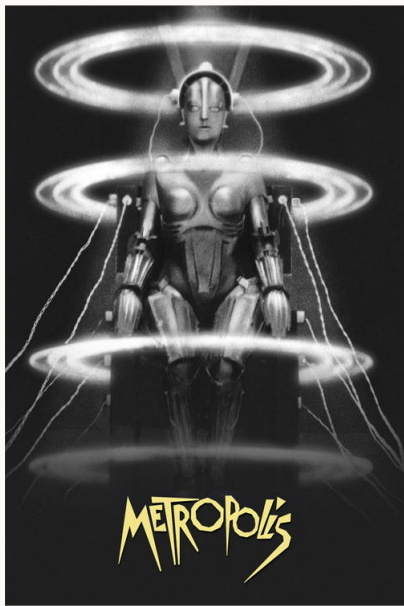




DRAMA · SCIENCE FICTION

Metropolis

1927 · Directed by Fritz Lang

- Silent Cinema
- German Expressionism
- Science Fiction

In a towering future city, the wealthy rule from gleaming skyscrapers while an underground workforce keeps the machines running. The pampered son of the city's master is drawn into that hidden world, and a mad inventor and a young woman preaching patience pull at the fragile order.

DIRECTOR	Fritz Lang
YEAR	1927
RUNTIME	2h 28m (148 min)
COUNTRY	Germany
GENRES	Drama, Science Fiction
CAST	Gustav Fröhlich, Brigitte Helm, Alfred Abel, Rudolf Klein-Rogge, Theodor Loos
MUSIC	Gottfried Huppertz
IMDB	8.2 / 10 (199,601 votes)
ROTTEN TOMATOES	97% (critics)
METACRITIC	98 / 100
TMDB SCORE	8.1 / 10 (3,213 votes)

WHERE TO

Free: [Search YouTube \(restored / 4K\)](#)

WATCH

Free: [Search YouTube \(all versions\)](#)

Free: [Search Internet Archive](#)

Stream (US): fuboTV, Brew, FlixFling, Eternal Family, Kino Film Collection, Artiflix

Rent: Amazon Video, Apple TV Store, Google Play Movies, YouTube, Fandango At Home, FlixFling

Buy: Amazon Video, Apple TV Store, Fandango At Home, FlixFling

Part one is spoiler-free. Part two, "After watching", reveals the story, scenes and ending.

Before watching

Spoiler-free

WHY WATCH THIS?

1 The film that set the look of screen science fiction

Fritz Lang's 1927 epic is the founding blueprint of the cinematic future city: vertical skylines, vast machinery, and a divided society. Later science fiction, from Blade Runner onward, keeps borrowing from it.

2 The height of German silent spectacle

Metropolis was the most expensive film UFA had made. Thousands of extras, enormous sets and ingenious trick photography show what silent cinema could achieve at full scale.

3 A story about class that still reads as current

Its picture of a ruling few above a working many, and of technology as both promise and threat, is blunt, but it gives the images a force that outlasts the plot's simplicity.

WHY IT MATTERS IN CINEMA HISTORY

A defining late-Expressionist film and the first great science-fiction epic, it brought Weimar-era design, architecture and special effects together on a scale that no European studio matched again.

WATCH WITH INTENTION

YOUR LENS

Watch it as a film built from architecture: ask how bodies, buildings and machines are arranged to express who holds power.

THREE THINGS TO NOTICE

- How crowds move: the workers shuffle in rigid, synchronised lines, while the privileged characters move freely and decoratively.
- How the city is arranged vertically, with light and height linked to wealth and depth to labour.
- How the acting is stylised, with wide gestures and wide-eyed stares meant to carry emotion without sound.

ONE QUESTION TO CARRY WITH YOU

When a film shows a divided society, where does it place the viewer: above, below, or between the two?

CINEMA AT THE TIME

- **Industry:** Germany's UFA studio was competing with Hollywood. Metropolis was meant as a prestige blockbuster, and its cost strained the company badly.
- **Dominant styles:** German Expressionism favoured stylised sets, dramatic light and shadow, and heightened acting. By 1927 the movement was fading, and Lang merges it with a modern, architectural sensibility.
- **Technology:** Special effects were done in camera. The Schüfftan process used mirrors to place actors inside miniature cityscapes, and multiple exposures built crowds and machines.
- **Audience:** Postwar Germany was marked by inflation, labour unrest and fascination with America's machine age. Viewers were primed for stories about industrial society and its tensions.

WHERE IT CAME FROM

MOVEMENT

German Expressionism

Stylised sets, dramatic lighting and heightened performance come from this tradition, here scaled up from small studio nightmares to a modern epic.



FILM

Dr. Mabuse the Gambler (1922)

Lang's earlier tale of control and manipulation features Rudolf Klein-Rogge, who returns here as the inventor. It shows Lang's interest in power and mastermind figures.



FILM

Die Nibelungen (1924)

Lang and Harbou's monumental two-part saga built vast stylised sets and mythic spectacle, preparing the ground for Metropolis.



THIS FILM

Metropolis (1927)

NEW AT THE TIME *Few films before it had imagined an entire future society on this scale, with architecture, crowds, machines and effects designed as a single world.*

SOCIAL CONTEXT

Made in Weimar Germany's brief stabilised mid-1920s, when recovery from war and hyperinflation sat alongside deep class tension and anxiety about machines.

- **Country and moment:** Germany in 1925–26 was in the Weimar Republic's relatively calm middle years. Hyperinflation had ended in 1923 and American loans were funding recovery, but defeat in the First World War and political violence were recent memories.
- **Class and industry:** Rapid industrialisation, mass factory work and strong labour movements made the gap between owners and workers a live public issue. The film's divided city draws on these fears and on contemporary awe at American-style modernity.
- **Economy and risk:** Ufa, the leading German studio, backed an enormously costly production, with a budget far beyond usual German films. Its heavy losses contributed to the studio's financial crisis and a rescue deal with American companies.
- **The filmmaker's situation:** Fritz Lang was an Austrian-born director who had established himself in Weimar cinema. Thea von Harbou, his wife and collaborator, wrote the script, and Lang said a visit to New York in 1924 inspired the city's look.

WHAT TO EXPECT

- **Pace:** Deliberate and operatic. Long set pieces alternate with melodramatic plot, so settle into its rhythm rather than expecting modern speed.
- **Performance:** Heightened silent-era acting with expressive faces and large gestures. Treat it as stylised, closer to dance or opera than realism.
- **Format:** Silent, black and white, roughly 4:3 frame, with intertitles. The restored version carries Gottfried Huppertz's original orchestral score.
- **Versions:** Cut heavily after its premiere and long seen in shortened form. The 148-minute restoration is the fullest, with a few damaged inserts and explanatory titles.
- **Tone:** Earnest and allegorical. Its social message is simple and sentimental, while the imagery is the main attraction.

WATCH WITH KIDS?

10+

SUGGESTED AGE

Ratings range from GB PG and DE 6 to a FR 12 listing, with no US rating. Content is mild, but length and silent style suit confident older children.

Official ratings: US NR · UK PG · Germany 6 · France 12/TP

- **Good for:** Children who enjoy grand sci-fi spectacle, towering city designs, robots and inventors. It's a landmark of early cinema that looks astonishing and sparks big conversations about fairness.
- **May unsettle, peril:** Several large-scale sequences of danger and disaster, including children in jeopardy, shown with dramatic, heightened silent-film staging.
- **May unsettle, scary imagery:** A sinister laboratory, a mechanical figure and hallucinatory visions are eerie and can feel creepy to younger viewers.
- **May unsettle, mob violence:** Angry crowds, chaos and some physical struggles. Nothing is graphic, but the energy is frantic and loud in feel.
- **May unsettle, pace:** Long and silent with text cards and theatrical acting. Younger children may lose the thread or patience.
- **Explain first:** It is a silent black-and-white film, so the story is told through pictures, music and text cards. Expect exaggerated, dramatic acting.
- **Explain first:** Made in 1927, it imagines a future city where rich people live in luxury while workers labour underground.

Talk about it after: *The film shows a city split between those who plan and those who work. What do you think each group needs to understand about the other?*

Cinespective's own guidance, a draft. Check it against the official ratings and your own judgement.

After watching

CONTAINS SPOILERS

THE FILM, UNPACKED

CENTRAL IDEA

The film dramatises a split between those who plan and those who labour, and asks what could join them. Its answer, a sentimental appeal to the heart, can be read as both a hopeful vision and a politically convenient one.

THEMES

- **Class division:** The city is physically stratified, with thinkers in the heights and workers underground. Architecture becomes a visible argument about who is served and who serves.
- **Machines and dehumanisation:** Workers are absorbed into the rhythm of the machines, even imagined as fed to them. Technology is shown as both a creator of wealth and a consumer of lives.
- **Mediation and the heart:** The film's slogan, that head and hands need a heart between them, proposes reconciliation instead of revolution. It can be read as a conservative resolution to a radical problem.
- **Faith and false prophets:** Biblical imagery runs through the film: Babel, a saviour, apocalypse. Persuasive speech and spectacle are treated as forces that can lead crowds either way.
- **Women as symbols:** Maria is split into opposed images of purity and seduction. The film can be read as using the female figure to embody its ideas, which also limits her as a character.

Key scenes

The shift change

Lines of workers trudging in lockstep, heads bowed, establish the film's visual language of class. Movement itself becomes a measure of freedom, and the scene is among the most imitated images of industrial dehumanisation.

The Moloch vision

A machine turns into a devouring idol, and Freder sees the factory as human sacrifice. It shows the film's method of fusing industrial reality with religious allegory through a single transformation.

Creation of the robot double

Rotwang's laboratory, with its rings of light and sparking apparatus, set the template for the mad-scientist workshop. The transformation also shows the film's effects ingenuity and its anxieties about artificial life.

The flood in the workers' city

The consequences of the crowd's rage reach the children, and the film shifts from allegory to physical peril. It also tests the idea that the hero's heart can matter more than the collective.

Filmmaking

- **Production design:** Otto Hunte, Erich Kettelhut and Karl Vollbrecht created a city of geometric towers, huge halls and cramped worker housing. The design carries the argument, not just the atmosphere.
- **Special effects:** The Schüfftan mirror process, miniatures and multiple exposures put actors inside impossible spaces. Many effects were done in camera, which gives them a tactile, handmade quality.
- **Editing and rhythm:** Rapid cross-cutting between machines, crowds and faces builds tension. Mechanical repetition in the worker scenes contrasts with the looser pacing of the upper city.
- **Performance:** Brigitte Helm, in her first film role, plays opposed versions of one face with striking range. Rudolf Klein-Rogge's wild-eyed inventor sets the pattern for the screen mad scientist.
- **Music:** Gottfried Huppertz composed a full orchestral score for the premiere. It was designed to follow the film's set pieces closely, and the restored cut restores it as an integral part of the experience.

THE FULL STORY

The full plot, including the ending.

In the city of Metropolis, a wealthy elite lives in towering gardens and stadiums, while workers toil underground to power the machines. Freder, the son of the city's master Joh Fredersen, glimpses a young woman, Maria, who brings workers' children into the pleasure gardens. Following her, he descends into the machine halls and is horrified by the conditions. He swaps places with an exhausted worker.

Maria preaches patience to the workers, telling them that a mediator will come to join the head and the hands. Fredersen, alarmed by her influence, turns to the inventor Rotwang, who has built a robot in the image of his lost love, Hel. Rotwang secretly intends revenge on Fredersen, and he gives the robot Maria's face.

The false Maria sows chaos in the city above and incites the workers to destroy their machines. In doing so they flood their own homes, endangering their children. The real Maria and Freder rescue the children.

Realising they have been deceived, the workers burn the false Maria at the stake and reveal her as a machine. Rotwang pursues the real Maria to the cathedral roof, where Freder fights him and Rotwang falls to his death. Freder brings his father and the workers' foreman together, joining hands, with the heart as mediator.

BEHIND THE FILM

- **New York skyline:** Lang said the idea took hold when he saw New York's illuminated skyline from a ship in 1924. The vertical, lit city he glimpsed became the model for the film's towers and traffic.
- **Faking the scale:** Without computers, the team used the Schüfftan process, in which mirrors placed actors into miniature sets, along with stop-motion for vehicle traffic. Crowds were also multiplied by careful photography and thousands of extras.
- **A costly gamble:** Shooting stretched over more than a year, and the budget grew enormous. The expense contributed to serious financial trouble for UFA, which had to turn to American partners and lost some control over its releases.

- **The robot costume:** Sculptor Walter Schulze-Mittendorff built the metal-looking robot suit, fitted to Brigitte Helm. It was reportedly rigid and uncomfortable to wear, but it created one of cinema's most lasting icons.
- **Lang and Harbou:** Thea von Harbou, Lang's wife and collaborator, wrote the novel and screenplay together. Lang later criticised the film's message of reconciliation, while admiring its look.
- **Myth:** Metropolis was the first science fiction film. **Reality:** Science fiction on screen began earlier, with Georges Méliès' *A Trip to the Moon* (1902) and others such as the Soviet *Aelita* (1924). Metropolis is better described as the genre's most influential early epic.
- **Myth:** The film was a success on release and has always been seen in full. **Reality:** It struggled commercially and was cut heavily after its Berlin premiere. Missing footage turned up in a print in Buenos Aires in 2008, allowing a much fuller restoration in 2010.

LEGACY AND CONNECTIONS

Its place in the lineage before → after

MOVEMENT

German Expressionism

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FILM

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THIS FILM

Metropolis (1927)



FILM

Blade Runner (1982)

Its crowded, layered future city and questions about artificial beings follow the model that Metropolis established.



FILM

Star Wars (1977)

The gleaming golden robot C-3PO is widely linked to the film's robot design, and its production design reflects the same tradition of imagined worlds.



TRADITION

Dystopian science fiction

Stories of stratified, machine-ruled societies, in novels and film, repeatedly echo its picture of a divided city.

Reception and reputation

Metropolis premiered in Berlin in January 1927 to admiration for its visuals and criticism of its story. H. G. Wells famously dismissed the plot as silly. It did poorly at the box office, and distributors cut it heavily for release, especially abroad.

Its reputation grew steadily as designers and filmmakers kept returning to its images. Restoration work from 2001 and the 2010 reconstruction, using a rediscovered print, let audiences see something near the original. Its plot is widely seen as naive, but its visual achievement is undisputed.

Awards Oscars and Cannes

Gold-standard honours did not exist for it at release: it received no Academy Award nominations and was not part of Cannes, which began in 1946.

Cultural impact beyond cinema

- **Pop music videos:** Queen's 1984 video for "Radio Ga Ga" intercut footage from the film, and Madonna's "Express Yourself" video (1989) borrowed its cityscape and machine imagery. The robot Maria became a recurring visual shorthand in pop styling.
- **Moroder's 1984 version:** Giorgio Moroder released a tinted, shortened cut with a rock and pop soundtrack featuring artists such as Pat Benatar and Adam Ant. It reintroduced the film to a young audience, though purists disliked it.
- **Manga and anime:** Osamu Tezuka's 1949 manga *Metropolis* took its title and inspiration from a still of the film. It led to Rintaro's 2001 animated feature, which reimaged the story in a world of robots.
- **Politics and rediscovery:** The film's line that the mediator between head and hands must be the heart is still cited in discussions of labour and class. Co-writer Thea von Harbou's later Nazi ties complicate that legacy. Footage found in Buenos Aires in 2008 prompted a fuller restoration.

Its lasting influence

Its vertical megacities, mad-scientist laboratory and gleaming female robot recur through science fiction, from Blade Runner's urban design to the look of C-3PO in Star Wars. The film also became a reference point for dystopian fiction about class and technology.

WHAT NEXT?

CONTINUE THE DIRECTOR

M (1931)

Lang's first sound film swaps spectacle for tight psychological suspense. It shows his control of space and shadow in a very different register.

FOLLOW THE IDEA

Modern Times (1936)

Chaplin approaches the same worry about workers swallowed by machines through comedy instead of allegory, a useful counterpoint in tone.

EXPLORE THE ERA OR MOVEMENT

Frankenstein (1931)

Another vision of a scientist creating artificial life, with a laboratory scene that shares Rotwang's visual DNA.

COMPARE ANOTHER APPROACH

Man with a Movie Camera (1929)

A very different silent city portrait, documentary and experimental, that also finds rhythm and poetry in machines and crowds.

SEE ITS INFLUENCE

Blade Runner (1982) **COMING SOON**

A later landmark that builds on the divided, vertical future city and asks what makes artificial beings human.

FULL CAST AND CREW



Fritz Lang
DIRECTOR



Gustav Fröhlich
ACTOR
as Freder Fredersen



Brigitte Helm
ACTOR
as Maria / The Machine
Man



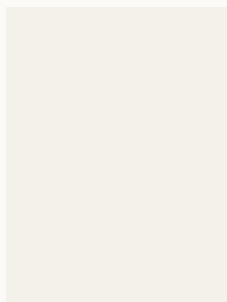
Alfred Abel
ACTOR
as Johann 'Joh'
Fredersen



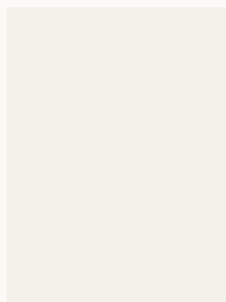
Rudolf Klein-Rogge
ACTOR
as C.A. Rotwang



Theodor Loos
ACTOR
as Josaphat



Gottfried Huppertz
COMPOSER



Otto Harzner
COMPOSER