Metropolis
Mother-City—"Mittler"—Hitler

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> *I have never, if I may say so, been able to ask questions or think in any sense other than theological—precisely in keeping with the Talmudic precept concerning the forty-nine levels of meaning in every passage of the Torah.*
> *Walter Benjamin, letter to Max Rychner*

Metropolis is a German film made by Fritz Lang in 1926. It is commonly held to be a "classic" of cinema; some even call it a "masterpiece." Apart from the stylistic qualities that make it, for many viewers, one of the masterworks of expressionism, it is chiefly the film's moral, or ideology, that has been singled out for praise. The final sequence, a model of the "happy ending," depicts the emotional reconciliation of the employer with his workers, brought about by the employer's son, who, with the blessing of Maria, the pure young woman who is soon to become his wife, assumes the role of Mediator (*Mittler* in German). The film drew harsh words from some critics. H. G. Wells pronounced it "an amalgam of all the nonsense and platitudes we have ever heard, upon which is ladled a sentimental sauce like no other." More significantly, some critics have seen parallels with, not to say instances of, Nazi ideas, values, and fantasies. For Francis Courtade, "*Metropolis* is a fascist, pre-Nazi work." Siegfried Kracauer's analyses in *From Caligari to Hitler* provide valuable evidence in support of this judgment, in particular Lang's own statements to an American newspaper. When the Nazis came to power, Lang was summoned by propaganda chief Goebbels, who told him that he and Hitler had seen the film together some years earlier in a small provincial town. " . . . Hitler said [to Goebbels] at that time," Lang recounted, "that he wanted me to make the Nazis' pictures" (*New York World Telegram*, June 11, 1941, p.12). The theme of destiny being a recurrent favorite of Lang's, it is curious to note here the Nazi historical "destiny" of *Metropolis*. Before elaborating further on this point, I will briefly review the film's scenario. My main point, however, will be to demonstrate the need for, and perti-

nence of, psychoanalytic concepts in investigating the specifically filmic content of the work.

The Subject of *Metropolis*

Abbreviated to the bare minimum, the film's credits are as follows.

> Producer: UFA, 1926. Director: Fritz Lang. Cameramen: Karl Freund, Günther Rittau. Special effects: Eugen Schüfftan. Set design: Otto Hunte, Erich Kettelhut, Karl Volbrecht. Music: Gottfried Huppertz. Cast: Brigitte Helm (Maria), Gustav Fröhlich (Freder), Alfred Abel (Joh Fredersen), Heinrich George (foreman), Rudolf Klein-Rogge (Rotwang the inventor), Theodor Loos (Joseph, Fredersen's secretary), Fritz Rasp (an employee of Fredersen), Erwin Binswanger, Heinrich Gotho, Margarete Lanner, Georg John, Walter Kuhle, Erwin Vater, Grete Berger, Olly Böheim, Helene Weigel, and Anny Hintze.

Briefly summarized, the story goes like this:

> Metropolis is a gigantic city of the future, filled with enormous skyscrapers. Workers are housed below ground, along with factories and machinery. There they live a hellish existence as slaves subservient to the needs of mechanized production. Above ground, in the Upper City, are the vast offices of industrialist Joh Fredersen, master of Metropolis, who dictates his orders to squads of secretaries; complementing the office building is an Edenic Garden, where the masters' sons frolic.
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> Into this garden, which is protected by an imposing gateway, wanders Maria, the daughter of a worker, surrounded by a group of wretched children. She stares long and hard at Freder Fredersen, the employer's son, who stands transfixed, as though hypnotized. "These are your brothers," she says, pointing to the children. She is then driven out of the garden, but her visit has revealed to the son the horrible conditions in which workers live. As though walking in his sleep, Freder descends into the machine room. We see a tableau of workers on the job. An explosion takes place, killing some and injuring others. Freder then goes to see his father, who curtly informs him that class division is inevitable and that the worker must toil for his daily bread. The worker's place is "down below." A secretary, Joseph, is fired for not keeping an adequate guard. He contemplates suicide, but Freder prevents him from going through with it and they become friends.
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> Freder returns to the machine room and assumes the place of a worker. For ten long hours he submits to the torture of labor. Along with other worn-out laborers he then descends into the catacombs, where he finds Maria, immaculately white and gleaming, preaching patience and prophesying the coming of a "mediator." Meanwhile, the father, to whom a foreman has handed over plans found on the bodies of dead workers, turns for advice to the inventor Rotwang, who describes his masterpiece: a robot that never tires and never

makes an error, designed to replace the human worker. The two go down into the catacombs and observe Maria's preaching from a hiding place. The father asks Rotwang to make the robot look like Maria. Thus disguised, the robot could be used to incite the workers to rebellion.

Rotwang, alone, continues to watch Maria. She approaches the kneeling Freder and kisses him. When Freder leaves, Rotwang pursues Maria and after a fierce struggle seizes her and carries her off. He ties her down and forces her to undergo a transformation. The mechanism of the robot is concealed beneath an outer shell that exactly resembles Maria. Thus the robot becomes her double. (I shall refer to the robot thus disguised as the False Maria, to distinguish it from the Real Maria.) Freder sets out in search of Maria but is caught and imprisoned in Rotwang's house, where he hears the girl's cries.

The False Maria is shown to the father. Fascinated by the resemblance, he takes her by the shoulders. The son arrives, witnesses the scene, and falls ill. The False Maria is presented to an audience of employers dressed in tuxedos and performs an extraordinary, erotic dance. She then returns underground and incites the workers to rebellion. A frenzied mob invades the machine room and wreaks havoc. There is fire and flooding. The Real Maria manages to escape and heads for the workers' city to save the children. Freder joins her in this task. The workers, suddenly aware of the situation, lay hold of the False Maria, tie her to a stake, and set her afire. The flames destroy her human covering but leave the inner mechanism intact. "Witch!" cries the mob. Rotwang pursues the Real Maria to the top of the cathedral, himself pursued by Freder. The two men fight and Rotwang falls. The father, on his knees, says, "Praise God!" On the porch of the cathedral the father advances, flanked by his son and Maria. Ahead of them a disciplined troop of workers in triangular formation also advances. The foreman steps out ahead and walks toward the boss. The son takes his father's hand and joins it to the foreman's. Thus the "heart" completes its mission of "mediating" between "hand and brain."

This summary, which may seem rather drawn out, is necessary for my purposes. Readers who have not seen the film need to know the main points of the plot. Those who have seen the film generally recall only brief snatches. Even the few who have seen *Metropolis* numerous times fail to recall all its details. Film criticism operates under an essential handicap: the raw material is evanescent. Fleeting images are lost forever (occasioning what has been called *le deuil cinématique*, or mourning of the lost image). When the substance of a film is rendered in words (as it must be in criticism), images are systematically eliminated. Hence the narration of a film plot always sounds like a rather tedious anecdote. The analogy with the psychoanalytic patient's account of a dream is obvious.

No film is unaffected by the material and ideological conditions under which it is produced. This is especially true of *Metropolis*, a film that played an important part in the ambitious plans of UFA (Universum Film Aktiengesellschaft, "one of the most powerful political filmmaking trusts that Europe has ever known." The corporation was set up with government capital made available by Ludendorff, a proponent of pan-Germanist policies for whom the war had amply demonstrated "the power of images and film as a means of educating and influencing the masses," and with private capital provided by a number of well-known trusts: Krupp Steel, I.G. Farben (chemicals), A. E. G. (electrical equipment), and Deutsche Bank, to name a few. The firm's mission was to produce films that would distract attention from reality ("escapist pictures," or *Traumfilms*) and in various ways cast doubt on the prospects for revolution. Later, under the Nazis, the film industry carried this policy even further, producing a mix of love comedies, elaborate production numbers, and Viennese operettas, apparently with great success: the *Encyclopédie du cinéma* reports that "in 1942 more than a billion movie tickets were sold in Hitler's Greater Reich." At the time *Metropolis* was made, the president of UFA was a publishing magnate by the name of Alfred Hugenberg, who was also the leader of the extreme right-wing "Steel Helmets" group and a financial contributor to Hitler's Nazi Party. Lang's wife, Thea von Harbou, approved of the Nazis's ideas; after Lang's departure in 1933, she remained active, making films for the Nazis.

UFA wanted *Metropolis* to be "the greatest film of all time." Advertising for the picture (which should be taken with a grain of salt) underscored the colossal character of the project: 310 days and 60 nights of shooting, from 22 March 1925 to 30 October 1926; 6 million marks; 750 actors; 26,000 male extras, 11,000 female extras, and 750 children; 1,300,000 meters of positive film and 620,000 meters of negative film; as well as 2,000 pairs of shoes, 75 wigs, 50 automobiles, and so on. The film followed the *Nibelungen*, an ambitious vehicle for traditional mythological themes, written and directed by Lang and Thea von Harbou in 1923-1924. The gargantuan size of the *Metropolis* project, in keeping with its overall ideological aims, could hardly fail to elicit a certain "gigantism" not only in the treatment of scenery and architecture and the use of extras but even more in the nature of the filmic discourse that was developed—a discourse of the paranoid type. To put the point in somewhat different terms, there is a certain accord or unity or interaction between the historical, political, financial, and existential or personal circumstances in which a film is made and the fantasy

materials that shape or enter into the composition of the filmic text. In other words, the various elements that make up the film (characters, situations, forms, technical procedures, and so on), though in a sense circumscribed by history and politics, cannot be adequately articulated and organized except in terms of the unconscious processes and fantasy structures discovered by psychoanalysis. This, at any rate, is what I shall attempt to show in the remainder of this essay.

The Mother-City Metropolis and Its Inner Divisions

Etymologically *Metropolis* means "mother-city" (from the Greek *meter*, mother + *polis*, city). This historical residue of meaning is structurally embodied in the title, with all its cultural overtones; these overtones are marshalled into waves of meaning that animate the film as a whole (making it literally a "moving picture").

Metropolis is, superlatively, the City. The ranks of massive skyscrapers in the opening frames make this quite clear (these images were supposedly suggested to Lang by his first sight of New York City). Yet the masses of stone punctuated by square black openings in cold, geometric patterns do not stand erect like the Empire State Building in *King Kong*, for example, where the image of phallic erection is driven home by the lengthy scene in which the ape laboriously climbs the tower. In *Metropolis*, by contrast, oblique spotlights play over the buildings' naked facades and seem to lift or remove their skin; the moving spotlights weave the fabric of the city and, from the film's opening moments, suggest a stripping, skinning, or peeling away.

The city is sealed, closed in on itself, like a womb. The only movement we see (apart from the symmetrical, sublimating ascent in the cathedral) proceeds along tortuous, bowel-like passageways into the lower depths, the catacombs, to the central, altar-like structure where the two Marias stand and preach. Nature is almost totally absent; it is alluded to twice, once in the story of Babel, which is retold in the film (through a gray and barren landscape endless columns of slaves haul huge building stones—nature is thus petrified in myth and in stone), and again in two brief sequences. One of these depicts the Edenic garden, which is treated in painterly fashion with a pool, fountains, vegetation, and great white birds. But this garden stands behind an imposing gateway; it is a hothouse, an *objet d'art*, an artificial production. The second sequence reinforces this interpretation of nature: the sumptuous room occupied by the son, Freder, has walls covered with stylized plant motifs. Nature is reduced to a decorative sign, crushed and flattened against the surface of stone. These motifs (in all senses of the word) of

petrifaction establish a complex of fantasies that plays an important part in the film's libidinal economy.

The film's opening frames consist of long, static shots of building models. These are immediately followed by more dynamic, animated shots, with impressive close-ups of machines, or, more precisely, of parts and pieces of machines, partial objects, cogs and complex mechanisms that throb, churn, reciprocate, or rotate. Looking at the image from close up, one might say: it is moving, it is turning within. One point should be made at once, before these images are subsumed in subsequent social and technological totalities: within this city of surfaces, this tissue of stone, there is something—the id (*ça*)—moving, working mechanically, like a machine. And since there is nothing in these frames but pieces of machines working without either raw materials or finished products, we can say: it (*ça*) is working on itself. Now, the usefulness of theory is that it enables us to transform this last statement as follows: the id (*le Ça*), the unconscious, asserts itself as a productive drive or mechanism; it is formed by or takes the form of machinery, a complex, repetitive, articulated interaction of various operations and processes. These quick opening images make it perfectly clear what the film's ideological and cultural position concerning mass production, exploitation, and alienation will be. More than that, they give the key to the production and development of images and signifers; we might even say that they reveal the film's id: together, the work of the id and the work of the film are intertwined, as cinematographic technique and unconscious processes cooperate in the animation, development, deployment, and organization of figures and forms.

The first and perhaps the primordial operation is the division of the city into two radically different parts, which are kept separate by edict of the father/owners. This hierarchical division is strongly influenced by mythological and religious tradition (God began the creation of the world by separating the "upper" from the "lower" waters). The Upper City is that of the masters and owners, the superior place of supreme and total authority. Here, thought is magisterial. (Fredersen's huge office reflects the enormous size of his brain, which is indicated in the film by pointing: in one frame he is shown lying on his back, and before continuing with his speech he moves two fingers close to his head.) Here pleasure is as readily available as it was in the Garden of Eden (not unlike the garden in which the sons of the owners cavort). This is the "good" city. "Good" means that it is the owners who establish the law and name all things; we are reminded, too, of the Kleinian notion of the "good" mother.

The Lower City, where the workers work and reside, lies in the "lower depths." It is composed of three rather different layers, one lying

more or less above the next: the machine room, the vast territory of labor, suffering, and death (which appears as Moloch in a hallucination experienced by Freder, the son); the workers' dwellings, which are seen, briefly, only from the outside, densely packed around an empty central square; and finally the catacombs, decorated with skeletons and bones. This is clearly the "bad" part of the city.

The spatial division of the city is mirrored in various ways, including the striking, indeed frightening and spectacular division of the Maria character into two quite distinct, indeed antagonistic, parts (the same actress, Brigitte Helm, plays both). Maria is clearly a maternal figure in two senses: the Real Maria is the "good" mother, and the False Maria is the "bad" mother.

In her first appearance, when she enters the garden of the sons after hurdling, as if by miracle, all the obstacles, Maria—the Real Maria, the Good Maria—is surrounded by a host of small children over whom she extends her arms, creating a sheltered zone outlined by the placenta-like veil that hangs from her shoulders. When she points to the children and says to Freder, "They are your brothers," he is so thunderstruck that he stops his lovemaking and places his hand on his heart, a gesture that will be repeated throughout the film; Maria thus turns him into a "child," an "infant." He becomes, in a sense, one of "her" children. Maria's maternal protective function is clearly in evidence in the catastrophe near the end of the film. She saves the children from the flood, rescues them from the water. A deliberately theatrical image, elaborate and decorative, shows her standing on a sort of pedestal in the small square at the center of the workers' city, surrounded by clusters of children who clutch her body. The central object, the gong that she sounds to give the alarm, is circular in shape with a protrusion at the center, exactly like a breast. What is more, Maria occupies, or is identified with, yet another central space that obviously resembles a uterus: the cave at the bottom of the catacombs, reached at the end of a laborious and somber "descent into the underworld." There stands a sort of altar, bristling with tall crosses and candles, a typical place of meditation. Maria's name here takes on its full religious significance. Like Mary she is an immaculate virgin all dressed in white, a virgin mother with arms extended in a cross as she raises her veil, and her evangelical speech soothes the pain of the workers and announces the coming of a messiah, the Mediator (*Mittler*). In this closed, mystical space, Maria's speech evokes and opens up, through a fantastic process of infinite regression, another, still deeper region, a more primordial mythical space, built around the story of the Tower of Babel. This provides Fritz Lang with the opportunity to indulge in (or reveal himself in) various fantastic, large-scale directorial effects: huge, crushing blocks of stone,

endless staircases rising toward infinity, gray, antlike slaves emerging in interminable columns from the gray earth, great circles of light that swallow up the sky. In this hallucination, however, the Tower of Babel itself is nothing but a scale model, a paltry thing, a humble erection around which the masters gather to meditate. To all this colossal imagery Lang attaches, in grandiose letters as on an advertising billboard, the principle of a spectacularly inflated religious humanism: "Great is the Creator and Great is Man!"

A clearly more complex, extraordinary, and disturbing figure than the Real Maria, the False Maria (the robot disguised beneath Maria's skin and sharing her appearance) stands out immediately as an imago of the "bad" mother, flaunting herself as a de-naturation of the "good" Maria with her lascivious winks and smiles, her stiff arm, and so forth. Significantly, it is the False Maria, far more than the would-be terrifying gestures of Rotwang, who frightens children aged five or six who see *Metropolis*. The False Maria systematically repeats in the "wicked" mode all that the Real Maria does in the "good" mode. She occupies the same key points in space and enters into relations with the same objects (Rotwang, Freder, the mob, etc.), each time inverting or subverting the system of values, that is, turning them upside down so as to reveal an archaic and repressed layer. We, too, must subvert this figure, turn it over, in order to discover its primordial meaning. The appearance will turn out to be the deeper meaning: the human skin that covers the metallic robot is precisely what the robot is trying to hide. The progress of the narrative itself suggests another reversal of this figure: born a mechanical contrivance wreathed in the prestige of science, a science fiction robot, the False Maria ends up a witch, burned at the stake.

The distressing and horrifying primitive maternal dimension of the False Maria is established chiefly in the various primal scenes that occur at intervals throughout the film. Before examining them, let me point out the notable absence of any individualized, homogeneous, and named maternal figure. Freder, the hero of the film, has no mother that we know of. When he falls ill, it is always his father that we see at his side. The fact that the institution of motherhood is so thoroughly expunged from the film makes it clear that the whole burden of maternity is carried by the two Marias, and that the maternal dimension underlies (*fonde*) and merges into (*se fond dans*) the totality of Metropolis, the mother-city.

The Underlying Structure of *Metropolis*: The Primal Scene

Fusion, diffusion, and scrambling of figures, forms, and values beneath apparently solid, one-dimensional entities: therein lies part of the wealth

and originality of *Metropolis*. So complex are the displacements and overdeterminations that there is scarcely an image in the film that cannot occupy the most surprising positions at any of the forty-nine levels of Talmudic interpretation. Yet the unusual abundance of signifiers is powerfully polarized by an organizing structure: the primal scene, which through a series of frequent reiterations occupies nearly the entire film. The most typical sequence occurs near the middle, as if in the center or "heart" of the film, and it brings into play a cinematographic rhetoric of rare virtuosity. Rotwang, the scientist, has made a robot that looks like Maria and sends it off to be examined by Fredersen. The latter is struck, moved, and seduced by the resemblance. He stares hard at the young woman, moves closer to her, places his hands on her shoulders. The woman plays the seductress with eyes, smile, and body. At that moment the son, looking for Maria, bursts into his father's office. He sees his father and Maria locked in a quasi-embrace. Dumbfounded, he feels the ground fall away; he staggers, and to his eyes, deluded by madness, the couple seems to draw together and begins to whirl about. The two figures—two parents now—are linked together in a rotation, caught up in a blur in which dark and light lines seem to merge. This geometry, these crossed and rotating figures create—do they not?—a swastika: two entwined bodies with four arms. Transfixed as by the sight of Medusa, the son sees an immense, expanding black hole dotted with glowing spots of light (phantasms in the strict sense) and experiences a sense of falling into a void, a loss of consciousness or, better, of a loss of the unconscious, as horror takes refuge in illness: Freder falls ill. After the spectacular image of the fall, we return to Freder lying in bed, racked by fever and hallucinations.

Furthermore, these hallucinations, indicated by Freder's haggard look of fright and horror, establish a link to another version of the primal scene, which is characterized not by traumatic effects but by an extreme, frantic voyeurism, lavishly filmed. The father leaves the room of his sick son to attend the dinner given by Rotwang. We see a crowd of employers, masters, all wearing tuxedos. All are men, who can be considered doubles of the son, because a very effective parallel montage alternates between, and hence identifies, the son and the guests, portraying their common vision of the scene. The purpose of the dinner is to introduce the False Maria, to present her to the public. In a very precise sense, therefore, she is re-presented. A large, glowing object, a sort of basin or cup, slowly rises. An enormous cover is raised, and the False Maria, splendidly dressed, slowly emerges. She spreads her veils, exhibits her almost naked body, and begins to dance. Her whole body revolves at a dizzying rate, turning faster and faster until all that can be seen is a moving, sinuous, serpentine line. Intensely, totally absorbed in

voyeurism, the audience is all eyes, all stares—quite literally (or, since it is an image that is involved, iconically): a repeated frame shows a series of huge eyes, a mosaic of fascinated stares, of eyes popping out of heads. Plucked from their sockets, these eyes leave the spectators' tense bodies and voluptuously attach themselves to the spectacle. This is a hallucinatory voyeurism in two senses: it is a hallucination created by the technical means of the cinema, with the shot of a mosaic of eyes, and it is a psychological hallucination of the son, who, lying unconscious in his bed, follows the action. What this complex scene of the dancer watched by voyeurs reveals is that the False Maria is more than just a simple figuration of the "bad" mother. The choreographic rotation, which confuses the feminine shapes of the body and links belly, breasts, thighs, shoulder, and head in a brilliant serpent-like coil, together with the sumptuous display of the hot and smoking cup or basin, suggests that the False Maria should be seen as a condensed, pantomime representation of the primal scene. Recall that the False Maria is in fact composed of two radically different parts, joined together and perfectly fused (and the crucial importance of the process of fusion in the primal scene can hardly be overstated): a rigid metallic form, the robot, and a soft, feminine envelope of lovely flesh, extorted by Rotwang from Maria's body. In other words—to reduce it to the simplest possible conceptual terms—the robot is part phallus, indeed a sort of phallic principle. I say phallic principle because it cannot be clearly defined as either father or son: after the coupling with the father, he and the robot separate, and the robot goes off to serve as provocateur, sowing discord. At one point, when the mob believes that it has won a victory, the robot is even brandished like a trophy, a totem erected on the shoulders of all the sons, workers and bourgeois alike, joined together in communion. The robot is also the object in which the socio-political paternity of Fredersen couples and combines with the technological-scientific paternity of Rotwang. Thus the robot assumes the paternal functions of tyranny, repression, and punishment. But it also assumes the filial functions of criticism, accusation, resistance, and rebellion. (Here the robot is like the severed phallus of Rotwang, who has been symbolically castrated, his hand cut off, for having dared to lay hands on Mother Nature, for having "had" her, to use a slang term [French: *entuber*] that suggests the tubular machinery that fills his laboratory. The Promethean nature of Rotwang's enterprise is underscored by the shot that shows him, in the presence of the frightened Fredersen, claiming victory by raising his stump covered with a glove whose black color links it to the black shell of the Robot that stands motionless behind him. Like the liver of Prometheus eternally regenerating itself, the black form of the robot, which the hysterical crowd has accused of witchcraft,

survives the flames at the stake, cackling with the witch's blasphemous phallic laughter. The son's phallus is structurally heretical; no hell can annihilate it, and no mutilation, castration, or Inquisition can do away with it. Neither the robot nor Rotwang really dies in the film, as we shall see.) Thus the robot is in part the phallus, a mobile, inner core. But it is also—the second aspect of the construct known as the False Maria—the primordial maternal skin, the placenta, the hot, protective envelope, swollen by the heat, engorged as Hermann would say, and detached from Maria's body: pure intumescence, then, which returns to the bonfire in the ritual consummation of the burning forest (to borrow again from Hermann). This montage of mother-upon-phallus is a traditional but always impressive and fecund condensation, source of monsters from the Sphinx to the Gorgon: the False Maria is a monster of this type, a splendid mythological creation of cinema, baby sister of the formidable King Kong and a woman who no doubt seduced and aroused her own creator, Lang himself, who was able to find the precise shot to express his fascination: a montage of dazzled eyes exploring as a louse might the voluptuous woman's skin (voluptuous and—if the reader will permit—*volutueuse*, or curvaceous, flesh; the latter word, through its Latin roots *volvere, volutum*, suggests *vulva* or *volva*, vulva or womb). The primal dance, which the son hallucinates in his neonatal bed while his doubles, the men at the dinner, look on as voyeurs, is wonderfully amplified by the scenery. The vast smoking tub —pelvis of what phylogenetic mother?—from which the False Maria emerges (inwardly armed, one might say) is one of many circular shapes, along with its cover and the circle that surrounds Maria's head, and the curves of the veils and the hairdo and the woman's body. The tub itself is decorated with a motif of hydra-headed serpents upon which the dancer rests her body. The polymorphic sensuality of the dance and the use of redundant signifiers produce a powerful image of the primal scene. (It is not without interest to note that the spectator can easily miss various shots in the sequence just described, particularly the guard of hydra-headed serpents that surrounds the False Maria. In analyzing a film, what was not seen is just as important as what was.)

For the unconscious, of course, no amount of repetition is enough, nor can the variety of repetition be exhausted. In the major scenes analyzed above, sight and its hallucinatory representation of reality are the key elements. This is perfectly consistent with the rest of the film, in which eyes and gazes are powerfully omnipresent. In yet a third version of the primal scene, we are given highly dramatic "shots" of auditory perceptions. (I do not think that it is a misnomer to speak of "shots" of sound in this silent film, because the pantomime and gesticulations are so eloquent, not to say piercing.) These shots accompany, or more

precisely herald, a sumptuous technological and "scientific" treatment of the fantasy. As further evidence of the film's innovative style and depth of comprehension of fantasy, primitive memories of the primal scene are given material embodiment in a very theatrical way: an unusual architectural form, a sort of curved or swollen triangle, like a grubby wart grown up, oddly (and insolently) enough, in the vicinity of the great cube-like workers' dwellings and the cathedral. The text says: "In the midst of the city stood an old house." Meaningful paradox: this old building houses the futuristic laboratory of Rotwang, "the genius inventor." Redundancy always multiplies the meanings of an image. Here, the notions Old, Ancient, Primal are emblematically inscribed in what we see as the label or trademark of occultism and the esoteric tradition, the five-pointed star or pentacle, which appears on the entrance to the house, on various inner doors, and, in a more monumental way, on the wall against which the robot's seat is placed; the head of the robot seems to fit inside the star's lower triangular cavity.

Freder hears Maria's cries as Rotwang drags her through the dark corridors of his house, which, given his predatory behavior and the nature of his victim, might also be called his den or lair. The son enters the house in a strange way. Rage and magic mingle and alternate as all doors resist Freder's blows only to open and close suddenly of their own accord—an imperious determinism that suggests both the omnipotent magic of infantile thought and the perfectly ordered structure of fantasy, which here requires a son caught in a trance and trapped in an enclosed room entombed in stone, petrified, while all around the alchemist continues with his work.

In a technological forest bristling with tubes swollen with black sap, with throbbing balloons, quivering levers, thermometers, measuring devices, and rotating coils (*serpentins*), Rotwang bustles about, rapidly moving his hands—the black and the white—over all his "gadgets." This energetic overexcitation centers on and culminates in a sort of glowing white sphere, a sun-like globe mounted high up in the room, which its radiant energy makes "fertile." Maria lies in a glass coffin, her body girded or encircled by black metal rings which create around it something like a space of pregnancy. Waves or rays or filaments of nervous electricity traverse this region and penetrate the body of the passive victim. The other Maria, the robot, mirrors this composition exactly. Motionless in a seated position, the robot is connected to the Real Maria by numerous filaments that slither across the floor like serpents. Large, glowing, white rings circle the robot's body and rotate around it, rising and falling as they turn in an accelerated masturbatory motion. Merely by changing the sign, we can view the black robot as engaged

in frenzied copulation, moving rapidly in and out of its hot white sheath. Excitation reaches its peak in the orgiastic atmosphere of the laboratory. Rotwang, after his period of intense activity, is nothing but a gaze contemplating the miraculous impregnation. The robot acquires vessels, nerves, and organs and begins to move; a human skin now covers its structure. Maria, drained, lets her head fall to one side, in a primal gesture suggesting both orgasm and death. The creative act is done. A door opens, freeing the son and allowing the story to proceed.

This is a scene of remarkable density, and it is instructive to compare it with a similar sequence, also depicting the creation of a woman, in *The Bride of Frankenstein*, where the same battery of signifiers is used: electrical charges and discharges, light waves, ringlike forms, mechanical motions of the robot gradually changing to more supple human movements, and so on. In *Metropolis* a subtle movement and interplay of forms makes the scene unusually arresting. Inventor, creator, and impregnator, Rotwang is single, double, and multiple all at once: he is the paternal and divine One, symbolized by the solar globe from which all energy emanates (a globe heated until it glows red, suggesting the inventor's very name—Rot-wang, or red cheek; *Wange* also designates clay and hands). He is sovereign over the empirical realm as well as the realm of reproduction. Yet he is a man who not only desires, conceives, orders, and carries out the experiment but also contemplates it: after conceiving it and then carrying it out, he follows its progress with his eyes, in a state of anxious fascination. Thus he assumes the role of the voyeuristic son, the passive witness of the scene. He is the double (in both senses of the word) of the excluded and banished son. Prostrate, the son is castrated; his entire body fails to achieve erection. Rotwang takes on this aspect of castration. His severed hand is punishment for his filial curiosity and establishes a female component of his personality, clearly indicated by his black gown. Finally, Rotwang is multiple in that he disintegrates into the innumerable objects that he manipulates and operates; he is one with his devices (for it is these that we contemplate in his laboratory-lair). The mother herself is double, Maria and the robot. This split is pregnant with sexual dualities, moreover: both figures exhibit a phallic rigidity (Maria in her catatonic state and the robot with its stiff black metal structure, which also allows the phallic axis to be inscribed on the anal register) while the rings and circles suggest feminine and maternal curves. Add to this the plethora (of energy as well as forms) evident in the wires and filaments that fill the zone of copulation with waves and rings, which one cannot fail to recognize as the nerve rays imagined by Judge Schreber in his paranoid fantasy of sexual action at a distance.

Rotwang's dual function—as paranoid father and creator and as re-

bellious rival son—is also apparent in two more or less symmetrical sequences, one of which ends in triumph, the other in failure. The first precedes and lays the groundwork for the great technological primal scene analyzed above: Maria, having finished her sermon and bestowed her kiss upon Freder, is left alone when Freder departs. Nearby, Rotwang, having concluded his alliance with Fredersen, is left alone when Fredersen departs. In the dark, primitive depths of a cavern, he follows Maria by focusing the beam of his lamp on her. Lang's stylistic virtuosity is given free rein to indulge the expressionist taste for effects of light and shadow, for contrasts of black and white that set off, engulf, or heighten actual forms. In her flight Maria runs into jagged walls, gazes in horror upon skulls and skeletons, and finally succumbs to Rotwang's attack. Duration is here an important part of the meaning: the scene clearly lasts longer than is required by the narrative or the representation of a fantasy. The insistence on these effusions of the imagination is more than just aesthetic license. A principle is laid down, made explicit by images of pursuit, confinement, and death: psychic mechanisms are inflexible, overwhelming, and inexorable. Indeed, I would call the whole sequence principled. It establishes, first, the principle that fantasies are causal, which governs the progress of the entire film. Second, it lays down a general principle of fate (pursuit, confinement, death), which is so important an element in all of Lang's work and which is masterfully expressed in the psychopath's confession scene in *M*. Maria stands with her back to a wall as Rotwang slowly and almost sensually raises the beam of his lamp over her body. In a close-up her face appears to be divided in two: the dark upper portion endures the hypnotic power of Rotwang's sparkling eyes, while the lower portion gleams white in the light cast by Rotwang's lamp, held at mouth level. Maria is thus the object of a hypnotic stare and the focus of a rigid beam of light. Both touch her and hold her still, cover or penetrate her. Sexual action at a distance takes place thanks to an upward displacement of the phallic power. Rotwang's barred phallus (*phallus barré*) moves off (slang: *se barre*) in two directions at once, establishing Rotwang's extreme ambivalence. Intellectual sublimation invests the eyes with a power of penetration-fascination of a hypnotic type, which literally holds the object at a distance: this is the scientist's expert gaze. On the other hand, a process of regression tends to polarize and structure various libidinal investments around the mouth, producing a sexual syncretism (mouth as anus, urethra, phallus, etc.) characteristic of Hitler's libidinal structure (as we shall see in a moment). The sadistic element implicit in this displacement (piercing eyes, mouth spewing forth its luminous jet) is underscored by several shots of skeletons and finally triumphs in the aggressive posture of Rotwang, who dominates Maria

and brutally holds her against and beneath him in an embrace-rape that is almost a preliminary take of the great scene of impregnation that follows.

In the final part of the film, Rotwang revives his aggression against Maria, but now every effort ends in failure. The triumphal birth of the False Maria is offset by the robot's immolation at the stake. The depths of the cave in which Maria was caught are countered by the heights of the cathedral to which she escapes. The alliance with Fredersen that was sealed in the cave is broken off. Above all, the lonely, diabolical work of the scientist now gives way to public confrontation with the hero Freder. For this battle a mythological atmosphere is created by a striking low-angle shot. This, together with gargoyles and a Manichaean handling of shapes, confirms Maria's maternal function by distinguishing, in that complex of forms named Rotwang, the grimacing figure of a "wicked," incestuous son, diabolical brother of the "good," angelic Freder, who is set up as the protector of the "good" mother. Rotwang, the "bad" son, symbolizes the "bad" mother with his black gown and black robot. The whirl of images is dizzying: the "bad" son engenders the "bad" mother as much as she engenders him. The themes are Hitlerian: "bad" sons—intellectuals, homosexuals, rebels, Semites, and so forth—have created a bad Germany. Purification will come through extermination and fire.

The "good" son triumphs as Rotwang plunges into the abyss. The father, on his knees, says "Praise God!" This suggests that Rotwang's fall is to be interpreted as the fall of Lucifer. Indeed, in the glowing globe and the beams and coils of light we have seen Rotwang as *luci-fer*, bearer of light; hence he is cast out of Heaven, where God reigns. But the images tell the story: the "wicked one" is not destroyed. The flames may destroy the False Maria's outer covering of flesh, but they leave the robot's inner structure intact. Rotwang falls, but we know not where. The "black nakedness of wickedness" (Michaux) regains the shadows, where it may carry on with its evil work. To track him down, the "good" sons dress in black and, as they set out to eradicate evil amid the sound of bonfires and marching boots, tirelessly repeat that the battle is never-ending, that the extermination of the wicked knows no respite or remission or end. If "wickedness" can assume the guise of the "good" mother herself, it can hide anywhere. But here I am extrapolating in terms of known history the unconscious tendencies that Lang's film obscures, precisely with regard to Rotwang's fall. The slate must be wiped clean before the supreme displacement can occur: once the figures of fantasy are gone, the subjects of ideology can make their entrance—theater of representation, elevation of the Representatives.

The final sequence is shot in a theatrical way. We first see a deserted, empty space in front of the cathedral, a stage waiting for the play to begin. Then an audience arrives: the army of workers, in close triangular formation, moving forward in disciplined ranks (or rows), rises from the bottom of the screen. The cathedral serves as backdrop, frame, and enclosure of the final scene. Fredersen, Freder, and Maria pass through a narrow door and are somewhat surprised to find themselves at the dawn of a new day, so to speak, beneath the maternal arch of the porch. The foreman steps out ahead of the group of workers, brawny and awkward in his respect for authority. A pantomime (with movements of the arms, looks, hesitations, and signs of awkwardness and embarrassment) makes it clear that something seeks to be represented, and that the characters do not yet perfectly embody their roles. Perhaps this scene should be called a "super-representation": before us we see not mere circumstantial characters playing to a passive audience, but well-defined socio-economic and ideological entities identified by name. The foreman represents labor (the hand); Fredersen represents capital (the brain). Freder, along with his double, the white shadow of Maria, represents mediation (the heart). Thus the heart, composed, as in sentimental postcards, of two curves, links capital to labor. Hands that had groped tentatively toward one another join in a handshake, and linked arms stretch horizontally across the frame in a composition now in a sense egalitarian, all angles, volumes, and vertical differentiations having been eliminated in the general leveling. Such is the ideological platitude of this happy ending in the form of a handshake; the vast, heterogeneous, contradictory spaces explored by the film are relegated to a place somewhere behind the screen. But they can be brought back in full delirium, by a mere squeeze of the hand: Hitler's manacles, brutally applied, will give the madness a new lease on life.

The triangular structure of the final scene repeats the triangles and diagonals that delimit figures and movements throughout the film. (To meet Maria in the triangular hollow of the catacombs, for example, the workers descend along a left-to-right diagonal, while Rotwang and Fredersen follow a right-to-left diagonal.) Particularly spectacular is the black triangle formed by the army of workers as it moves into center screen; heads lowered, the workers move in lock-step, a black sea of slaves. The robot, seated on its chair with wires coming down diagonally on both sides, also formed a black triangle, repeated once more in the pyramid of the bonfire and in certain of Rotwang's attitudes. Rotwang, the robot, and the workers are thus parts of the same triangle, which rises from below (energy rises into the robot's body, just

as the flames of the bonfire mount the stake and the workers' formation moves up toward the cathedral). This lower triangle is the "bad" triangle, as is indicated by stiffness and blackness—in a sense phallic, as we have seen. And just as the robot's head penetrated the lower triangular cavity of the pentacle, so, too, do the square workers' platoons penetrate Moloch's wide-open mouth, and Rotwang the inventor raises his black hand to begin the impregnation of the robot. But this interpretation conflicts with too much of the evidence: the femininity of Rotwang, the castrated male dressed in a black gown; the fact that the robot's head does not so much penetrate the cavity of the star as reinforce it; the robot's female flesh, destroyed by the flames; and so on. Accordingly, the phallic interpretation of this hardware seems rather misleading to me, valid and pertinent though it may be in some respects. It is a smokescreen, an overestimation, intended to conceal a more fundamental truth, something especially frightening, indeed truly horrifying, which can now be revealed simply by inverting the form or relation: turned upside down, belly up, the black triangle turns out to be the V shape of the female genitals. Recall that the False Maria consists of two parts, internal and external. A feminine skin, a swollen womb, materially covers the robot's phallic metal structure. But we can now say, at an even deeper level, in fantasy, that it is the phallic robot that hides and covers the female sex organ in the very act of exhibiting it. Rotwang's complex figure also requires reinterpretation: his spectacular powers as impregnator and father, his aggressive virility, are mere pretenses designed to distract our attention from such less visible or striking signs as his black gown and missing hand-phallus. These signs point to a rich vein of hidden femininity in this highly ambivalent figure. Hence it follows that the black triangle stands primarily for the female genitals, and that the determination to deny, denigrate, camouflage, repress, and destroy it (by crushing the workers, crushing Rotwang, burning the robot, and so on) indicates horror of the female organ, and, since the female organ stands for sex in general, horror of sexuality. This is perhaps both a primal level of the film and an important piece of information for understanding the Nazi imagination.

Apart from the oppressive, destructive context of the primal scene, sexuality is depicted in the film several times as amusement or recreation. In the masters' lovely garden, Freder laughingly skips around a gay fountain in pursuit of a cavorting damsel decked out with jewels, flowers, and feathers. In general, however, the black sexual triangle is crushed: it is always pushed into the depths, the abyss of Moloch, the void, or the flames by a symmetric and antagonistic triangle—white, placed higher up, and opening upwards. This is evident in the final scene: while the black triangle of workers penetrates from below, from

the bottom of the screen, the upper portion of the screen is occupied by the cathedral porch, on which two symmetrical rows of saints' statues converge toward a vanishing point, or vertex, where the Fredersen trio makes its appearance, as though it were a holy family sent from on high. The sublime, transcendental, angelic nature of this holy triangle is evident (from the cathedral, whiteness, goodness, and so forth); it reminds us of the spectacularly white and glowing triangle formed in the black depths of the catacombs by Maria's angelic figure, flanked by a fan-shaped array of candles and crosses. The purpose and composition of the structure are further highlighted by Maria's gesture as she raises her arm and spreads her veil—her wings. The kiss that she then bestows on Freder's face can only be an extension of this sexual "whiteness," this chastity; later, Maria herself falls victim to Rotwang's black aggression.

The first thing that makes Freder stand out is his white clothing, and Lang exploits this in a systematic and even brutal way by contrasting the son's glaring white garb with the black suit worn by Joseph the secretary, the gray fumes and huge black bulks in the machine room, the black uniforms worn by the workers, and so on. When Freder rejoins his "brother" workers, he trades his white clothing for a black uniform, since whiteness is now superlatively embodied in Maria (who appears to be radiantly white). In a third stage, we see Freder recovering from his illness (the whiteness of the bed and the sickroom represent the digestive process, the catabolism of the blackness and evil that accompany disease) and again putting on his white clothes, which will henceforth survive every adversity. This three-part chromatic composition (white-black-white) is by itself sufficiently strict and homogeneous to distinguish the three major segments of the film. If the primal scene is the fundamental and motivating structure of the film, then the son's role as mediator can be seen as the primary axis of the narrative and the key to the elaboration of an ideology.

Freder becomes aware of his vocation as mediator in a revelation of messianic type: Maria assumes the role of inspired Annunciatrix. Obviously this has Christ-like overtones, not only in the quasi-osmotic relationship between Freder and the Virgin-Maria (light is transferred osmotically through the gaze, among other things) but also in an image that occurs at a particularly dramatic moment in the film: when Freder is crucified on the needles of an electrical gauge of some sort (like the hands of a clock) and, in the midst of his torture, invokes the name of the Father. But beneath the reference to Christ lies a rich lode of mythological material. The biblical Babel in the background points to still deeper images (from the architecture of the tower to the huge gray furrows of human beings excreted by the earth). The narrative structure is based on traditional mythological models, in which certain sequences

occur in a fairly constant order: annunciation of the mission, vocation, trial, failure, symbolic death and rebirth, confrontation with the monster, triumph and resurrection. In terms of manifest content, composed primarily of elements of narrative and ideological messages, the film essentially follows the actions of the mediator. Indeed, Freder is the only character who appears in all the spaces represented in the film (the Edenic garden, the father's office, the machine room, the catacombs, Rotwang's house, workers' city, cathedral, and so on). He is also the only character who touches (to the point of grabbing or embracing) all the major characters (Fredersen, Maria, Rotwang, Joseph, and so on). Freder's trajectory is one of circular or cyclic totalization rather than a dialectical one of mediation or mediatization. Adversity is seen not as a historical or present contradiction but as an accursed survival of archaic material (the pentacle, the witch) or a sudden unleashing of natural forces (the flood). When Freder encounters Rotwang's opposition, he is immediately forced to take evasive action or to rely on magic to refuse and flee the challenge. Recall, in particular, the spectacular sequences in which Rotwang orchestrates first the technological primal scene and then the choreographic one, thereby in a sense causing Freder to fail to perform. We see him first lying prostrate in a dark room in Rotwang's house and then lying on his bed hallucinating in his sickroom. The contradiction is neither analyzed nor pondered, and no response is made that would exploit its dynamic; it is simply abandoned, hidden, and if possible crushed in a burst of feverish activity that might be classed as activism.

The mediator's mission is accomplished when he reunites Capital and Labor, Brain and Hand, in holy wedlock in the holy church (and recall that re-uniting, re-tying, comes from *religare*, the probable root of the word religion). He brings the opposing parties together and unites what has been separate, fragmented, and antagonistic by placing himself in the middle, in between, that is, by acting as intermediary: in German, the word is *Mittler*, which means "mediator" but is also the comparative of *Mittel*, meaning middle, central, intermediate. (*Mittel* is also the word for "means," in the sense of "means and ends," which suggests a cultural and economic instrumentalism characteristic of Nazism.) Freder's position is crucial in the strict sense of the word: he is at the center, the crossroads, the crossing, the crux. He encounters (*croise*) everyone in the film; in his hallucination he believes that he has witnessed the copulation (*croisement*) of his parents; he is crucified on the cross formed by the hands of the factory's time clock; he is the crusader (*croisé*) who confronts the heretic Rotwang; and finally he is the one who effects salva-tion by joining (in a *croisement*, a crossing of hands) capital and labor in the final reconciliation-resurrection. Freder is also

the one who believes [in French: *celui qui croit—croit*, the third person singular of *croire*, to believe, being a homonym of *croix*, cross—Trans.]. Freder believes in his father, in the "good" Maria, and in his revealed mission. And I would add, freely associating in a manner inspired by the frenetic history of the times, that after 1926 he also became the person who would grow (*croitre*: with the Nazi victory in the 1933 elections) as well as crow (*croasser*), as Hitler crowed in his speeches.

At this point it should be noted that Hitler was enthusiastic about *Metropolis* and a great admirer of Fritz Lang. Superficially, the reason for his interest is easy to see: the film's ideology coincides with the Nazi vision (set forth by Hitler in *Mein Kampf*, the book he finished in the same year, 1926, in which the film was made) of a national and cultural harmony transcending class divisions. This explanation is no doubt correct as far as it goes. To see the film as an apology for class harmony, a constant of conservative and reactionary thought, can no doubt account for some of Hitler's pleasure, but it is not really likely to elicit the deep and passionate commitment we know he felt (a commitment so passionate that he was prepared, we are told, to overlook Lang's Jewish background and put him to work making Nazi films). But the essence of the film's power lies not in its rather tiresome didactic themes (apparently a specialty of Thea von Harbou, Lang's wife and collaborator) but in the images that Lang created and constructed, produced and directed (to use film jargon that is perfectly appropriate here) —images rich in libidinal investment and fantasy and capable of seducing or horrifying the viewer. Ideological allusions and references cannot by themselves win a film a special and highly significant place in history and politics. For these references must themselves be carried, traversed, weighted down, interpenetrated by work that informs and figures—that is, gives form and figure to—the unconscious. And that is what Lang achieved. Perhaps this work of informing form is the much-sought place where history and fantasy meet.

To explore this meeting place would, I suspect, require considerable multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary effort aimed at drawing together analyses of style, rhetoric, historical pressures, social and economic data, politics, psychoanalysis, and so on—nothing less than a program for a new anthropology, one possible model of which has been outlined in the journal *Psychoanalysis and the Social Sciences*, founded by Geza Roheim in New York. My purpose here is much more modest: by bringing together the figures of Hitler and *Metropolis*, I want to draw out some parallels, which prove nothing but suggest areas for further research; in this I am indebted to Walter C. Langer, whose book *The Mind of Adolf Hitler* (Basic Books, 1972) collects many useful documents. One is immediately struck by the similarity between the name

Hitler and the title *Mittler*, which is attached to the hero of the film. Although the process by which identification through names, or even through the letters of names, takes place remains rather obscure, it has been shown to occur in too many, often quite spectacular cases to be ignored as a major factor in the shaping of the imagination. Hitler may have been especially likely to see himself or read himself into the *Mittler* of *Metropolis* because his own name was (according to Langer) a subject of uncertainty, frustration, and confusion. Early party documents were signed *Hittler*; Adolph's father, Alois Hitler, was an illegitimate child who until age forty, when he was recognized by his father Johann Georg *Hiedler*, used the name of his mother, Maria Anna Schicklgruber. Yet owing to a common ancestor, Hitler's maternal grandmother was also named *Hitler*. The nominal foundations are even more severely shaken (just as Freder feels the ground give way under him as he sees the figures of his parents whirl about) by the suggestion that Alois was actually the son of a Rothschild. (Maria Anna Schicklgruber became pregnant while working in Vienna in the home of the Austrian branch of the Rothschilds.) Whatever the basis for this theory (which seems rather farfetched), the important fact is that Hitler was aware of it, and that it may have stamped his paternal line with a sign of infamy extending far back into the past (just as the diabolical image of Rotwang is marked as ancient by the sign of the pentacle). Hitler's feeling that his ownership of his last name was fragile was compounded by the fact that his father's various marriages were to women of widely varying ages. Alois's first wife was thirteen years his elder; she died in 1883 without having given birth. His second wife, Franziska, died in 1884, leaving two children: Alois, born in 1882, and Angela, born in 1883. His third wife was his own cousin, Klara Poetzl, who had earlier been adopted by the couple and was twenty-three years younger than Alois. Of six children born to her, four died in early childhood. The only survivors were Adolph Hitler and a sister named Paula, who was apparently slightly retarded. What is more, Adolph's half-sister Angela, the manager of a Jewish student restaurant in Vienna, married a man named Raubal and had a daughter, Geli, with whom Adolph had a long and tortured affair that ended when Geli died in 1930, killed by a bullet fired from her uncle's pistol. This confused family history, frequently punctuated by death, may have heightened Hitler's sensitivity to the primal scenes in *Metropolis*, in which confusion of the figures plays such an important role. Death appears in Freder's hallucination (the same one in which the choreographic primal scene occurs) as a statue moving against a background of the seven deadly sins; to Hitler, death must have been a familiar figure, and he was to ensure that it would enjoy a triumphal future.

There are rather remarkable similarities in the early experiences of Lang and Hitler. Both were born in Austria, Lang in Vienna in 1890, Hitler in Braunau in 1889. Both later moved to Germany, indeed to Munich. Both aspired to become architects; Lang actually studied architecture, but Hitler, who lacked a diploma, could not. Subsequently, both became painters in a minor way, selling postcards and watercolors in order to live, Lang in Brussels in 1910 and Hitler in Vienna from 1908 to 1913. When war was declared in 1914, both felt a surge of patriotism. Both were passionate about the movies, cinephiles in the full sense of the word, and both were attracted to women who worked in theater or film: Thea von Harbou and Eva Braun were former actresses. For our present purposes, the most important similarity is the almost obsessive interest in architecture: in terms both of concrete accomplishments, political in the one case and aesthetic in the other, and of the formation of the imagination, the aptitude for projection, for turning fantasies into spatial constructions and architectonic volumes, is manifest in the two men. As many people have pointed out, *Metropolis* is an architect's film; I earlier alluded to the etymological sense of the word, mother-city. Hitler, Langer writes, "believes himself to be the greatest of all German architects and spends a great deal of his time in sketching new buildings and planning the remodeling of entire cities"(30). Thus the "modeling" of the maternal figure as the mother-city in *Metropolis* corresponds to Hitler's desire to "remodel" his mother, to remake or repair (*Mittler* also means "one who repairs") her damaged body, dismantled by a violent and brutal father (just as the "good" Maria is dismantled, taken apart, by Rotwang). In *Metropolis* the "bad" part of the father is almost entirely invested in the figure of Rotwang. The real, social father, Fredersen, while always good to his son, remains an ambivalent figure (he plots with Rotwang, lays hands on the False Maria, and plays with fire by toying with the destructive rage of the workers) until the son's heroism and Rotwang's fall enlighten and purify him, liberating his essential "goodness" and thereby safeguarding the paternalist social model, the basis of order and discipline. The conclusion of the film, in a milky discharge of "goodness" by father, mother, and son on the cathedral porch, seems to correspond to (and therefore to satisfy) a syncretic vision of Hitler's in which he attempted to combine the maternal figure with a dominant father imposed by German tradition (as well as by western paternalism in general). In this connection, Langer notes that "although Germans, as a whole, invariably refer to Germany as the "Fatherland," Hitler almost always refers to it as the "Motherland"(153).

Freder rescues Maria from Rotwang's clutches. He saves the children from the catastrophic flood. All in all, then, he saves the entire city, the

mother-city, as the final, summary image of universal marriage suggests. The story of the film is obviously one of salvation, and no word better describes Hitler's political and historical vocation. Thus communication and correspondences between the film's images and various aspects of Nazi ambition are permanent. The sequence that shows the rescue of the children from the flooded workers' city readily lends itself to "Hitlerian" political interpretation. In the small square at the center or heart of the city the waters rise (mounting perils menace the victim Germany); Maria sounds the alarm and calls for help (Hitler, we know, felt that he had a calling, that he was merely responding to the appeal, the voice, of the mother country—his vocation); the children, abandoned by their unworthy parents (compare Hitler's attraction to children; his antifamilial feelings; his ability to address the childlike populace and shape their behavior; etc.), unite (as the populace united around Hitler, ending "partisan" divisions) around Maria, toward whom they extend their arms in a gesture of supplication (did not Hitler see the innumerable outstretched arms, the Heil Hitlers, as a gesture of supplication addressed to him, expressing a desire to be saved?); at the height of danger, Freder arrives in the role of savior; he clasps Maria to his bosom (Hitler declared that he was "wedded" to Germany) and leads Maria and the children (Germany and her people) out of danger; he is their guide, their *Führer*.

Those responsible for the disaster have already been identified: Rotwang, the "ingenious inventor," whom Hitler must have numbered among those whom he denounced as "overeducated, stuffed with knowledge and intelligence yet devoid of all healthy instincts," representing "the intellect [which] has swollen to the point of becoming autocratic" (the troubling autonomy of Rotwang's house) and which "now resembles a disease" (the morbid hypertrophy of Rotwang's intellect, indicated by his huge forehead and vast library); to some extent Fredersen himself, the father and industrialist who pays too little heed to his son's voice and who (at Rotwang's gala party) is associated with a decadent, soft, and effeminate bourgeoisie symbolized by the revelers in tuxedos and evening gowns who, while dancing, allow themselves to be led into the abyss by the False Maria; the working class, too, is guilty of impatience, of having heeded agitators (the False Maria) who incited rebellion—the mob is impulsive, irresponsible, "feminine" in a word ("the mob is a woman," Hitler said, and "the vast majority of people are so feminine"). Like Maria, Hitler comes to "possess" the mob through oratory and leads it back to the straight and narrow: rectitude is nothing less than an obsession in *Metropolis*. Behind all these figures of guilt and sin (the statues of the seven deadly sins) looms the False Maria. It is in fact quite correct to say that she looms, and looms con-

stantly: over the shoulders of Rotwang as he shows her to Fredersen; above the luminous cup from which she emerges; above the crowd of workers and bourgeois who carry her in triumphal processions; and even above the flames of the bonfire that consumes her. If, as I have suggested, she is, above and beyond her various avatars, sexuality itself, seen or treated as a profound, ultimate power, as danger, anguish, and horror; then omnipresent and ubiquitously reborn she becomes something that cannot be tolerated, that must be tracked down, eradicated, annihilated, and burned—the interminable Nazi extermination.

Many other traits typical of Hitler find counterparts in *Metropolis*. "I move forward with the infallible accuracy of the sleepwalker," Hitler wrote; in the film we see Freder receiving Maria's revelation and then proceeding toward his destiny with both arms outstretched in the manner of a sleepwalker. The Christ-like aspect of *Metropolis* has its parallel in the history of Hitler and the Nazi movement, which for a time had a quasi-religious dimension; according to Langer, Hitler cited the Bible and drew "comparisons between Christ and himself"(35). The obsession with architecture that we find in *Metropolis* has its counterpart in Hitler's construction of the "eagle's nest" at Berchtesgaden, reached through "a long underground passage . . . enclosed by a heavy double door of bronze. At the end of the underground passage a wide lift, panelled with sheets of copper, awaits the visitor. Through a vertical shaft of 330 feet cut right through the rock, it rises up to the level of the Chancellor's dwelling place . . . . The visitor finds himself in a strong and massive building containing a gallery with Roman pillars, an immense circular hall with windows all around . . . . It gives the impression of being suspended in space, an almost overhanging wall of bare rock rises up abruptly"(169). The first part of this description accords remarkably well with some of the images of the underground city in *Metropolis*, while the latter part describes the precipice from which the paranoid King Kong surveys his empire. In citing these lines by [then ambassador] François-Poncet, Langer notes that "Hitler often retires to this strange place to await instructions concerning the course he is to pursue"(169). The images of petrifaction that we noted in *Metropolis* (the Tower of Babel, the enormous blocks of stone dragged by the slaves, Freder immured in stone during the impregnation scene), along with the constant presence of eyes and intense stares (Freder staring at his father embracing Maria, Freder hallucinating the erotic dance of the False Maria), were associated with the figure of the "bad" mother and its primal sexual dimension, both represented by the head of Medusa. I therefore find the following note by Robert Waite (from the epilogue to Langer's book) particularly striking: "He was infatuated with the head of the Medusa, once remarking that in von Stuck's painting the

flashing eyes that turned men to stone and impotency reminded him of the eyes of his mother"(218). As Hitler watched *Metropolis*, how could he not have been fascinated and hypnotized by the repeated hypnotic stares (of Fredersen and Rotwang and Maria and Freder), so like his own gaze, filled with the magical and paranoiac omnipotence of the stare that petrifies, engulfs, and penetrates, the gaze that wishes it were a disembodied orgasm, which in a frightening reversal injects its venom and like a vampire sucks the blood of its victim in an ersatz of displaced and dis-figured sexuality. Langer speaks accurately of the "diffuse sexual function" of Hitler's eyes and notes: "When he meets persons for the first time he fixates his eyes on them as though to *bore through* them. There is a peculiar *glint* in them on these occasions that many have interpreted as an *hypnotic* quality"(201; my italics).

Moloch: Hitler's Mouth and the World's Anus

The Führer's speeches shaped the Nazi imagination, which ultimately produced the crematoriums of Auschwitz: from Hitler's mouth to the "world's anus." Hitler's mouth, all observers agree, was capable of casting a spell over multitudes, producing what Langer, citing Axel Heyst, calls a "veritable orgasm": "In his speeches we hear the suppressed voice of passion and wooing which is taken from the language of love; he utters a cry of hate and voluptuousness, a spasm of violence and cruelty"(204). Auschwitz, anus of the world, enjoys the dubious honor of symbolizing the extremity of horror. 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 in the machine room. Liquids and gases are set free, bursting forth with destructive energies. Injured workers roll about on the ground or plunge into the void, so much dark debris. On a buckled, melted screen Freder's hallucination of Moloch's head takes shape. He sees an enormous, fiery mouth framed by huge teeth, into which diabolic creatures toss human beings with their pitchforks. But this fiery fantasy of consumption—the "bad" mother with her tongue of flame swallowing her young, the head of Medusa (flames as serpents) leaving Freder petrified —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, which the Nazis put into practice: the mouth excretes ("filth" flowed from Hitler's mouth) and the anus devours (Auschwitz).

The head of Moloch can serve as emblem for a reinterpretation of the signifiers in *Metropolis* in anal terms: the corridors and labyrinths are like viscera; the blacks and whites are expressive (expressionist) of filth (the material of the walls, partitions, ground, and clothing); the glossy blackness and mechanical rigidity (relative sublimation) of the robot and of Rotwang's prosthetic hand; the character structure of Fredersen; the explosions and destructions by gas, smoke, liquids, and so on. 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 (as one says of concrete, but also of billy clubs) with fecal power in order to enclose the libidinal economy (the walls of the mother city are more visceral than uterine) within a rigid structure and orient it toward destruction.

P.S. If we view *Metropolis* as primarily a "spatialization," a shaping and figuration of fantasy, then we may speak of a Langian traversal or exploration of the unconscious, whose existence is recognized in aesthetic terms through an intuitive elaboration and construction of concrete forms, yielding a specific type of ecstasy (*jouissance*) in which knowledge of the unconscious remains trapped. The author plays on (*joue*), and takes pleasure from (*jouit de*), a magical commutability of differences (the two Marias). The Hitlerian exploration is quite different: the existence of the unconscious is recognized, but it is constantly displaced and exploited through active, activist miscognition (*méconnaissance*) of structures, of the intrinsic productivity and lawfulness of the unconscious, all mixed in with the ideological pap (along with a parallel political-economic fusion of social differences—bourgeois, petit bourgeois, workers, peasants—through an outpouring of nationalism and racism). Instead of knowledge we have "acting out," on a historical scale. The imaginary architecture of *Metropolis* becomes Berchtesgaden, Nuremberg, Berlin, Auschwitz. The nation wants all differences to be effaced. Radically different is the Freudian exploration: here the existence of the unconscious is recognized for the first time as a field open to the understanding, to the elaboration of theories and concepts; Freud envisioned a science, a critical rationality, and attempted to establish a praxis for liberating otherness. Here differences are spelled out and called forth (childhood, neurosis, arts, etc.) in order to be articulated.

It may be of some interest to point out that all three explorations, divergent as they are in many respects, start, along with innumerable other explorations of other realms, from the same place: another rich* but identical mother-city, Vienna.

Translated by Arthur Goldhammer

[**Autre riche*: the author is punning on *Autriche*, French for Austria—Trans.]

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