

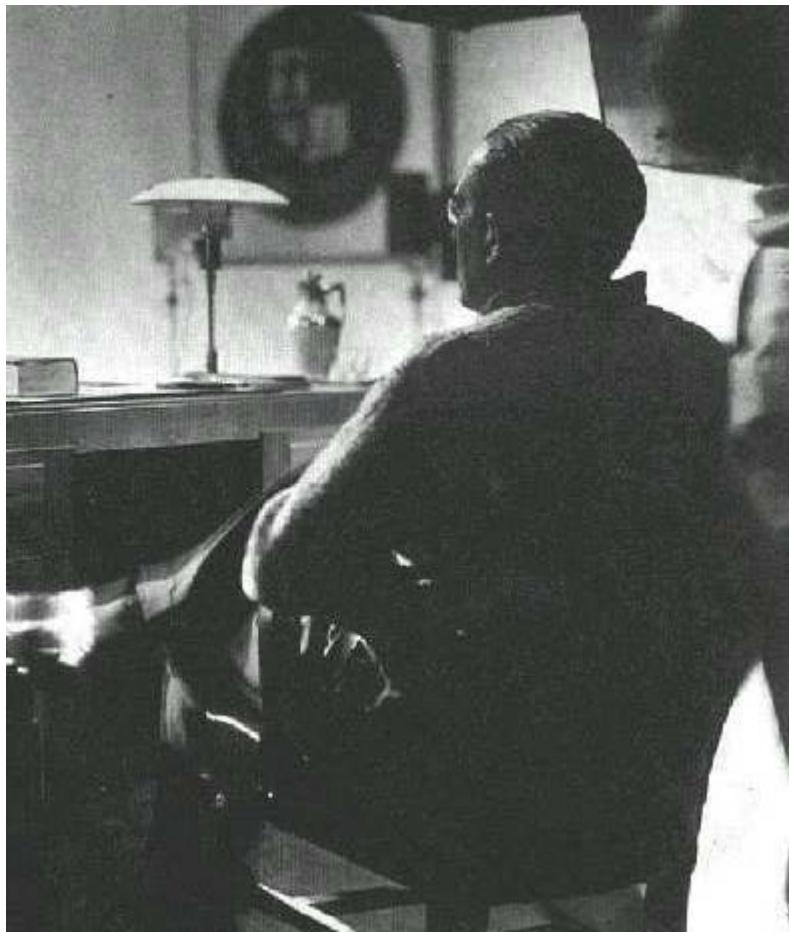
POLYTECHNIC OF TORINO
FACULTY OF ARCHITECTURE
Degree in Architecture
Honors theses

The influence of early 1900 architecture on the urban and architectonic representation of Fritz Lang's "Metropolis"

by Simona Schiavone

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"I was born on December 5, 1890 in Vienna, the son of an architect. My father wanted me to become an architect too, but I didn't like to study architecture and I left home – as any respectable young person should do – though I didn't know what to do with my life yet. First I went to Bruxelles; I subsequently travelled throughout the world, from North Africa to Turkey, from Asia Minor to Bali, and I finally got to Paris. I could support myself by selling drawings and painted postcards. I had eventually decided that I wanted to be an artist."

Fritz Lang

On the night of January 10, 1927, the most expensive ever produced film in Germany up to that time was screened for first time in the UFA studios in Berlin.

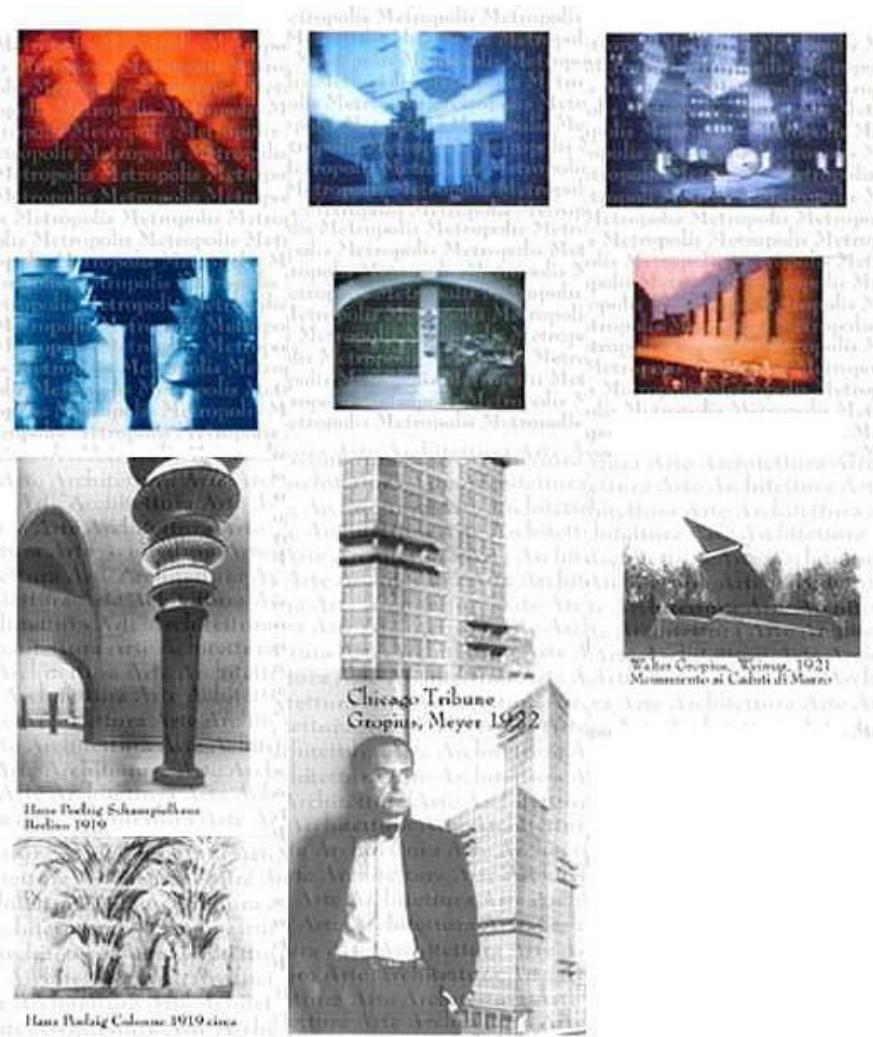
Metropolis

The expenditure had amounted to two million; the shooting had required 310 days and 60 nights; about 1.300.00 metres of negatives had been used. In addition 35.000 walk-ons, 750 kids, 1.100 bald men, 3.500 pair of shoes, 75 wigs, 50 cars had been employed and wages had cost 1.600.000 Deutsch Mark, costumes had required 200.000 Deutsch Mark. Finally, the decoration and the art direction expenses had amounted to 400.000 Deutsche Mark.

(These data are taken from "Metropolis," P. Bertetto, ed. Lindau, Torino 1990, and are based on the official UFA data.)

Expressionist architecture especially contributed to the aesthetics of Lang's movie: Hans Poelzig; the *Bismarck Monument*; the *Fire Brigade Barracks*; the *Grosses Schauspielhaus*; the Kolin and Salzburg town planning; Fritz Hoeger; the *Chilehaus*, industrial complexes and workshop projects; Hablik's crystalline vision; the Glaserne Kette group; Bruno Taut and Paul Scheerbart's *Glasarchitektur*; Wassili Luckhardt; Erich Mendelsohn's early project sheets from the Russian front; Otto Bartning's country houses; the *Novembergruppe*; an art club where painters, sculptors and architects, such as Ludwig Hilberseimer, Walter Gropius, Erich Menselsohn, Ludwig Mies van Der Rohe, could get together; the above mentioned Bruno Taut and Hans Poelzig; *Die Brucke*, the four students from Dresden; Ernest Ludwig Kirchner's spatial deformation of; *Der Blaue Reiter* group, the theories of Kandinskij; the geometry of Fortunato Depero, the synthesis of architecture, set design and choreography, wanted from Oskar Schlemmer; the Bauhaus movement and theatre (Weimar and Dessau); the art photography of Lazlo Moholy-Nagy.

Fritz Lang's voyage to America was also a crucial moment for the theorization of the film. During his tour, he had a chance to see the skyline of the ultimate metropolis, New York with its skyscrapers and "pre-skyscrapers" of the late 19th century; the Chicago School, Louis Henry Sullivan, Holabird & Roche, Burnham & Root, and Le Baron Jenney;



the *Marquette Building*; the *Home Insurance Building*, the *Rookery Building*, the *Liberty Tower*, the (notorious) *Equitable*, the *Guaranty Building*, the *Wainwright Building*, William Le Baron Jenny's warehouses; the *First* and the *Second Leiter Building*; the *McClurg Building*; the three *Gage Buildings*... "The skyscraper as a work of art was born," said Frank Lloyd Wright, assistant of Sullivan from 1887 to 1891.

His encounter with Erich Mendelsohn was also crucial. "Europe loves looking up to the US phenomenon but it is not fully aware of it," wrote Erich Mendelsohn.

The *Chicago Tribune* contest; Adolf Loos's "classical" provocation; Kurt Schmidt's little men; Leger's *Ballet Mecanique*; the experimental cinema; Richter's and Ruttmann's visual symphonies, *Berlin die simphonie der Grossstadt*; Kate Kollwitz's litographies; the *War Memorial* by Gropius in Weimar were only a few additional ingredients.

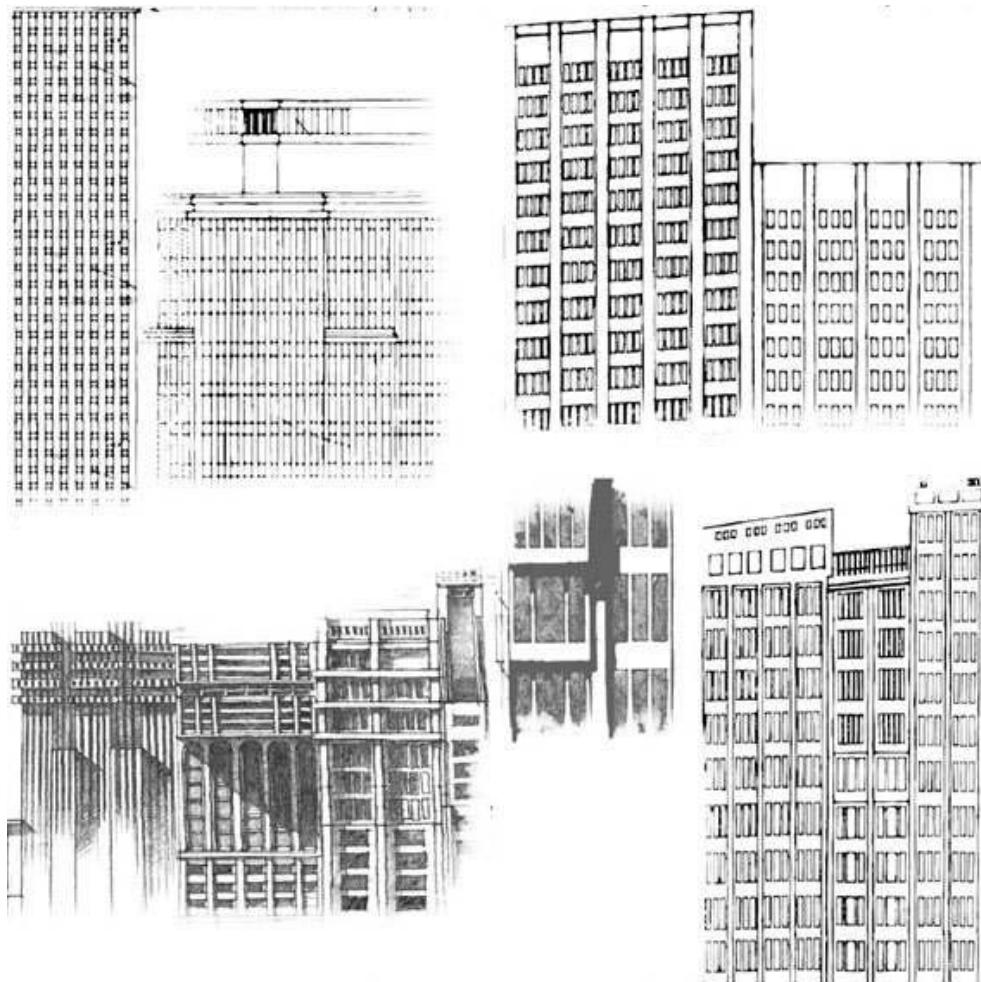
Finally there was the film.

There were the upper city and the lower city; wealth and poverty.

There were the "stone Berlin" and the monotonous featureless buildings in the suburbs; the hidden symbolism; the spirals; the pentagon; the living robot; Maria's contribution to the reconciliation between the masters and the serfs on the steps of the church – according to the German Government official report Rosa Luxemburg

was murdered by a furious crowd, near a church (these data are taken from "Architettura dell'Espressionismo, F.Borsi e G.K. Koenig, Genova, 1972")

Lang, the son of an architect, leading a bohemian life in Paris at the beginning of the 20th century with a passion for sculpture, was the creator.



Disegni ricavati dalle immagini del film Metropolis
a cura di Simona Schiavone

And there were the tinting effects; the cold and dark blue-toned workers' city; the bright and golden pleasure garden of the rich; the ochre-brown, serious and austere office of Fredersen, the father-master; the upper city - bright during the day, glittering like Broadway at night - photographed by the same Lang in 1924; Maria's purple transformation in the Yoshiwara dance room; Freder's fuchsia hallucinatory delirium. All this was Metropolis.

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