicted had faded. It was during this time that the devil's image began to be deformed from a beautiful, sulky angel into the grotesque and fearful figure, master of monster and demons, that was to inflame the religious imagination of Europe for hundreds of years. (Foote, 1968, p. 50)

The goddess of the Underworld and protector of unbaptized children, Hel is demonized as the Christian Hell. Thus Hel, a Nordic goddess, could be seen as the protector of the Jews. The ancient cosmological circle of light and dark energies is reinterpreted to serve the hegemonic ideology of the Church. The distrust of the body, initiated by men and rationalized by science, was maintained by the Church. Blind faith in the Church, blind faith in science, and blind faith in the dominant ideologies: a false consciousness that Lang brilliantly choreographed in the movements of the workers.

Aside from Kracauer's criticism of Lang's "ornamentation," little has been written on Lang's perception of movement. For myself, this is the distinguishing feature of Lang's film: the movement as *mise en scene*. The industrial revolution prompted studies into movement, not only to maximize worker efficiency but to study a system of expressive movement through posture and gesture. Francois Delsarte, a 19th century French music teacher, experimented with three zones of the body: the mental/intellectual which were expressed in the head and neck; the emotional/spiritual which were expressed in the torso and arms; and the physical which was expressed in the lower trunk and legs (It seems that the modernist "physical" is regulated to the groin and pelvic region). From this, Delsarte divided movement into three types: oppositions, parallelisms, and successions. Delsarte had discovered that through abstraction, utilizing theories of space and time, the body could communicate through movement. These theories laid the groundwork for further investigation into body, space, time, energy and form. Rudolf von Laban, a Czech born Hungarian who lived in Germany during the 1920's elaborated on Delsarte's research to include his work in spatial tensions and harmonies, and temporality and efforts. He would choreograph incredibly ambitious movement-choirs for thousands of dancers in his attempts to establish a new folk dance. Some of Laban's students were major contributors to the German avant-garde: Kurt Joos, choreographed his famous experimental ballet *The Green Table* about the machinations of war; Mary Wigman, with her preoccupation with Fate and Death choreographed and performed her expressionistic dance cycles; and Leni Riefenstahl was a dancer trained in the Laban style before working in film.

Lang's choreography, his use of light and the oppositional/successional architectural portrayal of the futuristic city to carve space, interpret time and evoke tensions were the pinnacles of the *Metropolis mise en scene*. Here, the narrative is superfluous; the *mise en scene* allowed the viewer, in their "indirect" gaze, to intellectually process their own meanings from the scene. It makes sense in a time of corporeal and anti-corporeal dialectics, that Kracauer would dismiss the importance of these non-narrative symbols. It must be recognized that very few film artists since, have used movement as brilliantly as Lang's *mise en scene*: Eisenstein, Riefenstahl, Kurosawa, and Gilliam are a few worth mentioning. As we move into the age of the Post Human *machina sapiens*, body movement/posture as *mise en scene* has become much more prevalent.

A Question of Power

Who is the Power? Is it the omnipresent rationalist Cartesian clock, a metaphor for Death, and proof of collective acquiescence? Is it the true heart (Harbou, 1975), the central machine that protects all of *Metropolis*, above and below, from its own destruction? Or is it the potential of science to create an artificial sentient intelligence that can replace mankind? Here we have an interesting paradox: Marvin Minsky, in his life long work to create a sentient artificial intelligence (like Rotwang's Futura a.k.a. Delusion), had to avail himself to a "connectionist theory" which is, simply put, that artificial intelligence is not just a programmable mathematical machine, but a thinking, learning machine. Turkle observes:

Minsky's leap of faith, his confidence in the power of the agents, is based on his belief-one that I see at the core of the romantic reaction in artificial intelligence-that the interaction of agents causes something to emerge beyond what is possible through the manipulation of symbols alone. (1991, p. 241)

In order to create the sentient machine, Minsky abandons control and submits to the occult of faith. Although the idea of an artificial intelligence sprung from the mind/body split, in order to

create the artificial human science has returned to theories of corporeality. The quest of artificial intelligence can be seen as the pinnacle of the Age of Reason and the Mechanical Age which dominated the Modernist thought. In Minsky's attempts to bring Futura/Delusion to life, he has realized that pure logic, pure science is impotent and must be wedded with areas that have been derisively termed the occult. Minsky is attempting to actualize Lang's vision. In spite of Modernism's infatuation with the machine as the embodiment of science, Modernism, and perhaps all philosophical systems, returns to myth to revivify the embodied human experience.

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