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Spaces of Territorialization in Fritz Lang's Film *Metropolis* (1927)

Abstract: This paper investigates the relationship between film, architecture and the city in Fritz Lang's film *Metropolis* by analyzing and interpreting its spatial concepts as a text of Weimar culture. Locating the study in the context of philosophy, theory of text, and cultural analysis, the main hypothesis of this paper is that the urban and architectural spaces of *Metropolis* are based on the concept of territorialization (arborescent model of organization) of a totalitarian capitalist system through the reduction of real or fictional deterritorialization to a definitive and closed territory of totalitarianism. Developing this hypothesis with historical, comparative, and analytical methods, the aim of this paper is to investigate the relationship between narrative, ideology, and space in *Metropolis*. How is the ideology of Weimar culture represented by spatial structures in *Metropolis*? What are the relations of acts of territorialization, narrative, and the rhythmical structures of spaces of modern culture in this film? How are social practices inscribed in the spatial structures of the film, marking the totalitarian system and its terrorist horror on one side, and resistance to the totalitarian system on the other, trying to abolish the active/passive dichotomy? These are the key questions of this study. Its theoretical starting point comes from the works of Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Luce Irigaray, Erwin Panofsky, and Rosalind Krauss.

Keywords: refrain, territory, territorialization, spaces of territorialization, shell-shock film, Weimar culture

Weimar Culture and Shell-shock Film

Germany's defeat at the end of World War I had disastrous consequences for "the first German democracy" and its culture. "Unspoken and concealed, implied and latent, repressed and disavowed, the experience of trauma became Weimar's historical unconscious. The double

wound of war and defeat festered beneath the glittering surface of its anxious modernity.”¹ As Anton Kaes observes,

Although historians disagree as to whether the Great War was the primal shock of the modern age or the culmination of unbridled industrialization [...] the term ‘shell shock’, which doctors used to diagnose frontline soldiers suffering nervous breakdowns, provides a metaphor for the invisible though lasting psychological wounds of World War I. Some of the most seminal German movies made in the 1920s found artistic expression for this elusive yet widespread syndrome. Just as shell shock signified a broad array of symptoms, the movies of this shell shock cinema took on a variety of forms. But despite their manifest differences, all of these films found a way to restage the shock of war and defeat without ever showing military combat. They were post-traumatic films, re-enacting the trauma in their very narratives and images. [...] Articulating an indirect, but more poignant understanding of trauma than many traditional war movies, these films translate military aggression and defeat into domestic tableaux of crime and horror. They transform vague feelings of betrayal, sacrifice, and wounded pride into melodrama, myth, or science fiction. They evoke fear of invasion and injury, and exude a sense of paranoia and panic. These films feature pathological serial killers, mad scientists, and naive young men traumatized by encounters with violence and death. They show protagonists recovering from unspeakable events both real and imagined, and they document distressed communities in a state of shock.²

Among these films, *Metropolis*, directed by the filmmaker Fritz Lang (1890–1976), born in what was then Austria-Hungary, was one of the most prominent examples of what Kaes calls “shell shock cinema”, and certainly one of the high-water marks of Weimar film culture (1918–1933) and Weimar culture in general, which was a kind of German mass culture of modernity that was post-traumatic as well as pre-fascist, a culture that simultaneously juxtaposed the modern and the traditional, the progressive and the reactionary, free will and standardization. This cultural climate also influenced the construction of urban and architectural spaces in the film, as spaces of territorialization and reification (that suppress the lines/acts of deterritorialization), a central feature of modern mass production in the first half of the 20th century. Namely, in the era of mechanical reproduction, in the period of the early modern mass reproducibility (of representation, duplication, copying, mediation, multiplication) of works manually or directly physically reproduced by technical means (photography, film, sound recording), the art of film, radio, television, advertising, and also architecture, became big industries closely linked to the needs of capital. While we used to have immediate “physical” contact with works of art in the form of direct physical labour on the object itself, in the era of mechanical art, the work of art becomes separate from the direct input of a human being and is realised by alienated labour. As Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) wrote, what was lost in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art, and that means its authenticity, associated with inalienable, direct physical work on the object.³ Direct physical work on an

¹ Anton Kaes, *Shell Shock Cinema: Weimar Culture and the Wounds of War*, Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2009, 2.

² *Ibid.*, 2–3.

³ Walter Benjamin, “Umetničko delo u veku svoje tehničke reprodukcije“, *Eseji*, Beograd, Nolit, 1974, 114–149.

object endows it with that magical, transformative confirmation of human involvement in the work – *now* and *here* (*sometime* and *somewhere*). In the era of mechanical reproduction, the work thus becomes interchangeable through cultural exchange and consumption in order to last as a mass-cultural meaning or value. Culture and art become industry.⁴ Culture becomes a business and the business of culture is at the same time the business of capitalist ideology. In order to achieve the greatest possible reproduction of capital, human needs become false and manipulated. False needs are those that are not derived from autonomous judgement, but are imposed and then self-imposed. For example, the media on the one hand create the consumer (whether through content, advertising, film, etc.) and on the other define what is necessary for that consumer. In other words, they artificially evoke a need, which they then automatically fulfil. This is a paradoxical situation, based on reification, in which people acquire traits of inanimate objects and social relationships are reduced to relationships between objects, while objects acquire human traits (the ability to govern the lives of people, their ways of thinking, perceiving, understanding, and living). The imposition of a specific product, or the consumption of a product in order to effect sufficient reproduction and thereby rapid reproduction of capital relates not only to the imposition of the type of products we consume, but also to the kind of values we hold. The exchange of goods includes not only the production of surplus value, but also the creation of false consciousness. In other words, the seemingly open society of consumer pluralism is really a closed society, a society that restricts the freedom of choice and personal, subjective decision-making. At this time, architectural production was not exempt from this process. The emergence of standardized products, machine-produced prefabricated elements intended for the production of architectural objects, led to an automation of thinking, the restriction of the ability of humans to make decisions and organize their own way of life and habitation. Architecture became a “machine for living” and social relations came to be dictated by relations between machines. In fact, the only logic of machine-age aesthetics, mass architecture, and sterilized buildings (designed for different markets and the clear interests of particular groups) was to be rational, Cartesian, regular, strict, straight, shallow, non-ornamental, non-stylized, standardized, functional, highly stressed, concrete, ubiquitous and uniform, global, international, designed *without spirit and idea, and without variable meanings*. But let us return to the concept of territorialization.

Refrain, Territory, Order

In *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), Gilles Deleuze (1925–1995) and Félix Guattari (1930–1992) developed the concept of territorialization through the concepts of refrain, territory, order, and harmonic rhythm. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the refrain is territorial and has the function of creating a “safe paradise” in the chaos of the world. Deleuze and Guattari distinguish three aspects of the refrain, which alternate in various ways. The first aspect relates to the refrain as a way of creating a calm and stable center, the refrain seen as a fragile point in a big black hole: a child comforts himself in the dark by singing a familiar children’s song.⁵ The first aspect of the refrain thus relates to this “sleeping” function and the function of centralization.

⁴ See Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, “Industrija kulture“, *Dijalektika prosvetiteljstva*, Sarajevo, Veselin Masleša–Svjetlost, 1989, 126–172.

⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, Minneapolis–London, University of Minnesota Press, 1987, 311.

The second aspect relates to the organization of a calm “pace” (rather than form) around this stable point. Many quite diverse components, have a part in this process, like urban landmarks and marks of all kinds.⁶ Deleuze and Guattari call this “home”.⁷ Every household is a territory marked by sound. Homes are created with sound walls: radios that play, the sounds of singing or speaking, the sound of the washing machine and other sounds.⁸ The second aspect of the refrain is thus related to rhythm, or rhythmical structures and sounds that correspond to the interior forces of creation, the forces of the earth, and are detached from the exterior forces of chaos, being inside the circle. The third aspect of the refrain relates to the moment when “home” is affected or becomes open to exterior influences: “Finally, one opens the circle a crack, opens it all the way, lets someone in, calls someone, or else goes out oneself, launches forth. One opens the circle not on the side where the old forces of chaos press against it, but in another region, one created by the circle itself [...] in order to join with the forces of the future, cosmic forces.”⁹ Those three aspects of the refrain are not three successive moments in an evolution, but three aspects (coexisting simultaneously or mixed together) of a single thing, the Refrain. Sometimes, chaos is an immense black hole in which one endeavours to fix a fragile point as a centre.¹⁰ Sometimes one organizes around that point a calm and stable “pace” (rather than a form) that makes the black hole a home, and sometimes one grafts onto that pace a breakaway from the black hole.¹¹ Deleuze and Guattari call these three aspects of the Refrain *forces of chaos, terrestrial forces, and cosmic forces*. All three aspects are present in *Metropolis*.

“From chaos”, Deleuze and Guattari write,

Milieus and Rhythms are born. [...] Chaos is not without its own directional components [...]. Every milieu is vibratory, in other words, a block of space-time constituted by the periodic repetition of the component. [...] Thus the living thing has an exterior milieu of materials, an interior milieu of composing elements and composed substances, an intermediary milieu of membranes and limits, and an annexed milieu of energy sources and actions-perceptions. Every milieu is coded, a code being defined by periodic repetition; but each code is in a perpetual state of transcoding or transduction.¹²

In the passage between milieus resides an active moment – rhythm. Rhythm “does not operate in a homogeneous space-time, but by heterogeneous blocks. It changes direction.”¹³ Rhythm is located between two milieus, or between two intermilieus. Territory, however, is not a milieu, nor even an additional milieu, nor a rhythm or passage between milieus. “The territory is in fact an act that affects milieus and rhythms, that ‘territorializes’ them. The territory is the product of a territorialization of milieus and rhythms.”¹⁴ A territory borrows from all the milieus.

⁶ Ibidem.

⁷ Ibidem.

⁸ Ibidem.

⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁰ Ibid, 312.

¹¹ Ibidem.

¹² Ibid, 313.

¹³ Ibidem.

¹⁴ Ibid, 314.

It is built from aspects or portions of milieus. It itself has an exterior milieu, an interior milieu, an intermediary milieu, and an annexed milieu. It has the interior zone of a residence or shelter, the exterior zone of its domain, more or less retractable limits or membranes, intermediary or event neutralized zones, and energy reserves or annexes.¹⁵

There is a territory when rhythm has its expressiveness, when matters of expression (qualities) emerge. In a sense, we could say that the territory and the functions performed within it are products of territorialization because the territory is also inseparable from certain coefficients of deterritorialization: movements of permutations.¹⁶ Territorialization is thus an act of rhythm that has become expressive, or of milieu components that have become qualitative.¹⁷ Territorialization is a dimensional act that ensures the consistency of a territory. The functions of territorialization are forces of the earth, rather than of chaos. They are expressive rhythms rather than functional rhythms, phenomena of decoding rather than phenomena of transcoding. In other words, acts of territorialization are related to processes of formalization, metrication, systematization, linearization, hierarchization, and an arborescent model of organization.¹⁸ The refrain is thus a rhythm or melody that has become territorialized when a rhythm or melody become expressive. The first two aspects of the refrain are inherent to acts of territorialization and the third to acts of deterritorialization. In other words, the mediator between the forces of the earth and the forces of chaos are acts of territorialization, while the mediator between the forces of the earth and the forces of the Cosmos are acts of deterritorialization. Territorialization is thus inseparable from certain coefficients of deterritorialization.

Processes of territorialization are found in all types of fundamentalism, from philosophical essentialism, to ethnic identifications, to the religious return to the source, origin or roots.¹⁹ These are forms of phantasmal territorialization through the restoration of continuity and homology of space, time, and sign (which represents specific notions). In this context, I will try to show that the concepts of space in the film *Metropolis* are based on the concept of territorialization (an arborescent model of organization) of a totalitarian capitalist system by reducing real or fictional deterritorialization to a definitive and closed territory of totalitarianism.

***Metropolis* (1927)**

Metropolis begins with a scene that emphasizes the movements, motion, and rhythm of machines, or the dominance of the machines, which shape the new world of *Metropolis* and its way of life based on uniform, impersonal, and mechanical movements, centralization and hierarchization. The opening scene consists of streaks of light that make up the word *Metropolis*, spelled out in art deco letters that suggest a union of technology and design. This brightly illuminated title gives way to a fast-moving montage in which a mountainous cityscape morphs into close-ups of moving engine parts. Applying compositional principles derived from the abstract film style pioneered by Viktor Eggeling, Hans Richter, and Walther Ruttmann

¹⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁶ Ibid, 326.

¹⁷ Ibid, 315.

¹⁸ Ibid, 327.

¹⁹ Miško Šuvaković, *Pojmovnik suvremene umjetnosti*, Zagreb–Ghent, Horetzky, Vless & Beton, 2005, 143.

in the early and mid-1920s, Lang uses form and movement, light and shadow, to convey the dynamics of a big city, literalizing its machine-like precision and unquestioning automatism.²⁰ Superimposed over a low-angle panorama shot of skyscrapers, we see close-ups of three pistons moving up and down. “Their shafts and triangular tops invert the shape of the pyramidal buildings, and underscore the sublime affinity, on a formal level, between skyscrapers and engine parts.”²¹ This opening montage fetishizes both machines and dynamic motion. No human agency is visible and there is no indication of what the machines do or what they produce. We see only mechanical components moving by themselves. (The style here has affinities to the post-expressionist art movement known as New Objectivity, whose embrace of machines and mundane objects was a reaction against expressionist subjectivism.)²² By projecting a machine over the cityscape, the film visualizes in its opening moments the city’s mechanical, clockwork functioning, its precision, automatism and unflagging energy. But it also hints at the catastrophic potential of even the smallest malfunction. The pressure of time and insistence on precision are further suggested by a sudden cut to a huge ten-hour clock – another impersonal machine that synchronizes movements and signals the imminent start of a new ten-hour shift. A siren’s blast, visualized as a vertical burst of white steam, signals not only the start of a new shift, but also the beginning of the film’s narrative.

The story begins with columns of workers dressed in identical dark clothes moving steadily through a tunnel toward the underground portion of the city and passing other columns of workers moving in the opposite direction. The scene then switches to the portion of the city above the ground, where it shows the main protagonist Freder (Gustav Frohlich), the son of the capitalist Joh Fredersen (Alfred Abel), cavorting with beautiful women in the luxurious “Eternal garden”. Suddenly, a working class girl called Maria (Brigitte Helm) enters this location with a group of children. “These are your brothers”, she says to Freder, who immediately falls in love with her. This encounter between these two separate spheres – rich and poor, bourgeois and working class, leisure and work, the city above and the city below the ground – will drive the whole story. Intrigued by the girl, Freder ventures into the workers’ city below the ground for the first time in his life, where he is faced with the life of workers directed by machines. This private plot dealing with the relationship between Freder and Maria intertwines with the public plot based on the conflict between the workers and the industrialists, which resolves, on the one hand, by suggesting that love conquers class differences and, on the other, with a return to the previous state based on the mechanisms of the exploitation of the workers.

The two plots are clearly reflected in two different conceptions of space, in terms of planning and architecture: the city below the ground (the workers’ city) and the city above the ground (the capitalists’ city), marking from the very beginning of the film a vertical, hierarchical organization of space. Namely, the main capitalist, Fredersen, works in a luxurious tall building above the ground, while the working class toils away deep under the ground. This division connotes a radical modernist loss of society in spatial terms and a totalitarian capitalist system based on binary logic and rigid segmentation (wealthy vs. poor; above vs. below; spaces filled with natural light vs. spaces filled with artificial light; light vs. dark spaces; spaces of enjoyment, leisure and pleasure vs. spaces of hard work and automatism, etc.). Using Deleuze and Guattari’s terminology, we could say that this film shows an arborescent model of organization, where the tree represents an axis that guarantees concentricity, hierarchy, and

²⁰ Anton Kaes, *op. cit.* 171.

²¹ *Ibidem.*

²² *Ibidem.*

linearity, that is, a structure that enables “gridding“ (the imposition of a grid system). In each of these two spaces, Lang introduces a polemical juxtaposition of several spatial conceptions as texts of culture and society: (1) German idealism, (2) Americanization, (3) industrialization, and (4) mythology.

The city above the ground is a futuristic city of progress filled with new gigantic skyscrapers, modern automobile traffic, and overhead roads, a city full of light, rotational street and static neon lighting, a city freed from traditional values and bonds with the past. In other words, the city above the ground is a city filled with the ultimate symbols of American progress and modernity. In fact, as Anton Kaes notes,

Weimar Germany’s embrace of American modernity was a way of forgetting its traumatic past. The loss of the war and the collapse of the Wilhelmine empire (1871–1918) brought a sudden end to an idealistic value system of Germany and its culture rooted in the courtly aristocracy of eighteenth-century classicism [...] Germany could offer little resistance to the onslaught of American popular culture. The flow of mass entertainment from the United States into the big cities of Germany in the immediate post-war years was unstoppable, ranging from the Shimmy and Charleston dance crazes in the early 1920s to concert tours by Paul Whiteman’s jazz band in 1926, from Chaplin and Buster Keaton slapstick movies to revues with Josephine Baker and new spectator sports such as boxing. *Amerikanismus* (Americanism), so it seemed, had invaded every corner of urban post-war culture. [...] Berlin became known as the most American city in Europe; writers like Bertolt Brecht and Lion Feuchtwanger freely used Anglicisms and American idioms in their writings. [...] The infatuation with the United States allowed the German avant-garde to demonstrate its rejection of Germany’s military past and its disillusionment with the old European values that had proved so powerless against the war. Americanism was supposed to inaugurate a culture free of history, tradition, and specifically the trauma of the lost war. It promised an end of German didacticism and artistic elitism. [...] American culture (deemed democratic because it was accessible to everyone) thus loosened Germany’s grip on its own cultural and national identity – with devastating results in the backlash under Hitler’s reclaimed nationalism.²³

This struggle between German idealism and Americanism is reflected in *Metropolis* by polemical juxtapositions of two spatial conceptions: above the ground is the “Eternal garden”, which takes the forms of an artificial cave with columns like stalactites, spaces of pleasure and infantile idyll, nature, erotic and innocent playfulness, like the playfulness of water in a fountain shaped like a transparent dome, but also gigantic skyscrapers of concrete, steel, and glass laid out in a Euclidean, harmonic grid – the familiar urbanism and architectonic conceptions of modernism breaking with tradition and the environment. We could say that Lang introduces a struggle between (two ideological) spaces: spaces of rationalization and individualization, logos and nomos, consumerism and leisure, humanity and soullessness, in other words, between the spaces of “American (or ‘Western’) materialism and German idealistic humanism”²⁴

²³ Ibid, 182–183.

²⁴ Ibid, 184.

In contrast to the illuminated city above the ground, the parts of the city below the ground are dark, forgotten places with no feeling of life. Everything in them is calculated and systematic, planned and rigid. As he descends underground, Freder is shown from a high perspective, which makes him seem like a dwarf in comparison to the enormous space filled with giant machines, evoking the modernist preference for the massive and monumental. These are cold and oversized spaces (by human standards), which makes one feel humbled and powerless (in an analogy to totalitarian ideologies). Dressed in white, Freder appears lost and frightened among the turbines that swirl over his head and the black-clad workers. One group of workers stands in front of a machine, swaying from left to right and back again, moving exactly in time with the machine. Their movements are mechanical and abstract, exaggerated and carefully choreographed, recalling Oskar Schlemmer's *Triadic Ballet* (an experimental abstract dance piece performed at the Bauhaus in 1922).

After witnessing an explosion, Freder hallucinates and imagines the giant machine turning into an image of Moloch, a demonic creature from the Bible that devoured children. The sudden metamorphosis of futuristic technology (or, rather, futuristic technological architecture) into iconic architecture evoking ancient myths or an Old Testament legend is here a metaphor for the way human beings are sacrificed to the gods of technology and war. In his delirium, Freder sees battalions of workers being fed alive to Moloch.

The use of religious texts as a sub-text can also be seen in the use of Christian iconography in, for instance, the scene in which Freder ends up stretched across the hands of a huge clock due to his inability to cope with machine's automatism and assumes the role of Jesus on the cross calling out for his father. This scene, with its strong symbolism, speaks of the cruel (but one could also say modern) era of modernity and capitalism in which time is deleted from social space and recorded only by measuring instruments like clocks. Namely, the lived time of modernity has lost its form and social interest, except for time spent on work.

The use of religious texts as a sub-text is also present in Lang's narrative appropriation of the first and final books from the Bible – the Book of Genesis and the Book of Revelation, and finally in the spatial conception of the city below the ground. Lang's most spectacular biblical set piece is introduced through the legend of the Tower of Babel, the monumental building that was built by the Babylonians and that relates to a moral tale directed against discord and rebellion.

The Tower of Babel scene is set in a secret cave far below the futuristic world of the city of *Metropolis*. The film's subtitle already refers to catacombs, a clear reference to the underground hiding places of the early Christians in ancient Rome. The Christian framework is underscored by large crosses struck into the ground at the centre of the amorphous cave. These unmistakably Christian symbols mark the place from which sermons are delivered and surround the virginal figure of Maria as she narrates the story of the Tower of Babel to the workers. The cave is a dark and geometrically irregular space (in contrast to the rigorous and rigid, straight and phallogocentric, Euclidean geometric spaces of the futuristic city), and resembles the interior of a womb. This is a place where revolutionary desire is imbued with mythical and occult meanings, in which a woman has the podium, in contrast to the mechanical spaces of industrialization where man has the last word. Drawing on the discourse of the feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray (1930–), we could say that the space of the cave is more fluid, softer and warmer (in terms of its material quality), associated with female identity, while the mechanical spaces of concrete and steel are associated with male identity.²⁵ The space of the cave is thus a space where a woman dominates, albeit in a dominantly phallogocentric representational system of the

²⁵ See: Peg Rawes, *Irigaray for Architects*, London–New York, Routledge, 2007.

world. The revolution will be instigated by a female robot, but one made by a man, and this revolution will also be suppressed by a man.

What is the function of the story of the Tower of Babel in this film? The legend comes from the Old Testament Book of Genesis (11:1–9), which tells the story of Noah's great-grandson Nimrod, who decided to build a city "to make a name for themselves", and to erect in it a tower whose top would reach to heaven. But the Lord was displeased by the hubris of this project and confused the builders' languages so that people could no longer understand each other and thus could not finish building the city. For this reason the tower was named *Babel* (imitating the cacophony that results when everyone speaks at once). This biblical legend is a retrospective moral tale about excessive human pride, which is punished by an omnipotent monotheistic god. It has inspired numerous artists and philosophers. We find it in Pieter Brueghel's (1525/30–1569) *Building the Tower of Babel* (1563), Vladimir Tatlin's (1885–1953) plans for a *Monument to the Third International* (1919), which would have been 400 metres tall, had it been built, in Jacques Derrida's (1930–2004) essay *Des Tours de Babel* (1985), etc. This story of undeterred progress and secular modernity halted by divine intervention is reflected in *Metropolis* in a fearless revolutionary movement halted by a totalitarian capitalist system. Oscillating between myth and fact, between architectural fantasy and archaeological reality, the Tower of Babel is not only the oldest visionary building, but also an enduring symbol of a modernity, which, with its vertical structure, repetitive concentric circular forms, symmetrically arranged around a central axis, represents linear progress, hierarchy, centralisation, and power – the triumph of order over chaos. In *Metropolis*, the tallest building of the city above the ground is named the "New Tower of Babel", and this is where Frederesen, the leading capitalist, works. We also find the Tower of Babel in the installation made of car parts, on which the robot Maria is burnt, as well as in the sculpture in the centre of the main square of the city below the ground where children gather around the real Maria to seek refuge from the flood. The flood, which is also a reference to another Biblical legend, is simultaneously linked to both death and birth, evoking the resolution of the narrative. On the one hand, contact with water brings regeneration, because dissolution is always followed by new life, while on the other hand, flooding promotes fertility and multiplies the potential for life. Immersion in water is not equivalent to a final extinction, but to a "temporary reincorporation into the indistinct, followed by a new creation, a new life or a new man"²⁶

The film's last scene takes place in front of a Gothic cathedral and suggests a form of reconciliation between the classes and the rebirth of a wounded community. The two interwoven narratives come to a conclusion in this space. While the private plot of Freder and Maria is sealed with a kiss, the public plot ends with a handshake between the industrialist and a worker. The scene is witnessed by a mass of anonymous workers who march in orderly ranks like soldiers (evoking once again the parallel between factory and army) and form a pyramid with their bodies, denoting a return to the previous hierarchical and subordinate state, analogous with Lang's choice of a Gothic cathedral as the space in which the narrative concludes. The film ends with images of free-standing statues overhung by a canopy and various carved stone reliefs under arches, both expressive symbols of High Gothic. As the art historian Erwin Panofsky (1892–1968) argued, this evokes not only a return to antiquity, an ancient optical space and Aristotle's doctrine of space, but also a breakthrough to the Modern (the appearance of free-standing figures in an associated empty space as a homogeneous field).²⁷ These are equivalent

²⁶ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and The Profane: The Nature of Religion*, New York, A Harvest Book, 1968, 129–132.

²⁷ See: Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, New York, Zone Books, 1991, 53.

forms of homogeneous and indivisible unity or, in Lang's context, a return to a homogeneous, unified, disciplined, oppressed, and submissive society.

Spaces of Refrain in *Metropolis* as Spaces of Territorialization

Returning to the previous social order, we could say that the spaces of the narrative in *Metropolis* denote acts of territorialization, soothing and reducing real or fictional deterritorializations, to achieve a final closed territory of totalitarianism. This is a specific kind of refrain expressed through (1) the aspect of centralization, (2) uniform, rhythmic organization, and (3) pacification of a movement for change, in other words, the reduction of an act of deterritorialization to achieve a closed territory of territorialization.

The aspect of centralization is expressed by the presence of three urban landmarks in the city of *Metropolis*, or three alternative forms of the Tower of Babel: (1) the highest modern building of the city above the ground, the so-called "New Tower of Babel", the centre of a capitalist system that imposes standardized production, a uniform, automated, repetitive rhythm of work, movements, and motion (fetishizing modern techniques and technology); (2) the sculpture in the central square of the city below the ground, a simplified, acentric representation of the Tower of Babel and a fragile point that calms the forces of the chaos caused by the flooding of the city (a fetishization of love that conquers class differences); and (3) the installation made of car parts in the form of the Tower of Babel that will become the robot Maria's funeral pyre, which is a fragile point that suppresses the forces of revolution, rebellion, and chaos (fetishizing industrial mass production and providing a central point for a quasi-religious celebration of "Fordism". In this context, "Our Lord" might as well be replaced by "Our Ford").²⁸

The aspect of calm and silent movement is reflected primarily by the grid system, which is a rhythmic structure of space and emblem of modernist art and culture, which emerged at the beginning of the 20th century in the visual arts. The grid refers not only to the geometric Euclidean conception of space, but also to a rigid system of society and culture. From its first appearance in pre-War cubist painting, as the art critic and theorist Rosalind Krauss (1940–) has shown, the grid announces "modern art's will to silence, its hostility to literature, to narrative, to discourse".²⁹ As such, it is anti-narrative, anti-historical, and anti-developmental. Regular in its organization, the relations that the grid offers are given *a priori* (i.e. predetermined, based on rigorous rules, or pre-textual) and definitive, i.e. unchangeable. The grid is thus an emblem of a universal world offering universal references.³⁰

In the cultist space of modern art, the grid serves not only as an emblem but also as a myth. Like all myths, it is not about paradox and contradictions, but the concealment of these contradictions. The grid simultaneously provides a profane as well as a sacred space. It is both material and spiritual. The success of the grid, according to Rosalind Krauss, is connected to its structure, which is similar to the structure of myths. We should be careful here, however, because myths are stories and, like all narratives, they unravel in time, whereas grids are not only spatial, but also visual structures that explicitly reject a narrative or sequential reading of any

²⁸ A reference from Aldous Huxley's satirical novel *Brave New World*.

²⁹ Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, Cambridge-London, The MIT Press, 1985, 9.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 9–22.

kind.³¹ What is important here is that mythical stories are based on a circular flow of time in which the narrative is not resolved but repressed, and this is what myths have in common with the structure of the grid, a structure that has no apex and offers continual “revolving” without release, “revolving” around the same point. This denotes a utopian culture of repression, in which the repressed elements offer only endless repetitions of the same conflict. In *Metropolis*, the grid is not only expressed by the Euclidean form of the grid on the façades of the buildings and the layout of the city. We also find it in the Mondrianesque stage compositions of workers in the elevators, the orderly columns of anonymous workers, the shadows cast through a window (reflecting not only the grid system as a logocentric and phallogocentric representative system of society, but also the subjects themselves as impersonal and automated subjects: the symbolism of the window as a transparent element that lets light through, but also reflects light back toward the interior of the room like a mirror).³²

Certainly, the final feature of Deleuze and Guattari’s refrain is manifested in the interweaving of mythical narrative spaces (the scene from the Bible) with the narrative spaces of industrialization and modernization of the capitalist system (analogous to the structure of a narrative within a narrative). The dominant/major spaces of the narrative about industrialization and modernization, manifested in the pyramidal spatial forms made by the bodies of workers in the final scenes, recall the pyramidal landscapes of *Metropolis* in the opening scene of the film, calming the awakened revolutionary forces/spaces of the mythical/minor narrative (the story of the Tower of Babel), i.e. acts of deterritorialization, and marking the transition to the initial, repressed state by imposing an act of territorialization. This movement of the narrative line of industrialization is analogous to the circular flow of myths, which generate (whether in terms of semantic structure, symbolism, syntax, or chronological character) the impression that the ending brings us back to the beginning or is already contained therein. The narrative spaces of the film *Metropolis* are thus products of acts of territorialization performed by the culture of industrialization and modernization.

Resting on an arborescent model of organization, an autonomous, closed structure, systematization, linearization and hierarchization, metrication and formalization, on the expressive and sayable, as well as on the repressive and unsayable, the spatial conceptions of Fritz Lang’s film *Metropolis* are based on processes of territorialization (that suppress acts of deterritorialization) of a totalitarian capitalist social system and the culture of modernization and industrialization.

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³¹ Ibid, 13.

³² Ibid, 16–17.