The tradition of the oppressed shows us that the "state of emergency" in which we live is not the exception but the rule.

—Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History"

One of the most ubiquitous and disturbing images in anime and manga—indeed, an image that comes close to defining them—is the apocalyptic destruction of the city, with a human or humanoid figure at the epicenter. Very often this figure shares in the destruction of the city: it comes apart as the city does. This mutually experienced destruction implies more than just catastrophe. Whether we are aware of it or not, bodies and cities act as each other’s limits. On the one hand cities and buildings, as they shelter and enclose us, articulate a series of important distinctions. They mark a boundary between the spaces of the individual and those of the public. They afford a distinction between the space of citizens (often associated with the human) and the space beyond citizens, beyond civilization (the realms of the inhuman). On the other hand, our bodies in turn place limits on the city. Architecture and urban form take the human as their measure, literally and metaphorically. The shared destruction of these mutually delimiting figures—human
Freder is the “mediator” who might reconcile the cold-hearted ruler with his suffering people.

and urban architectures—implies a modern crisis in what it means to be human and what it means to dwell together in a community.

Such images are all the more disturbing in their resonance with world events, which have with increasing frequency made us witnesses to the disintegration of real bodies, real cities. This implies some relation between anime and manga images of destruction and the history of destruction of cities in the real world. Particularly important in Japan is the leveling of cities at the end of World War II. Nonetheless, neither the imagery nor the circumstances for such imagery is uniquely Japanese. Both speak to a more general crisis of modernity, and to the political, social, and ontological implications of modernity as articulated in architectural form. Here I propose a look at three instances of the destruction of the modern city and its relation to the disintegration of the human, all of which strive to topple the same behemoth, the modern Metropolis.

The first attempt on the Metropolis is Fritz Lang’s Metropolis (1927), a silent film that has had such a profound impact on the dystopian imagination in science fiction. Although Lang’s film toys with the possibility of the total destruction of the city, it ultimately offers something else: the immolation of a humanoid body, the sacrifice of a gynoid robot. Something similar occurs at the end of Tezuka Osamu’s manga Metropolis (1949): while the rebellion of the robots threatens to destroy the Metropolis, ultimately it is the robot that disintegrates. The connection between Lang’s and Tezuka’s tales is tenuous. By his own account, Tezuka had seen only one still from Lang’s film, and knew little else about its content. Tezuka was not rewriting or remaking Lang’s film, and the two stories differ significantly, as I will discuss below. Nonetheless, Tezuka and Lang are both concerned with the destructive forces of modernity and the potential obliteration of the very emblem of modernity, the Metropolis. It is on the basis of this shared concern for the modern destruction of body/city that director Rintarô and writer Otomo Katsuhiro’s animated Metropolis (2001) folds together elements of the two prior Metropolis stories. The 2001 version achieves the urban apocalypse only promised in the prior attempts, ending with the destruction of the gynoid robot and the Metropolis.

Clearly, with the destruction of both the modern city and the human body at stake, there are political implications to such stories and images. In fact, each Metropolis presents a political scenario: the destruction of the city is linked to conflicts between factions and social classes as well as to the rise and fall of leaders. There is a direct engagement with structures of authority
and sovereignty. Significantly, structures of authority and sovereignty are imagined through structures of urban spaces and the positioning of artificial humans in relation to them. Here, with the three Metropolis stories as a guide, I wish to explore the relation between the structuration of urban space and the imagination of (and critical response to) modern sovereignty.

**BETWEEN TOWER AND LABYRINTH**

Lang’s version of Metropolis appeared in the brief lull after Germany’s defeat in the First World War, shortly after the ensuing inflationary crisis but before the Great Depression and the rise of Nazism. It speaks of the traumas and social tensions resulting from and foreshadowing these events. Central to the film, for instance, is the oppression of the working class whose labor supports the luxury lifestyle of the rulers of the massive city Metropolis. A heartless autocrat, Joh Frederson, runs the city, and his rule depends on the genius of the brilliant inventor Rotwang. The film pits the merciless Joh against his own son Freder and against the woman with whom Freder falls in love, Maria, who is struggling to improve the lot of the workers. For Maria, Freder is the “Mediator” who might reconcile the cold-hearted ruler with his suffering people—which is presented as a reconciliation of the “head” and the “hands” through the “heart.” Joh Frederson has other plans, however. He has already ordered Rotwang to construct the prototype for a machine to replace the human workers completely. In some versions of the film, the robot takes the name “Futura.” Once Joh becomes aware of Maria’s efforts on behalf of the workers, he decides to give the robot her appearance. So the robot is a “False Maria,” as other versions of the film dub her.

The story turns on Joh’s plot to substitute Futura for Maria, in order to incite the workers to violence, which would in turn justify their destruction. In the climactic scenes of the film, a flood sweeps through the lower levels of the Metropolis where workers are in full rebellion. Believing their children dead in the flood, and seeing the False Maria’s role in the catastrophe, the rioting workers burn the False Maria at the stake. In the confusion, the true Maria and Freder are nearly killed, and in the end, seeing the near death of his son, Joh Frederson realizes the error of his ways. He gains the wisdom of a true leader and is reconciled with the workers.

Fritz Lang’s film translated these social divisions and conflicts into urban form, drawing inspiration from metropolitan Manhattan. He also drew on visions of the future city from such architects and artists as Antonio Sant’
Elia, Le Corbusier, and Hugh Ferris. For modern architects, a functionalist division of urban space became a key tenet of design, and the utopian vision of modernist urban designs was predicated on a separation of spaces for living, working, and recreation. These divisions were typically horizontal, but some of the more fantastic plans applied these principles vertically as well. Lang, for instance, transformed this functional division vertically, and a strict vertical hierarchy structures his Metropolis. Mid-air bridges and train lines spawn the yawning canyons between towering skyscrapers. The upper classes live in the upper reaches, in graciously partitioned spaces of play and repose. Underground, far from the light of day, are two levels of austerely delineated space. There are the worker's tenements, where the bodies that labor for the wealthy reside. In addition there are the machine rooms, where they work and occasionally die as they labor to keep the machinery of the city running. The New Tower of Babel, a skyscraper dominating the skyline, provides an axis for the vertical hierarchy. It is the control center for the entire city, with main thoroughfares radiating from it, while its internal mechanisms plunge down into the lowest levels. The subterranean tenements and machine rooms form part of this rational axis. Insofar as the New Tower of Babel serves as the axis for this fundamentally vertical gesture, the entire city appears as one great tower (Figure 1).

Now the biblical Tower of Babel that this structure evokes was in fact a ziggurat, a species of pyramid that one ascended along a path that spiraled up its perimeter to the apex. The Tower of Babel thus combines two different, potentially contradictory architectural structurations of movement: the tower and the labyrinth. In Greek mythology, the labyrinth was the maze built by the first architect Daedalus at the behest of a sovereign, Minos, in order to hide his wife's monstrous offspring. At the center of the labyrinth dwelled the Minotaur, half bull, half man. Each year Minos forced young men and women into the maze, where they invariably lost their way and fell prey to the Minotaur. The Labyrinth implies both disorientation and hybridization. It spatially poses the question of "where?" and "who?" but offers only cryptic replies. In contrast to the Labyrinth, the tower unequivocally marks a place and acts as a beacon, as if to answer the question posed by the Labyrinth: "Where?" "Here!" And, in response to the question of confused identity or tangled origins, the Tower poses a unitary and unifying entity. In effect, the Tower of Babel can be read as an architecture that superimposes the
convoluted question mark of the Labyrinth upon the soaring exclamation mark of the Tower. It is a figure that at once rectifies and twists spatial orientations, actions, and identities.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Tower of Babel came to represent man’s hubris, his attempt to ascend to the level of God. Hence it supplied an apt metaphor for modernity, when man really did lay claim to godlike powers, pushed God aside and proclaimed Him dead, only to discover that human works did not prove a sufficient replacement for divinity. This is ostensibly how the Metropolis films conjure forth the Tower of Babel: as an icon for the inevitable failure of the modern project.

While the Metropolis of Lang’s film is structured around the New Tower of Babel, it also offers a labyrinth: twisting passages and catacombs beneath the city, at once spaces of danger, secrecy, and safety (Figure 2). Yet even as these labyrinthine structures appear to unravel the vertical authority of the city, they are inseparable from it. The city generates them and imparts intensity to them. Ultimately even the rational axis of the New Tower partakes of the labyrinth. The austere worker housing and the machine rooms that form part of its modern machinery are also shadowy, smoky, and connected to the twisting underground catacombs. In other words, if Lang’s Metropolis can
be understood as a Tower of Babel, it is because it combines tower and labyrinth in specific ways. Another dominant building in the film, the Gothic Cathedral, also combines tower and labyrinth and provides some insights into the specificity of Lang's Metropolis.

Significantly, in medieval Europe, the soaring Gothic cathedrals were imagined as Towers of Babel, and on their floors, labyrinthine symbols of religious perambulation were etched. They thus combined a heavenward gesture with the convoluted motion of ritual. In circles of architecture and urban planning in 1920s Germany, however, the cathedral took on another meaning. It was taken as the model for a truly German version of the American skyscraper. Many believed that one massive central building in each city, in the manner of the cathedral, was preferable to the American model of unbridled commercial growth. In this sense, the cathedral promised a way to produce a German modernity free of foreign influence. It is noteworthy that, in Lang's film, the people burn the False Maria at the stake before the cathedral, in an attempt to purify their realm of the dangers of hybridity (Figure 3).

In an essay published in 1929, Joseph Goebbels describes the Berlin cathedral Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtnis-Kirche as a refuge from the vicious cosmopolitan metropolis of Berlin. His vision is so reminiscent of Lang's film that it is likely that Goebbels penned the essay after seeing the film. While Lang was not a Nazi (he was in fact part Jewish), many critics have taken his film to task for its resonance with the reactionary political rhetoric gaining ground in Germany at the time. Lang himself indicates that his Metropolis was a favorite of Hitler and Goebbels. This is not so surprising in view of the film's resolution of the conflicts and inequalities between different social factions and classes under the rule of a loving leader. This is not far from Hitler's vision of a united Volk, a people of one blood, sharing a common wellspring of life.

In Lang's Metropolis the happy resolution is predicated on the elimination of otherness, as embodied in the labyrinth and the female robot. Not only does the European tradition posit the biblical Tower of Babel as an Oriental structure but the novel by Thea von Harbou (scriptwriter and Lang's wife) on which the film is based makes clear that the city's labyrinthine spaces are
also somehow Oriental. Rotwang’s house, for instance, was built long ago by a mysterious man from the East. Moreover, the city’s site of debauchery is named Yoshiwara, after the famous pleasure quarters of the city of Edo (early modern Tokyo). All in all, the novel makes clear, even where the film does not, that a foreign Oriental presence, associated with labyrinthine spaces, threatens the upright character of the towering city. Not coincidentally, the robot is born of these spaces. Thus Futura or the False Maria comes to embody the otherness that menaces Metropolis.

Because the robot is a replica of Maria, only their behavior serves to distinguish the true and false Marias. The true Maria is upright with a direct yet demure regard, while the false Maria is twisted, winking and grimacing. They repeat the contrast between tower and labyrinth, but in this form, the tower can be purified of the labyrinth. The immolation of the robot promises to purify the upright city of its twisted otherness. Oddly, however, the other is not other in appearance, only in behavior. This recalls one of the great fears of Nazism, the fear of the alien undistinguishable from “us.” In Lang’s film, this disguised alien must be identified and destroyed to ensure the safety of

**Figure 3.** At the climax of the film the “False Maria,” the robot double, is burned at the stake, on the parvis of the purifying cathedral. Here as elsewhere her body twists and distorts, its movement reflected in the gyrations of the rioting workers.
the populace. Significantly, at the climax of the film, the robot’s human skin burns away, and she is shown to be nothing but a mechanical device, not a genuine human at all.

In sum, it is the displacement of the tension between tower and labyrinth onto the mechanical robot versus organic human that allows Lang’s Metropolis to resolve its social tensions. Yet, insofar as the Metropolis, as the New Tower of Babel, is by its very nature a combination of tower and labyrinth, the city must always be at war with itself, in a constant state of emergency. It must commit to the identification and elimination of the peoples and spaces that allow for difference, social conflict and social interaction. The entire Metropolis has the potential to transform into a killing field, into a closed space in which aliens must be separated out and destroyed. In its disavowal of the hybridity of its structures, this model of modernity ultimately turns to self-destruction in an effort to overcome itself. The film makes possible a happy resolution. The other is burned under the people’s eyes, the city is united under its proper leader, and the apocalypse is averted. Germany was not to have such a happy ending.

**THE DARKENED SUN**

Not long after the war engendered in part by the conditions articulated in Lang’s film, Tezuka Osamu developed a very different set of relations to robots and the Metropolis in his manga *Metropolis* (1949) (Figure 4). Although Tezuka, like Lang, based his Metropolis on Manhattan (as seen in photographs and comics), Tezuka’s city differs radically from Lang’s. Where Lang develops a tension between vertical tower and spiraling labyrinth, Tezuka offers horizontal, diffuse, and largely unfocussed urban spaces. Tezuka draws lots of buildings, and his manga includes towers and labyrinths. The climactic battle, for example, takes place atop a skyscraper. But unlike Lang’s Tower or Cathedral, Tezuka’s skyscraper has no explicitly mythic or iconic status. Likewise, while some of the events of the story occur in labyrinthine spaces—for example, the underground headquarters of the evil Duke Red—they have no clear relationship to the overall organization of the city. They seem rather to float free of it. Some episodes even take place at a distance from the city: aboard an oceanliner or on a distant uncharted island. In sum, the dispersed spatiality and non-iconic architectures of Tezuka’s manga contrast sharply with Lang’s film. Where Lang’s Metropolis remained shut off from the world, intent on identifying and expunging the inner alien, Tezuka’s Metropolis
opens to lands beyond the ocean (one of the main characters hails from Japan), to the other spots on the planet (events in the Metropolis affect the globe), and to even the heavens.

Just as the robot in Lang's film embodied the tension between labyrinth (otherness) and tower (self), the robot in Tezuka's manga embodies the dispersion of urban space. Where Lang presented two distinct versions of one body (Maria/Futura) in order to stage a conflict between true and false, good and evil, inorganic and organic, Tezuka's robot Michi is always in a position of being neither/nor and both/and. Grown from artificial cells, Michi oscillates between the inorganic and organic. Similarly Michi transforms from male to female at the flip of a switch. Neither good nor evil, he/she becomes violent only when provoked. In sum, Michi embodies a more ambiguous and ambivalent relation to modern technology. Even her identity remains in suspense. While constructed like the False Maria in the image of another, Michi is modeled on a work of art. He/she bears the face of the most beautiful statue in the world. Consequently, Michi does not

![Figure 4](image-url)

**Figure 4.** Michi flies through Tezuka's *Metropolis* (1949); note that in contrast to Figure 1, none of these tall buildings dominates the others. This robot moves through the manga city in swoops and swerves, in contrast to the frenetic movement of her counterpart in Lang's *Metropolis*. Copyright Tezuka Productions.
conceal a true identity. It is impossible to burn away her skin and flesh to
reveal an underlying truth. When Michi dies at the end of the manga, he/she
melts into a formless mass. Her death affords no final revelation (Figure 5).

Consistent with the dispersion of urban space and the undecidable nature of
the robot, Tezuka's manga offers no figure of legitimate political authority. Lang's film
turns on the legitimacy of Joh Frederson, challenging his legitimacy only to reconfirm
it in the end. Tezuka's story follows Duke Red's struggle to seize power, but Duke Red
is clearly a criminal, without any legitimate authority. This lack of a political center is
consistent with the unfocused spatial layout of the city. If there is any center to the
story and to the city, it is one that acts at a great distance from the city and in an entirely different register from urban
space: the sun.

Although Tezuka does not introduce the sun until page 22 of the manga,
the entire plot revolves around its effects. The evil Duke Red's plans to take
over the world depend on transforming the sun. He fires a super weapon at
it to create sunspots that at once increase the temperature of the Earth and
produce a form of radiation (omothenium rays) that allows for the production
of life with artificial cells (Figure 6). The scientist Dr Lawton creates the
artificial human Michi with the omothenium-irradiated artificial cells. Duke
Red sees in Michi a tool to hasten his ascent to global domination. Michi
escapes him, however, and in his/her anger, leads the robots in rebellion
against the Metropolis.

It is easy to interpret Tezuka's open, decentered, unfocused, loose, am-
biguous, and horizontal comic book Metropolis as a response to Japan's con-
dition—both physical and political—at the end of the war. Largely leveled in
the war, many of Japan's cities consisted of a patchwork of survival and ruin,
demolition and reconstruction. The political condition was similar. Under the
American occupation, Japan's government and economic institutions were
to be restructured, with a new constitution in which the sovereign center,
the emperor, renounced his divinity, becoming just a symbolic center. Until
only four years prior to Tezuka's manga, official doctrine had posited the Em-
peror of Japan as the descendant of the sun goddess. It is telling, then, that
Tezuka makes the sun central to his narrative, yet at the same time places it
at a distance, off to the side, and darkened. While the formerly legitimate political authority (sun) is displaced, and contemporary claimants to power are discredited as criminal (Duke Red), Tezuka’s sun continues to exert a powerful and deleterious influence on the world, precisely because illegitimate politicians and criminals can manipulate it. Significantly, it is the politically and scientifically instrumental use of the sun/emperor in its displaced position that is the source of evil, rather than the sun itself.

In this respect, while it is tempting perhaps to read Duke Red, with his long legs and high nose, as a sign of the Western, Tezuka’s manga is not a critique of the Americanness of the occupation, of foreign forces come to remodel Japan. Tezuka implicitly takes to task the criminal nature of the Japanese government under the American occupation, and also, perhaps accidentally, points to the repositioning of Japan in the Cold War. After all, this Duke is Red, and in 1949 it was already clear that Japan was America’s front line in the war against communism. There was plenty of anxiety about the possibility of “reds” in Japan. All of which suggests that Michi, as the product of a transformative attack on the sun, is equally a product of the displaced

**Figure 6.** The radiation from Duke Red’s sunspots provides the missing spark that brings Dr. Lawton’s synthetic proteins to life: a form of life that oscillates between organic and artificial and with an intimate relationship to the sun. Copyright Tezuka Productions.
emperor, and United States' and the Soviet Union's "criminal" grab for power, both in postwar Japan and around the world. Michi's combination of innocence and total ambiguity speaks to the consequent decentering of sovereignty, not only in Japan but also the postwar world of the Pax Americana, in which questions of place and identity—"who?" and "where?"—threatened to become unanswerable.

In combining and drawing connections between Lang's *Metropolis* and Tezuka's, Rintarô and Ôtomo's animated *Metropolis* succeeds not only in constructing a vision of the contemporary global city that is grounded in prior formations but also in showing how the fascism of the 1930s could transform and adapt itself to the diffuse and open conditions of place and identity associated with information society and postmodernity. This is the version of *Metropolis* I will consider next.

**THE TOWER OF THE SUN**

Rintarô and Ôtomo's city is even more centralized than Lang's. At the center of their animated Metropolis stands a tower known as the Ziggurat, which implies that it is structurally a ziggurat and thus analogous to the biblical Tower of Babel. Yet within the language of the film's art-deco design scheme it is a cathedral: a cross in plan, topped by gargoyles, flanked by flying buttresses. The Tower/Cathedral forms a cross at the center of the city grid, and all roads lead from it and return to it. In sum, where Lang's film presented combinations of tower and labyrinth in two major architectural figures, one modern (the New Tower of Babel) and one "traditional" (the Cathedral), Rintarô and Ôtomo's animated film fuses the New Tower of Babel and the Cathedral into one structure: the Ziggurat (Figure 7). Such a fusion of structures might be read as a compression of figures of sovereignty, in the sense that the animated *Metropolis* combines the two symbols of sovereignty from Lang's film (one symbolizing power and the other, ostensibly, purity). It also implies, like Lang's cathedral, a distillation of identity. The animated film begins with newsreel footage of Duke Red atop the Ziggurat, announcing the approach or ascent of his nation to the heavens. This is pronounced in a language reminiscent of wartime (and contemporary) invocations of national pride, emphasizing a shared identity: an emphatic "we" and "our" ("ware ware wa, waga"), and a term for "nation" ("kokka") derived from the Chinese characters for country and household. So the Ziggurat brings sovereignty and identity into focus at a single point, in a sort of Tower of the Sun.
For it is here, at the center of the Metropolis, that Rintarō and Ōtomo place Tezuka’s sun-polluting super weapon. This is a very different gesture from Tezuka, who had placed the weapon at a great distance from his city, paralleling the sun’s own distance and ambiguity as a source of power and authority. While Tezuka had pushed the sun off to the side, the animated *Metropolis* recovers it within the city through the very weapon designed to attack it. In a similar departure from Tezuka, the animated film makes Duke Red not just a criminal but a public figure. At the beginning of the film he is wealthy and influential; he is responsible for the construction of the Ziggurat. And by the end of the film he has actually provoked a coup d’état and violently taken control of the city. He thus differs from Joh Frederson, whose legitimacy is ultimately upheld, and from Tezuka’s Duke Red, who falls without ever achieving political legitimacy. In effect, the Tower of the Sun allows for a structural blurring of the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate sovereignty.

The animated *Metropolis* also has labyrinthine subterranean zones reminiscent of those in Lang’s film, and a divide between the city above ground

*Figure 7.* Lang’s two dominant buildings, the New Tower of Babel and the Cathedral, are merged together to form the Ziggurat in Rintarō and Ōtomo Katsuhiro’s animated *Metropolis* (2001).
and zones below ground was essential to Rintarō and Ōtomo’s vision of the Metropolis from the outset. This underground is also home to the most abject of city dwellers: unemployed or impoverished humans, and robots. Yet, unlike the austere, featureless architectures of Lang’s underground spaces, the subterranean world of the animated Metropolis bursts with color. Its denizens are poor and live in shanties, but these shantytowns are ablaze with activity (some of it black market or criminal), crowded with markets, food stands, bars. Instead of the dark pockets of otherness found in Lang’s film, Rintarō and Ōtomo create a collage of heterogeneous elements. Examples of architecture from around the world and from a vast range of historical periods crowd into one space. We see citations of classical architecture, industrial architecture, nineteenth-century arcades, Gaudi, and Peter Eisenman. This colorful architectural collage answers to the fusion and compression of architectures in the Ziggurat, with a kaleidoscopic and chaotic superimposition of elements that refuses to constitute a single space (Figure 8). If the Ziggurat compresses sovereignty and identity into a single-minded “we!” and proudly proclaims “here!” in response the animated labyrinth continually asks “where?” and “who?” Who are we in this collage of wheres?

One of the main characters, Ban Shunsaku, a detective from Japan (adapted from Tezuka’s manga), speaks of his sense of disorientation, “I’m such a stranger here, I don’t know East from West!” (“machi wa hajimete, higashi mo nishi mo kaimoku” and “higashi mo nishi mo shiran tokoro de”). In this respect, too, the animated Metropolis is as open and dispersed as Tezuka’s.

**Figure 8.** Unlike the narrow, twisting, and empty tunnels beneath Lang’s city, the animated Metropolis is a collage of spaces grand and small, old and new, colorful and dark—and inhabited.
Yet rather than discrediting sovereignty or criminalizing it, the indeterminacy of Rintarō and Ōtomo’s underground city invites the arbitrary exercise of sovereign power, in the form of a rigorous zoning and policing of zones. Paradoxically, the underground zones are strictly controlled, yet we are told that laws do not apply there. These are exactly what Giorgio Agamben calls “spaces of exception,” wherein the law creates zones where the law does not apply. The underground is legally unlawful. The result is a constant state of emergency. Those who inhabit these zones are “bare life” or “naked life,” subject to authority that legally places them outside the law, which is in this case symbolized in the highly compressed architectural authority of the Ziggurat.19

The robot Tima in the animated Metropolis emerges from this labyrinth, as does Futura or the False Maria in Lang’s film. But where Futura embodied the otherness concealed within identity (the dark side to be eradicated), Tima is a thoroughly hybrid figure. She is both the true and the false Maria, as it were. While the animated Metropolis makes the robot definitely female (in contrast to Tezuka’s gender-switching Michi), Tima is nonetheless as hybrid a figure as Michi, who remained poised between inorganic and organic, true and false, good and evil. She seems capable of adopting any identity, and not surprisingly, her tag line in the film is “Who am I?” She is an embodiment of bare life.

If Tima has a truth, it is that she has been designed as the final piece in the weapon that will launch a strike on the sun. Duke Red aims to sit her atop the Ziggurat as the new ruler of his world. In other words, what emerges from the labyrinth (bare life) is taken for the rule of sovereignty. The exception is to become the rule. Yet things do not turn out as Duke Red planned. In keeping with its doubling of the silent film and the manga, this Metropolis gives us not one but two revolutions or rebellions. The first rebellion, on the part of human revolutionaries, proves unsuccessful. Despite its earnestness and good intentions, it is an entirely conservative revolution, with the goal of overturning Duke Red and returning the city to a time before robots. Indeed the failure of this revolution appears as a warning against conservative revolution and thus as a critique of the complicity between Lang’s film and national socialism. Consequently, there must be a second uprising, that of robots, the figures of bare life.

The second uprising occurs when Duke Red is about to succeed in his plan to sit Tima (the robotic emblem of bare life) upon a throne atop the Ziggurat.
As she loses her “human” nature and becomes one with the machine, the robots rise against this ultimate injustice, that is, the transformation of their state of exception into the new law for world order. Thus the Tower falls, destroyed by the very bare life whose state of exception allowed its emergence, and the film ends with humans and robots poking through the now horizontal ruins of the Ziggurat, in a search for Tima’s remains. In effect, Rintarō and Ōtomo achieve what Lang and Tezuka imagined but deferred: the fall of Babel, the world after the apocalypse.

Near the end of the film an immense red globe raises up Tima’s throne, an image that evokes the red disk of the sun on the Japanese flag, the hi no maru. For an instant, something like Japan appears in the place of absolute sovereignty (Duke Red) and bare life (Tima)—a place for Japan unimaginable in Tezuka’s manga but also a place that Rintarō and Ōtomo are intent on rejecting or at least questioning. Their robot, designed to attack the sun, becomes equated with it. Tima becomes (the film tells us) a goddess, if only briefly: new life and pure violence pouring forth together. Such a condition, which is somehow our condition, cannot endure. As she fulfills this condition, Tima brings it to a crisis, immediately provoking its destruction—and her own.

Through this gesture she frees the people of the Labyrinth: both robots and the poorest humans are in effect led to a new land devoid of power structures. But as she falls from the collapsing Ziggurat she again repeats her tagline “Who am I?” (Figure 9). Who does she save through her death? Who are her people, really, and where is her city? An answer can be found, I think, if

**Figure 9.** As Tima disintegrates and falls at the climax of the animated Metropolis, the question of identity is posed yet again.
we explore some of the connections between the architectural spaces of the animated Metropolis and those of contemporary Japan.

OUR METROPOLIS

One building in Tokyo in particular assimilates closely to Rintarō and Ōtomo's Ziggurat. It is one of the most notorious buildings in Japan: the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Headquarters, or Tokyo City Hall, designed by Tange Kenzō (completed 1991). This building was conceived as a center of power and technocracy, part of the largest single set of buildings to be constructed in Japan in the twentieth century. It was designed to evoke the imposing authority of traditional architectures—castles and Edo-era government buildings—and the lattice-like pattern of a computer circuit board. Its most prominent building, City Hall Tower 1, was also immediately noted (and disparaged) for its resemblance to the building at the heart of Paris—the gothic cathedral Notre Dame de Paris. So, in a building that itself can be considered parodic—it would be classified by many as a piece of postmodern architecture—we find a literal fusion of control Tower and Cathedral (Figure 10).

Today this building is occupied by the administration of governor Ishihara Shintarō, who has been criticized for his extreme nationalism and for statements many have considered racist, sexist, and historically revisionist, including a speech that called for the Japanese army to be prepared to put down hordes of rioting foreign residents of Japan in the event of a major earthquake. The foreigners Ishihara was speaking about occupy an economic niche in Japan that makes them like the robots in Metropolis: essential laborers who barely exist socially and politically and yet whose very existence provokes resentment and fear. It is in response to their existence that the right wing has attempted to answer the question of identity: "Who are we

Japanese? We are not those Asian foreigners. We are we.” Such conceptions of national identity might be considered to turn this Ziggurat into a monument to the Japanese sun, embodied bizarrely in a cathedral like Rintaro’s—and Lang’s.  

But Tokyo’s relationship to national identity is complex. Indeed one of the reasons for building such an ostentatious city hall was to underline Tokyo’s autonomy from the national government. Tokyo’s boundaries really lie outside of Japan, in the many countries from which it draws its resources. It is one of those metropolises referred to by economists and sociologists as “global cities.” Like other global cities, Tokyo is a crucial node in the supranational flows of capital, information, and technology that link subnational regions, provoking a crisis in what it means to be situated locally, to be a nation.

The identities of all citizens become a problem in this condition. And so we long for a time when we were whole, our bodies intact; or a time when we were part of one body, one folk. Leaders like Ishihara Shintaro appeal to precisely this longing. Yet their rhetoric disguises the fact that they—and we—depend on those lives that are reduced to a subhuman condition by the exercise of our power. These are the millions of people, sometimes entire populaces, we employ or enslave daily to die for us: foreign guest workers, occupants of refugee camps, captives of all kinds.

This is the condition described in Rintaro and Otomo’s Metropolis. In it a new form of fascism—articulated in an architecture derived from Lang—combines with the diffuse and open conditions of place and identity of our own era—conditions that find expression in a loose urban structure derived from Tezuka’s city. While these conditions have their roots in the past, they take on a new accent now because of the decline of the two Cold War empires, the expansion of the information society, and the other complex circumstances that go together to make up what is often described as “postmodernity.” In this condition the questions of “Who are we?” and “Where are we?” become acute. The nationalist or culturalist rhetoric that responds to this anxiety divides the world into two camps: those who are with us and those who are not. The result is, as in Japan, leaders with global power but only local legitimacy. Criminals and pretenders can, like Duke Red, actually achieve positions as global sovereigns.

This is an ironic outcome, given that some hoped that the new decentralization might yield a revolution from below. But many writers and artists
of Rintarō’s and Ôtomo’s generation were among those who tried to reform Japan in the early postwar period, only to see it swing increasingly to the Right, and much of their work now seems to be imbued with a pessimistic belief that revolution from below is no longer possible. This may be the source of the animated film’s dependence on an apocalypse provoked from above. Tima’s robot revolution succeeds where a human revolution failed. At the same time, it promises liberation from rogues like Duke Red, a world in which all power structures have been leveled and from which we can begin to pull together the pieces that make up some kind of bare life. The hope is that this life will offer sovereignty on a small scale, a sovereignty of individuals or of small communities that, while distinct, can accommodate relationships between people, or even between humans and robots.

This is not a new dream. Walter Benjamin, who wrote under the shadow of Hitler’s fascism, hoped for a messianic or divine violence, as opposed to the bloody mythic one he saw tearing apart his world. Divine violence was to annihilate the very notion of sovereignty, leveling all power structures. But it is unclear today, as it was in Benjamin’s time, what might be the end condition that comes out of this divine violence. What form would a community dwelling together in the world take after the destruction of Towers? For the yearning for a postpolitical world is also shared by the representatives of the Right against which this film reacts. An apolitical condition can in the end turn out to be about pure power, whether that power is expressed through violence or love. The postapocalypse may turn out to be just another state of emergency.

But at least Rintarō’s film does not restore the sovereign, as Lang’s did. Tima becomes a goddess and then immediately cancels out her own sovereignty. And while Lang’s Metropolis papered over the hybrid condition of modernity through the sacrifice of a robot in place of the city, Tima’s death occurs alongside the destruction of the city and confirms our own hybrid condition. Instead of an answer to the question “Who am I?” the animated film leaves us with the question unanswered. Rather than one united folk, the ruins of the animated Ziggurat are populated by bands of robots and humans, two communities. With the fall of Babel, many tongues replace one, and one story becomes two. And just as the later retellings of the Babel and Metropolis stories restore and distort their antecedents, so we humans’ second identity, Tima, both turns on us and saves us. If there is some hope to be read in the shared destruction of body and city, this is it. Whether it is enough, whether the film as destructive creation can possibly contribute to a creation born out of destruction in the real world, is another question.
Notes


2. Tezuka Osamu, "atogaki" (postscript), Metropolisu (Metropolis) (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1979).


4. This is made clear in the 1926 novel by Thea von Harbou, Metropolis (Boston: Gregg Press, 1975). The robot's primary purpose as laborer is implied but not explicit in the film.

5. Including the most recent and most complete restoration of the film: Metropolis, dir. Fritz Lang (1927); restored and released on DVD (Kino Video, 2002). My analysis is based on this version of the film.

6. In 1924 Fritz Lang visited New York City for the first time, in the company of his wife and scriptwriter Thea von Harbou, and famed architect Erich Mendelsohn. It was on the first evening of this journey, looking across the water at Manhattan from the ship where he and his companions were still confined (as, in his words, "enemy aliens"), that he conceived Metropolis. Jean-Louis Cohen, Scenes of the World to Come (Paris and Montréal: Flammarion and Canadian Centre for Architecture, 1995), 87.


8. This is implied in the film in its best-restored version today, but even in this version approximately one quarter of the original film has disappeared (it was edited out in part for American distribution). The vertical axis of movement tying together the New Tower of Babel and the machine rooms below is made explicit in von Harbou's novel Metropolis. The novel, written while the screenplay was being developed, describes the Paternoster Machine (an early elevator), which ascends and descends within the New Tower and connects through to the control mechanism in the depths below to which Freder Freder is bound at one point in the story. In the film this control mechanism takes the form of a giant clocklike disk. In the novel Freder is attached instead to an insectoid machine with a trunklike sucker that "jacks in" (to borrow a phrase anachronistically from cyberpunk) to his head. In the novel this device is referred to as the "Ganesh machine" (see the following discussion on oriental imagery in Lang). A few surviving stills show the Paternoster Machine in action as it appeared in the original film.

9. Lang would have been aware of this because of his training in architecture, which he studied for one year before switching to film.

10. Since Goethe, the Gothic had been seen as a quintessentially German style of architecture, and the Gothic cathedral as the epitome of German culture. Of course Gothic architecture was a pan-European phenomenon. There were, though, local variations of
Gothic, and in the modern era recognition of these became important to the construction of a national identity in opposition to the international, even abstract, tone of classical architecture. Victor Hugo, for example, suggested in his great novel *Notre-Dame de Paris* (originally published in 1831; English title *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame,*) that the Gothic, epitomized for him by the cathedral at the heart of Paris, was quintessentially French. In England, to give another example, one reason that Sir Charles Barry designed the British Houses of Parliament (begun 1836) as Gothic buildings was because it was seen as the most British of styles.

11. Thousands of such buildings were designed as projects in the 1920s, including Otto Kohlz’s federal office building in Berlin and Haimovici, Tschammer, and Caroli’s trade fair tower in Leipzig (both 1920). Neumann, *Film Architecture*, 35–36 and 102.

12. This is speculation, but the full text does support it strongly. Here is one excerpt: “In the middle of this turmoil of the metropolis the Gedächtniskirche stretches its narrow steeples up into the grey evening. It is alien in this noisy life. Like an anachronism left behind, it mourns between the cafés and cabarets, condescends to the automobiles humming around its stony body, and calmly announces the hour to the sin of corruption . . . This is not the true Berlin. It is elsewhere waiting, hoping, struggling. It is beginning to recognize the Judas who is selling our people for thirty pieces of silver. / The other Berlin is lurking, ready to pounce. A few thousand are working days and nights on end so that sometime the day will arrive. And this day will demolish the abodes of corruption all around the Gedächtniskirche; it will transform them and give them over to a risen people. / The day of judgment! It will be a day of freedom!” Joseph Goebbels, “Around the Gedächtniskirche,” in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, ed. Anton Kaes and Edward Dimendberg (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994; first published as “Rund um die Gedächtniskirche,” in *Der Angriff*, January 23, 1928).


14. “And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there . . . And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven” (Gen. 11:2–8; King James version).

15. Asian and pestilential: “There was a house in the great Metropolis which was older than the town . . . It was said that a magician, who came from the East (and in the track of whom the plague wandered) had built the house in seven nights” (Gen. 11:55).

16. The text is “Ima, ware ware wa, waga kokka wa masa ni tenjô ni itaran to shite iru.” Òtomo Katsuhiro, *Metropolis* (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 2001), 1. This is rendered in subtitles on the DVD *Metropolis*, dir. Rintarô (2001); translated as *Metropolis*, subtitled DVD (Columbia Tristar, 2002), as “At this moment our state extends its reach to the stars!” or “presently, we, as a nation, are about to touch the heavens!”


18. Ôtomo, *Metropolis*, 10, 58. This sense of disorientation dominates not only in the spaces of the film, but the plot as well: the Japanese detective’s pursuit of a criminal is sidetracked by other chases and intrigues, while Duke Red launches his coup d’état, and an insurrection is crushed as soon as it arises. In other words, there is an abundance of action, much of it political action, yet all of it seems misdirected, as if unable to arrive at
a full articulation of who should act and where. What is more, much of the action goes astray because concealed identities and indeterminate identities constantly undermine any sense of certainty.


20. Tange was also architect of a building erected at the opposite end of Japan’s postwar expansion and associated with another apocalyptic explosion: Hiroshima’s Peace Memorial Museum (1952). That building is a profoundly horizontal gesture—see discussion of Tezuka’s diffuse and horizontal city above. Images are available at Kenzo Tange Associates Official Site, http://www.ktaweb.com (accessed June 14, 2007).


22. "With Sangokujin and foreigners repeating serious crimes, we should prepare ourselves for possible riots that may be instigated by them at the outbreak of an earthquake... As police are not always fit for handling all contingencies, the Self-Defense forces should be ready to respond to threats to public security besides natural disasters." Cited on the Web site of the International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR), http://www.imadr.org/new/ishihara1.html (accessed March 23, 2007).

23. Ishihara is also one of Japan’s most prominent writers. His work includes several screenplays, including the recent *For Those We Love* (2007, *Ore wa kimi no tame ni koso shini ni iku*; the title has also been translated as "I go to die for you"). According to Ishihara, his intention in writing this script was "to convey the [kamikaze] corps' beauty to young people today" (quoted in Kim Do-hyeong, “The Kamikaze in Japanese and International Film,” *Japan Focus* [May 28, 2007], http://japanfocus.org/products/details/2431 [accessed May 28, 2007]). In 2007 Ishihara was reelected for a third term as governor of Tokyo. As though to underline the relationship between film and architecture that seems to emerge again and again from these films and the events that surround them, one of his opponents in the election was Kurokawa Kishô, prominent architect and member of the 1960s architectural group known as the Metabolists. Kurokawa opposed Ishihara mainly because of a conviction that the governor’s promotion of Tokyo’s bid for the 2016 Olympics was misguided. The Olympic bid, as Olympic bids tend to do, engaged a rhetoric of equal parts national(ist) and civic pride, both to be crystallized in the form of grand architectural projects (the master planner was to be Andô Tadao, another prominent architect). Additional information can be found at the Tokyo 2016 Olympic Games Bid Committee Web site, http://www.tokyo2016.or.jp/en/index.html (accessed June 14, 2007).


25. These flows are predicated on a culture of consumption that finds some of its purest expressions in spaces in Japan not far from Tokyo City Hall, the entertainment district around Shinjuku station. Such spaces (there are many others) might well be compared to the Labyrinth of the animated *Metropolis*: playful, phantasmagoric collages fueled by a commerce of bare life both legitimate and not.