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METROPOLIS 1927

NOTES ON THE PORT
OF SAINT FRANCIS 1952

METROPOLIS

PRODUCED BY UFA

DIRECTOR: Fritz Lang
SCENARIO: Thea von Harbou
CAMERA: Karl Freund
EDITING: Gunther Rittau
DESIGN: Oscar Werndorff

CAST: Brigitte Helm as Mary
Gustav Frohlich as Erik
Rudolph Klein-Rogge as Rotwang
Alfred Abel as John Masterman
Fritz Rasp as Slim

METROPOLIS was made in a time which, for Germany, was one of intellectual interest. The post-war atmosphere was one of "frenzied search for new formulas, the passionate desire to establish new dogma." Disillusioned by defeat, German intellectuals, who could not and would not resign themselves to a new reality, turned instead "to their old reputation as a 'people of poets and thinkers.'" They became mystical. Since the real world had slipped from their grasp, they resorted to a world of "anguish, unrest and a vague remorse, obsessed by the memory of a glorious past."

As a medium, German writers and artists chose the expressionistic style of the Stanislavsky and Meyerhold Soviet theater. The best form of expressionism was in film art. Here one could "evolve in a visual but unreal manner phantoms created by their perturbed minds." Germany was overwhelmed by a sense of fatalism, and this found its way into their films. "They found a temporary escape in films formed in their own image, films of horror, death, and nightmare."

The Lang city of the future (21st century) is on two levels: an upper level for the rich and pleasure living; and a lower level for the workers who tend the machines. In the film the workers, more like slaves, revolt against their masters; and eventually the two classes reconcile their differences. Freder, the son of an industrialist, rebels against his father and joins the workers of the lower city. He becomes a friend of Maria who gives saintly comfort to the oppressed. She advances the idea that the heart must mediate between the hand and the brain. The industrialist overhears, and fearing the mediation of the heart, has a robot made to look like Maria to incite riots and furnish an excuse for the industrialist to crush the workers' spirits. However, the rebellion gets out of hand. The picture ends with a symbolic alliance between labor and capital and the mediation of the heart.

But by yielding to the heart, in reality, the industrialist now has an even stronger hold on the workers. This was the essence of the propaganda formulated by Goebbels, who believed it better to win the heart of a people than to beat them with arms. The final scene contains the analogy between the industrialist and Goebbels. The industrialist becomes omnipotent. "Freder's rebellion results in the establishment of totalitarian authority, and he considers this result a victory." But all this is contrasted with Lang's own personal views. This "naivete or conventionalism" was probably due to his wife and collaborator, Thea von Harbou, and to Ufa.

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Lang's early background was as an architect, and his early films show an "individual use of expressionistic techniques combined with an architectural sense of cinematic composition." This is very apparent in his handling of crowds. "Lang likes to group his actors into a definite geometric frame... In METROPOLIS, grouped figures become more and more an element of the architecture itself." But Lang is not completely bound to expressionism. "He only makes use of this style for his psychological or decorative purposes; for example, when he wants to express the soulless, anonymous force of the masses in METROPOLIS..." This all contrasts with Lang's later, more sympathetic treatment of crowds in "M" and a few others of his films.

Lang was conscious of light and shadow as "dramatic factors." "For Lang... light is a means of emphasizing the form and structure of his settings. Yet the basic idea of light as a means of obtaining dramatic effect is at its best in METROPOLIS when the mad inventor's torch chases Maria until she is caught in a circle of light out of which there seems to be no escape." Lang uses shadows in METROPOLIS when "during an accident corpses are being carried away. Lang only shows the gigantic shadows of the bearers from the actor Frohlich, the only visible witness."

Here is a film that shows some of the inner feelings of the German people. It has in it some of the mythological background and the later day fascism. It was powerful enough to encourage Goebbels and Hitler to ask the non-Aryan Lang to remain in Germany to make Nazi films although he disagreed with their policies.

NOTES LIFTED FROM THE CINECLUB SCRAPBOOK SEM. 2 NO. 3, 1953 WRITTEN BY ROBERT KAUFMAN WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO PROF. J.C. REID FOR HIS NOTES. OTHER SOURCES: FROM CALIGARI TO HITLER BY SIEGMUND KRACNER; THE FILM TILL NOW BY PAUL BOWEN; "THE GERMAN FILMS OF FRITZ LANG" BY LOTTE H. EISNER IN THE PENGUIN FILM REVIEW NO. 6. PROF. REID'S NOTES WERE ORIGINALLY PREPARED FOR THE AUKLAND FILM SOCIETY OF NEW ZEALAND.

NOTES ON THE PORT OF ST. FRANCIS

PRODUCED AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY: Frank Stauffacher
DIRECTED BY: Vincent Price
TEXT: Robert Louis Stevenson.

The late Frank Stauffacher was one of our most sensitive film makers, and this film is his best. He founded and ran one of the country's largest film societies at the San Francisco Museum of Art. He deeply loved San Francisco, as did Robert Louis Stevenson many years before. The visual excitement of this city is overwhelming, and its cosmopolitan atmosphere is tantalizing, but these attributes can be elusive when one tries to capture them on film. Stauffacher turns his back on obvious sights and looks below the superficial. Thus, this film is more than a variation on the "city symphony", it is a deeply personal statement on the part of all who contributed to it. Were it more universal, more objective, it would also be empty. As it is, it is unpretentious and charged with deep feeling and keen observation.

NOTE BY CAMERON MAC CAULEY IN TOWARD AN UNDERSTANDING OF DOCUMENTARY

BOTH NOTES CUT AND SPLICED BY J. JOHNSON