

# Metropolis



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## Metropolis

Set around the year 2000, Metropolis is a depiction of the future, yet it is viewed more intensely in the twenties style. In this view we can truly appreciate the work, without the cynicism of today's standards, for the marvel that it is.

The "costliest and most ambitious picture ever screened in Europe"(Jensen) the film was premiered on January 10, 1927 at the UFA Palace, in Berlin, before an enormous audience which included many members of the political and artistic hierarchy. Initially Metropolis did not meet critical expectations. Like many science fiction films of the present it was praised visually, yet, its sappy predictable view of society was heavily bombarded by negative reviews. Still it attracted huge audiences "ten thousand people were reported waiting outside the Rialto Theatre at its American opening"(idem) where it had been re-edited and about seven reels were cut from the original seventeen. This condensed version, lacking almost half the intended footage, is still the only one available.

In this silent film, sound has been visualized with such intensity that we seem to hear the pistons' throb in the film's grand [prelude](#). In all directions there is movement. The pistons

are placed in three-dimensional space, and are substantial in spite of the misty flood of light, in spite of the superimposition to indicate them as monumental symbols of labor. The wheels turning within wheels and the thudding of the pistons create an awe inspiring vision.

Equally stunning is the workers conditions, as the slave in ominous underground factories " and live in [apartment](#) blocks all done in Expressionist style"(Thomson) Their homes, are stylized into mere forms with black rectangles for windows. A number of these were "models, which were combined with live actors through the Schufftan process"(Jensen). "The working class is portrayed powerfully -- slaves dressed in black, heads bent, anonymous creatures of labor walking through vaulted corridors, rhythmically keeping time like the Expressionistic revolutionary choirs, sharply outlined ranks in which the individual no longer counts as a human being."(Eisner) As they begin to execute their duties they become like hands of a clock, frantically working with every ounce of strength. They become one union, working for one cause that eludes us.

"The machine center is transformed in...

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...t shots creating an equal procemium style of framing. Shapes are observed through out the film and are abundant at almost every turn. Camera movement is used in many of the shots, such as when the edge of the flood approaches the fleeing children; in another case, only a few workers at the Tower are standing in the foreground until a shift in position reveals thousands in the distance

"A painter's eye for composition and staging is again revealed in Lang's direction"(Jensen), without prompting the spectacles of the injured silhouette workers marching past Freder. Also the children running down the street with the water moments behind them and the creation of that robotic icon of science fiction. The city and the themes are intellectual, and so conflict with the childish sentimentality of the plotting, motivations, and feelings. The content of Metropolis fails to live up to its visual treatment, but the film is still a treat to the eye.

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