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Dialectical Imaginaries: forms of life, forms of fascism in the *Metropolis* of film, manga and anime

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The Japanese animated film "Metropolis" (2001) spliced together two earlier visual narratives sharing its name: Fritz Lang's famed silent film (1927) and Osamu Tezuka's early postwar comic book (1949). The paper presents these three tales as instances of what Walter Benjamin referred to as the *dialectical image*. It examines the imaginary cities offered up by the tales, places them in the context of contemporary urban and political discourses, and relates them to applications of military and police violence over the arc of the last century as understood through the work of Giorgio Agamben. Over the course of this journey, it draws on Benjamin and Agamben to speculate on the intersection between the topologies of the dialectical image and of the state of exception, questioning where that relationship is taking us now.

The city has long been an emblem. It embodies our attempts to order the world and our society; at times, it represents our failure to do so. This emblem has many aspects: from a material reality, felt and experienced, to images of that reality as it is or as it might be. Such urban representations are crucial to the meaning and imagination – and therefore planning – of the city. They can often be understood as instances of a specific kind of image: what Walter Benjamin referred to as the *dialectical image*. Benjamin used this term to refer to images which encapsulate and present, without resolving, the social and political tensions specific to a given historical moment. In the words of Susan Buck-Morss, for Benjamin "such images were the concrete, 'small, particular moments' in which the 'total historical event' was to be discovered… in which the origins of the present could be found." (Buck-Morss 1991: 218, 71). The dialectical image articulates those tensions according to a visual rather than a linear logic. Its strength as evidence is derived in part from its emblematic power – the extent to which it compels us as viewers. It shares something with the technique of *montage*: the composition of images in space, or their cinematic juxtaposition or superimposition in time for dramatic, symbolic or experiential effect. Works of visual narrative – from cinema to popular arts such as graphic novels – make up some of the most compelling expressions of dialectical imagination.

The following pages examine the rendering of such an imagination in three visual narratives. While each of these is distinct, all three share a preoccupation with the city as an emblem of modern life, as well as a title: *Metropolis*. The first of these is Fritz Lang's famed science fantasy of 1926, in which a city is threatened with destruction and then saved by romantic and filial love. A single image from Lang's film served as the starting point for another rendering of the city, this one on paper: a 1949 *manga* or Japanese graphic novel by Osamu Tezuka. That manga depicts a shining future city, nearly torn apart in its closing pages. These two works were the main sources for a work of *anime* (Japanese animated film) from 2001: a film which ends, like many others of its genre, with the apocalyptic annihilation of a city. This broken trilogy of stories spans the last century. The following pages document their trajectory and speculate on the relationship between their fragile and fraught images of the city and contemporary social and political conditions. Those conditions include, most significantly, the application of military and police violence to the inhabitants of the city and through urban space. As Giorgio Agamben noted, the key effect of such applications of violence is to render their victims as less than human. These narratives not only articulate those conditions, they can be seen as in some sense complicit in them: tales in which the dialectical image becomes, in effect, a killing field.

Lang: city as camp

Lang's film emerged in Germany less than a decade after the end of WWI, at a time when the country was crippled by punitive war reparations. Its currency had undergone massive devaluation and its economy had been fractured, leaving millions unemployed. Reflecting these conditions, *Metropolis* tells the story of social conflict between impoverished workers and a cold-hearted ruler, in a city stratified by social class. Deep below ground, the workers suffer in the service of the machinery that powers the playgrounds of the wealthy above. While the novel which accompanied the film (*Metropolis* [1926] by Thea von Harbou, Lang's scriptwriter) takes the reader briefly outside the city, the film never does. The audience sees no limit to this immense conurbation and its collage of architectures, old and new.

Scholar of film and architecture Dietrich Neumann has demonstrated that the key architectural figures in Lang's film drew on an ongoing urban and architectural discourse, a discourse bound up with Germany's fragile condition between the wars. One manifestation of this is the immense structure at the center of Lang's filmic city, The New Tower of Babel. The form of the New Tower was derived from Leipzig's 1913 Völkerschlachtdenkmal, the Monument to the Battle of the Nations commemorating the defeat of Napoleon's invading army in 1813. This monument thus had a special place in the collective imagination relating to military might and national autonomy. The film's second key structure is a gothic cathedral: a genre of architecture identified since at least Goethe as an expression of a distinctly German spirit. In the 1920s, the cathedral had a particular significance in German architecture and planning circles. It was seen as a model for a truly German version of the American skyscraper, and therefore a reinforcement of German national identity in response to the economic and social consequences of the Versailles treaty. The cathedral/tower articulated "a desperate nationalism
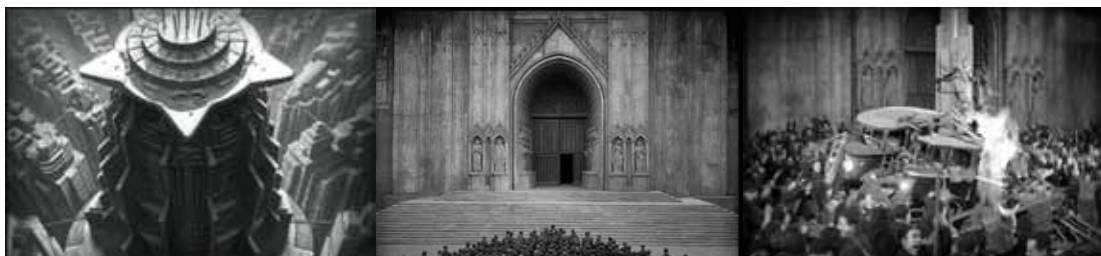
top, l to r: From Lang's film, the New Tower of Babel; the Cathedral; the False Maria burned at the stake. bottom, l to r: Völkerschlachtdenkmal, Leipzig (1913); Kaiser Wilhelm Gedächtniskirche, Berlin (1895); Auschwitz.

and the idea that a monumental symbolic gesture could demonstrate the emergence of an unvanquished German will…" (Neumann 1996, 36). Thousands of buildings based on this principle were designed as projects in the 1920s, though few were built.

Thus the architectural figures of the tower and the cathedral engaged with a contemporary and specifically German discourse on urban form. In the film *Metropolis*, these tall, upright, and bright emblems of community and control are opposed by another genre of space. The filmic city is undermined by a twisting labyrinth of dark tunnels, opening into womb-like pockets of space. This labyrinth entwines – even infects – the city above; emerging for example in a nightclub

by the name of The Yoshiwara (after an entertainment district of that name in Tokyo, destroyed by fire after an earthquake a few years previously). As they navigate these different kinds of space, human bodies oscillate between conditions of control – robot-like slaves attending to the city's machinery – and conditions of instability – undergoing magical transformations of various sorts, for example from machine to human form and back again. The city's dark spaces spatialize an occult and frequently foreign (especially Eastern) presence in the city; in fact, the novel *Metropolis* is blatantly racist in its depiction of foreigners.

These distinct genres of space are, however, united by a shared geometry – the pentagram and pentagon. The

pentagon is the basis for both New Tower of Babel (it has five sides) and the cathedral (it has a five-sided façade and door). The pentagram is inscribed on the doors of one of the key buildings, the house and laboratory of the mad scientist Rotwang. The body of the protagonist Maria, the workers' pure and mother-like leader, is contorted into the form of a pentagram as she is pursued through the tunnels by Rotwang. The film's architecture thus has a distinct effect on human bodies, mediated through an occult star. That effect, along with the spatial schema of the film, resonates disturbingly with political undercurrents emerging as Germany moved toward the end of the 1920s.

Indeed Siegfried Kracauer has argued that much German cinema from this era can be understood as presaging the rise of the Nazi party (Kracauer 2004). Goebbels and Hitler appear to have been enamored of Lang's work, particularly of *Metropolis*. According to Lang, they were eventually to offer him the directorship of the Nazi film program; an offer he refused. In a text from 1928, Joseph Goebbels' own imagination resonates with Lang's. His text uses a specific church in Berlin, the Kaiser Wilhem Gedächtniskirche, to represent the resistance of a pure German nation to the foreign pollution infecting the streets of Berlin. The text ends with a promise: Goebbels heralds an uprising which 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!" (Goebbels 1928/1994).

The uprising promised by Goebbels echoed a cinematic rebellion: one which occurs at the climax of Lang's film. The city's downtrodden workers have been driven to rebellion by their suffering at the hands of the city's coldhearted ruler, Joh Frederson. At Joh's behest, Rotwang has captured Maria, the maternal leader of the workers, and transformed a robot in her image. Becoming the False Maria, the robot is now indistinguishable from other members of the community. It usurps Maria's place and infiltrates the workers' rebellion, inciting the citizens to riot. The workers' sabotage threatens the city itself, even their own children – and realizing that, they turn on both false and true Marias. In the final moments of the film the robot is caught and tied to a stake on the parvis of the cathedral. There she/it is set on fire; and as its false skin burns away, the robot's inhuman form is revealed. Rotwang is thrown from the cathedral by Maria's beloved, becoming a scapegoat. The citizens never realize that it was their ruler Joh who ordered the scientist to create the False Maria. The city is saved, and before the cathedral doors Joh, his son, and Maria are finally reconciled with their community.

If the spatial schema of *Metropolis* intertwined and opposed emblems of community, control, infection, and corruption, this narrative reinforces that formulation and resolves it through the immolation of the false human, an occult figure disguised as a member of the community. The narrative and its filmic spaces articulate the tormented condition of Germany between the wars, subject to foreign powers, a condition in which subjects perceived as foreign were themselves becoming vulnerable. It was that condition that was to generate, in life as in art, the terrible sacrifice yet to come: the expunging of the alien from the German body politic.

As Neumann pointed out, an imagined restructuring of the German cityscape was one of the means by which it was hoped that Germany could be shored up

against foreign influence. This exercise of the imagination was to be pushed far beyond raising symbols of community and nation at the heart of each city, to a fascist restructuring of global space. That included, for example, Albert Speer's rethinking of Berlin as Welthauptstadt (World Capital) Germania, a monumental city of grand urban vistas and immense buildings. But this spectacle had an obverse: the hidden pockets of space conceived as sites for the elimination of the alien inhuman from Europe. The tragedy is that while Germania was not built, these spaces were.

Within the death camps, human beings were reduced to the condition Giorgio Agamben refers to as *bare life*, life stripped of any political status. For Agamben this stripping away occurs through the creation of a *state of exception* or *state of emergency*, a suspension of the Law in which law and raw nature become indistinguishable. This is the defining capacity of police power, and its purest application in the era following this film was in the camps. The state of emergency is topologically framed; it is enabled in part by the setting of specific spatial boundaries. Urban spaces like ghettos and extra-urban spaces like the death camps were instances of this topology. The rigid boundaries of the camp framed a space in which the most important line – between the human and inhuman – was obliterated. This is perhaps what is suggested above all else by the twisted, yet controlled, spaces of Lang's *Metropolis*, where citizens cross back and forth across the line between humanity and inhumanity, fleshy and machine-like space, black and white. These cinematic spaces imply those other, horrific superimpositions of tower and labyrinth in which a relentless panoptic clarity was to be twinned with an unutterable darkness, and humanity was stripped away by truly mad scientists.

The spatiality of the state of exception is what connects it to the dialectical image. An image of any kind can be understood as a space: a topology which frames, delineates, creates and potentially erases structure. In the case of the dialectical image, that space allows the suspension of history—and in the case of this specific dialectical imaginary, of the Law. If the state of exception is spatialized, this implies a particular significance and role for images – in particular images of the city. This is the reason that images can form a part of the machinery of oppression: from the images of the star inscribed on the Jewish body; to the images of space upon which the boundaries of enclaves were drawn; to the plans of the camps in which a rational geometry delineated spaces for labor and death; to the images and models produced by Speer for Germania; to the swastika's own superimposition of cross and labyrinth. These images of course include films like *Metropolis*, which were perhaps, as Kracauer felt, not merely harbingers of Nazism but in some sense culpable for it. While the dialectical image might have been understood by Benjamin as a suspension and encapsulation of a historical moment, rather than an active part of the machinery of history, the image can shift from the mode of suspension to an active one. Images provoke. They frame our thinking, they help to structure our imaginations; they can move us to action, for good or evil. The very notion of *montage*, one rendition of visual dialectics, suggests a movement forward in time provoked by images seen in sequence: an engagement in the flow of history.

The image of the city in Lang's *Metropolis* articulates a form of fascist space associated with the coming era: city as camp. The cinematic trope of trap-like city was to re-emerge across the world over several decades in various guises: in the cities of Film Noir

for example (Dimendberg). For Europe in the years ahead, there was to be no escape. Over the coming decades the entire globe was to be caught in an evolving form of this trap, not merely as the planet became a battlefield, but because – as Agamben also argues – the topology of the camp came to encompass, in our own time, the entire globe. But this was to happen in stages. We glimpse the next of these in the subsequent rendering of *Metropolis*: a Japanese comic strip which followed close on the heels of the global catastrophe Lang's film had anticipated.

Tezuka: Open City

Works of anime and manga were to become important articulations of social and political tensions in the post-war era. One of the earliest examples of this was Osamu Tezuka's 1949 graphic novel *Metropolis*. This book was based on a single still from Lang's film; its author Tezuka claimed no other knowledge of the original (Tezuka 1949/1979, postscript). While the details of Lang's film were unknown to Tezuka, like Lang's story, the comic book concerned a robot and its relationship to a community. In the manga, this community took the form of a shining future city, based largely on the images of American cities Tezuka saw in comic books such as Superman. Like Lang's False Maria, Tezuka's robot Michi was created through the combined effort of two father-figures – though in the manga that collusion was accidental. One of the fathers was Dr. Lawton: if not exactly a mad scientist, then at the very least a silly one. The other father was a master-criminal, Duke Red, scheming to control the world from an underground lair. He fires a super-weapon at the sun, polluting it with radiation. This

top: Original cover, "Metropolis" (Tezuka 1949/1973). bottom; Tokyo after incendiary bombing.

creates sunspots on the sun's surface, which have the effect of heating up the Earth. Red plans to use this effect to bend world leaders to his will. One accidental effect of these sunspots is to provide the missing spark that brings Michi's artificial cells to life. She leads a rebellion of Duke Red's own robot minions, first against him but then against all the human inhabitants of Metropolis. The situation is only resolved when the pollution of the sun stops, and Michi, its creation, dies.

As with Lang's story, it is easy to understand this narrative as an expression of tensions specific to its historical and cultural context. Indeed, the entire output of manga and anime in the second half of the 20th century has been interpreted in terms of Japan's struggle to come to terms with its postwar condition and international position (Murakami, 2005). The manga *Metropolis* fits well with this thesis. There are repeated references to an international presence in the city (itself of ambiguous location): an international conference of scientists for example, where the sunspots are first identified. Duke Red is pursued by a team of detectives from different nations, including Japan. Besides being tall with long legs and a big nose (features often ascribed stereotypically in Japan to non-Japanese), Duke Red is defined as an internationally wanted criminal. While the name "Red" might suggest a communist threat, keenly felt in Japan at the time, "Duke" is a good old Western name; and Duke Red's dress suggests something between Capitalist Robber-Baron and Chicago Gangster. Other foreign emblems are similarly ambiguous: for example, an incarnation of Mickey Mouse as a mutant, carnivorous, rat (his mutation also provoked by solar pollution). This Mickey is a threatening annoyance who nevertheless serves to liberate the city: his skin serves as a disguise

essential to rebellion against Duke Red. The foreign presence as represented in this manga seems be at once threatening and liberating, legitimate and illicit.

These fictional preoccupations resonated with Japan's reality immediately after the war. There was in Japan at the time an overwhelming international presence in the form of the occupying American army. International political restructuring was on everyone's mind with the creation of the United Nations and the beginning of the Cold War. Locally, the country's constitution was being redrawn under a strong American influence. Japanese nationals would likely have had contradictory feelings about these events. On the one hand, the foreign presence had brought an end to years of wartime deprivation, and had brought about the downfall of a government which most now felt had led the country badly. Japan's own presence as a foreign power in its neighboring countries over the last decades had been ruinous for the region, and Japanese civilians had only recently begun to realize this. On the other hand, the Americans had laid waste to Japan with some of the most horrific technologies then available: not just atomic but also incendiary bombing. This is the background for this conflicted tale of battling races and negotiation between local and international entities where the stakes are wisdom and folly, criminality and justice, violence and peace.

How can we characterize the imaginary city in which these tensions played out? Unlike Lang's city, this *Metropolis* has no central tower or emblem of community. Tezuka draws a lot of buildings, and his manga includes both towers and labyrinthine spaces. 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 – it is just another tall building. Likewise, while some of the events of the story occur in subterranean tunnels, unlike Lang's film, there is no rigorous structuring of the city around verticality. Tezuka's city is horizontal, and his underground spaces 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 ocean liner, or on a distant uncharted island. Consistent with this, if Tezuka's city is radically less structured than Lang's it has another major difference: in its relationship to the rest of the world. In contrast to Lang's all-encompassing city, Tezuka's *Metropolis* opens to lands beyond the ocean and even to the heavens.

The comic-book *Metropolis* might thus be described as dispersed, lumpy, unfocused, horizontal, and open. These were also the qualities of the urban environment Tezuka and his readers would have experienced on a daily basis. Largely leveled in the war, Japanese cities were a patchwork of survival and ruin, demolition and reconstruction. Besides Hiroshima and Nagasaki, almost every urban center had sustained major damage through American incendiary bombing. At least one quarter of the buildings in Tokyo had been leveled; in many wards all the buildings were gone. The physical ruin of these cities over the coming years, half annihilated, half new, paralleled Japan's political condition. Japanese cities had already often been described as unstructured – with a weak distinction between figure and ground for example – in contrast to European cities. Even as these cities were rebuilt in the service of postwar economic development, their form became less clearly defined. Japan's amorphous and borderless conglomerations sprawled across the landscape, congealing here and there in lumps of commerce, industry, residence, transport, and legislatures of various kinds.

This amorphous, lost condition can best be understood if we consider the event which sets the entire plot into motion: the pollution of the sun. In Japan at the time, the sun had a particular significance. Until only four years prior to the publication of Tezuka's *Metropolis*, official doctrine had held the Emperor of Japan to be the descendant of Amaterasu, the sun goddess[1]. The Emperor's status involved a complex commingling of indigenous and modern power; for example Imperial authority had actively overseen the modern adoption of many Western institutions. While the presentation of the Emperor as emblematic of a pure and indigenous culture was thus inaccurate, his perceived divinity had been an important factor in the mobilization of the Japanese population in support of the national war machine. It was for this reason that Japan's unconditional surrender at the end of WWII included the Emperor's abnegation of his own divinity. Articulating these tensions, in Tezuka's *Metropolis* the sun is the object of attack, pollution, scientific scrutiny, political and criminal manipulation, and ultimately restoration through the sacrifice of the artificial being Michi. In accord with the real-world disruption of Japanese sovereignty, in Tezuka's Metropolis there is, unlike Lang's city, no leader. There is only a master-criminal, an illegitimate pretender to authority, and furthermore one associated with the color of the sun: Red.

The undermining of sovereignty implied in Tezuka's images applied not only to the Emperor, but more generally to the Japanese people themselves. During the war they had been members of one national family united under the father-figure of the Emperor. After defeat they found themselves citizens of a state whose constitution was being re-written largely by foreigners, with no clear sense of what their new position would

be upon the departure of the occupiers. In Agamben's terms, they went from one decades-long wartime state of emergency to another condition in which the application of foreign military power suspended their own Law without a satisfactory re-constitution. This is the condition spoken by the amorphous Japanese city, writ small in the imaginary city of the comic book.

But if Lang's film could be understood as presaging the holocaust, Tezuka's tale presented a contrasting dialectical imaginary, one which seems to set the groundwork for some kind of shared inhabitation of the city. The survival of Tezuka's city seemed to imply a negotiated coexistence of opposites in a futuristic society engaged positively with a progressive and peaceful, if divided, world: an optimistic look forward at what was left of the 20th century. Despite its rapid post-war development under this Pax Americana, key issues for Japan – particularly its political role in the world and its own use of military power – remain unresolved to this day. This historical and political condition produced another, distinct, urban imaginary: one in which the destruction of cities, often at the hands of apocalyptic weapons, was to become a recurring motif in popular culture. These are the issues engaged by the next rendition of the *Metropolis* story.

Rintarô: a city overthrown

In 2001, an animated version of *Metropolis* was released, the creation of director Rintarô and screenwriter Katsuhiro Ôtomo[2]. The animated film was publicized as "Osamu Tezuka's *Metropolis*", and the filmmakers, while expressing admiration for Lang, claim not to have based the new film on his (Ôtomo 2001). This claim is questionable. In numerous ways their city resembles Lang's rather than Tezuka's: vertical rather than horizontal, clearly structured at the ground level rather than amorphous, and organized around iconic works of architecture. Lang had modeled his Metropolis on a Manhattan he first saw as, in his own words, an enemy alien. Rintarô's city refers to a Manhattan which is similarly loaded: New York in 1941, the year of Rintarô's own birth, and of course the outbreak of war between Japan and the United States. So there was an explicit connection

l to r: the Ziggurat; the underground city
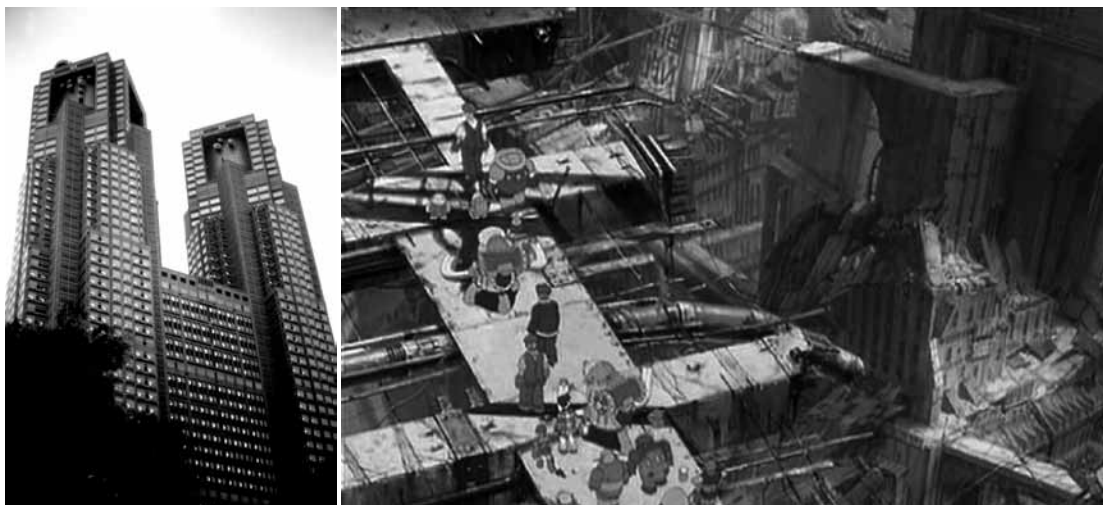
l to r: Tokyo Metropolitan Government Headquarters, Tower 1; the post-apocalyptic city

with the memory of the war and its politics, mediated through the work of Osamu Tezuka. We will see that this heritage forms the backdrop for an articulation of tensions specific to our own time, and rendered in the space of the contemporary city.

Like Lang's city, the anime Metropolis is clearly divided into high city and low city. Dominating the upper city is a central tower known as the Ziggurat; as we will remember the Biblical Tower of Babel referenced by Lang was a kind of Ziggurat. Yet this Babel has, remarkably, another valency tying it to Lang's film. Within the language of the animated city's art-deco design scheme, this building is a cathedral: a cross in plan, neo-gothic, topped by gargoyles, and flanked by flying buttresses. It thus fuses *both* of Lang's key buildings, which were only implicitly doubled in his film. This Tower/Cathedral complex, piercing as it does down through several urban

layers, might be seen as a *point de capiton*: a structure ostensibly shared by the two films, but underlining the shifts which have occurred over the intervening years as the latent fascism of Lang's city was replaced by forms of oppression proper to our own time.

As it makes its way toward that new formulation, the film makes explicit reference to the politics of the past. One would expect that a gothic cathedral, in whatever distorted form, could not stand in for the Japanese people. Yet this cathedral does: it is linked in the film's opening moments with Japanese nationalism, and to fascism more generally. The film begins with newsreel footage of Duke Red atop the Ziggurat (many of Tezuka's characters appear in Rintaro's film), announcing the approach or ascent of his nation to the heavens. This is pronounced in a language reminiscent of Japanese wartime (and contemporary) invocations of national pride, emphasizing a shared identity: an

emphatic "We" and "Our" ("*ware ware wa, wa ga*"), and a term for "nation" ("*kokka*") derived from the Chinese characters for country and household.[3] Note that the illegitimate pretender to power from Tezuka's story has here taken on the role of national leader – he does not merely aspire to power, he claims it as a legitimate role. As though to confirm such preoccupations, the animated film's opening sequence continues from the top of the Ziggurat, dropping down into the city before pulling back along a long boulevard to reveal an array of searchlights pointing upwards – a clear reference to Albert Speer's spectacles for the Nazi state.

Yet this city evokes more than fascism. With its central core dominated by tall buildings, a wide divided boulevard, triumphal arch (now orientalized and emblazoned with half of a rising sun), a raised elliptical platform in the center, and surrounding blocks of medium-rise modernist housing – we can also clearly identify Le Corbusier's City for Three Million Inhabitants folded into the animated Metropolis. The Ziggurat forms a cross at the center of Le Corbusier's grid; the entire city is set out from it.

The film thus presents a city built out of both fascist and modern(ist) utopias. It offers us this fitting metaphor for modern Japan itself; and then, disturbingly, it detonates it. The cross at the city's center turns out to be a cross-hair: here Rintarô places Tezuka's sun-polluting super weapon, in a very different gesture from Tezuka. The manga artist had placed the weapon at a great distance from his city, paralleling the displaced and distanced sun. The re-centering of the sun in the animated film suggests a re-alignment of the city with Imperial authority. It also underlines the brittleness of this realignment, the impossibility of restoring in any straightforward

way the institutions and emblems of national sovereignty: as the cross-hair itself turns into a target.

As though to underline this city's fragility, the animated *Metropolis* throws not one but two revolutions at it. The first, on the part of human revolutionaries, resembles Lang's worker rebellion. It erupts from below, in protest against oppressive masters; it proves unsuccessful. Despite its earnestness and good intentions, it is an entirely conservative revolution, with the goal of returning the city to a time before robots. Indeed the failure of this rebellion – a social revolution in disavowal of the city's hybridity – might be understood as a warning against a *national* socialism. The second rebellion occurs at the climax of the film and superimposes in one figure symbols of both otherness – the robot – and collective identity. That rebellion is sparked by the robot Tima, Rintaro's rendition of Tezuka's Michi. Learning, to her dismay, that she is not human but was in fact designed to be the final crucial part of the superweapon, Tima mounts up on the throne of power atop the Ziggurat. At this moment the robot rebellion, echoing Tezuka's robot revolution, spontaneously begins. Tima's throne rises up on an immense red globe, an image evoking the red disk of the sun on the Japanese flag, the *hi no maru*. For a moment she is become something like a sun goddess, an Emperor of sorts pinned to the center of the city, and also a messianic figure. But that role is not tenable. As she turns the superweapon from its intended target – the sun – and brings it to bear on the city itself, Tima is torn from her throne and in the ensuing battle (with a male protagonist, atop the building: a trope from both Lang and Tezuka) plummets to her death. Around her the Ziggurat collapses and finally the city is destroyed, reduced to piles of rubble.

If Towers and all they represent are felled by this apocalypse, something else is generated out of it. This is a space opened up by the destruction, a space which had been hidden beneath the city. As was Lang's city, the animated Metropolis is undermined by a labyrinth. Unlike Lang's dark labyrinth, this animated sub-terrain is a bright phantasmagoria, a collage of architectures from around the world and from a vast range of historical periods. It is a space which has everything to do with otherness and hybridity. The human underclass lives here in colorful shanties, light as well as dark. Their space is full of activity, much of it illicit; we are told that police writ does not run in the lower depths. It is a ludic space, in contrast to Lang's underground where there was no room for play. While in Lang's film the dwellers of the lower strata were slaves to machines, here they are left to their own devices, making a living in a laissez-faire free-for-all. Nevertheless, the Ziggurat makes itself felt here through a rigorous policing of movement between vertical zones, most notably for the robot inhabitants of the lowest levels. It is this regulating structure which is overthrown at the climax of the film, as the Ziggurat collapses and the polychromatic labyrinth spills out, transforming the urban landscape into a patchwork quilt of colorful ruins.

In these spatial and narrative tropes we can identify a hybridization of Lang's and Tezuka's urbanisms which is much more than formal. It implies not just the splicing of Lang's and Tezuka's spaces, but also all they represented: the city as camp and the open city. The animated film can be seen as both a reiteration and also a transformation of its predecessor's preoccupations with national and collective identity, otherness, conditions of control, and sovereignty. It represents a restructuring of these concerns around conditions specific to our own time. To demonstrate this, we turn to the anime city's shadow – the real city of Japan today.

In fact, Rintarô's film seems to make specific reference to contemporary spatial structures at both urban and global scales. One building in Tokyo in particular assimilates closely to Rintarô's Ziggurat – that is, it resembles it, but more importantly it shares its social and political stakes. It is one of the most notorious buildings in Japan: Tokyo Metropolitan Government Headquarters (completed 1991), or Tokyo City Hall, designed by Kenzô Tange. 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 (Coaldrake 1996, 258-281). So, in a building which itself can be considered a parody or pastiche — it would be classified by many as a piece of post-modern architecture — we find a literal fusion of control Tower and Cathedral. The completion of this building infamously coincided with the bursting of Japan's "bubble economy" at the end of the 1980s, an event provoked by spiraling real-estate prices based on questionable bank loans. The building has been vilified as a symbol of ostentation and of the excesses that led to Japan's current austerity, and for this reason has frequently been the target of attacks in Japanese film and comics.

Today, the building is occupied by the administration of governor Shintaro Ishihara, who has been

criticized for his reactionary nationalism and for statements many have considered racist, sexist, and historically revisionist[4]. Such pronouncements include the following, made on April 9, 2000:

> "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." (Buraku Liberation News 2000)

Ishihara is calling here for the Japanese army to be prepared to put down hordes of rioting foreign residents of Japan in the event of a major earthquake. *Sangokujin*, "third country nationals," is a derogatory term which dates to the post-war era (Tezuka's city), and originally referred to ethnic Taiwanese, Korean, and Chinese—that is, citizens of neither Japan nor the United States, many of them stranded in Japan after the war. Today, it can refer to the foreign nationals temporarily in Japan on work or study permits, as well as to foreign residents whose families have been in Japan since colonial times – and who still cannot obtain permanent residence, let alone citizenship. The reference to foreigners rioting in the case of an earthquake has a particular resonance in Japan. In 1923 the great Kantô earthquake caused great damage in Tokyo and its surrounding areas; this is the earthquake that destroyed the Yoshiwara referred to in Lang's *Metropolis*. At that time, in fact, foreign residents of Japan (Koreans) became the victims of rioting, as scapegoats for the devastation caused by the earthquake.

The foreigners Ishihara was speaking about frequently occupy a specific economic niche in Japan: essential laborers with limited if any civil rights and whose very existence can provoke 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 Rintarô's.

One crux of these tensions related to identity is contemporary Japan's attempt to develop a mature political and military relationship with the rest of the world. For many Japanese commentators, notably Takashi Murakami, an artist and curator whose work makes use of Japanese popular arts like anime, defeat and postwar development left Japan in a state of permanent infancy, impotent, reduced to cartoon-characterhood (Murakami 2005). According to this view, Japan is a country which lost its center and leadership after the Pacific War; as we have seen, this is exactly what was implied in Tezuka's manga. The country's new constitution, written largely by its occupiers, included the lauded and disparaged Article 6 renouncing war as a sovereign right and the use of military force as a means of resolving international disputes. Japan, for Murakami and many others, was castrated by this; it has never been able to return to its rightful place as a peer of other nations. For many, the cartoon-like, childish, or adolescent qualities of manga and anime are products and evidence of this condition. The fractured cities prevalent in such narratives are likewise understood as signs of an unhealed and underdeveloped society. This context has produced a reactionary nationalism

of the kind given voice by figures like Ishihara.

If this is the cultural context specific to the animated *Metropolis*, the film speaks also of a more global condition. That is the unstable situation of all nation states in our time, as their powers are superseded by the kinds of networks and relationships engaged by what we refer to as the "global cities" (Sassen 1991). Tokyo's boundaries, for example, really lie outside of Japan, in the many countries from which it draws its resources and its workers. Like other global cities, Tokyo is a crucial node in the supranational flows of capital, information, and technology which link sub-national regions, provoking a crisis in what it means to be situated locally, to be a nation. These flows are predicated on a culture of consumption which finds some of its purest expressions in spaces in Japan not far from Tokyo City Hall, the entertainment district around Shinjuku station. Such spaces might well be compared to the underground labyrinth of the animated *Metropolis:* playful, phantasmagoric collages fuelled by a commerce of bare life of varying degrees of illegitimacy.

This new economy also depends on the maintenance of geopolitical zones which produce materials (and sometimes bodies) for consumption in our cities. Many of the special economic regions of China or other parts of Asia, for example, play this role. Movement between these zones is strictly controlled by quasi-military police powers; but within the zones, there is no application of universal law. These regions are sometimes reproduced at the sub-urban scale. Tokyo and Osaka have their share of neighborhoods with high concentrations of the non- or quasi-Japanese to whom Ishihara referred—Chinese or Brazilian guest-workers for example. While

movement into and out of these urban areas is not regulated by law, the realities of real-estate practice resulting from the legal and social status of foreigners do tend to lead to a concentration of foreign residents in such areas. The ubiquitous presence of *koban,* or small neighborhood police posts, also ensures a high level of paternalistic surveillance. The precarious legal status of foreign nationals—almost all currently on one- to three-year residence permits[5]—means that they are subject to the arbitrary application of police power. When the state decides their presence is no longer useful, they must leave. Such spaces – whether special economic zones or city enclaves – are crucial pieces of infrastructure for the neo-liberal project. The nationalist rhetoric of Governor Ishihara and others disguises the fact that they—and we—depend on citizens of these other zones, those lives reduced to a sub-human condition by the exercise of our power. These are the millions of people, sometimes entire populaces, we employ or enslave daily: foreign guest workers, occupants of refugee camps, captives of all kinds. Their bodies, not unlike robots, stand in for ours in a complex economy of production and sacrifice linking cities and regions across the globe.

In Japan, foreigners are not the only victims of these circumstances. Between the time Tokyo City Hall was built and this film was made, growing numbers of Japanese citizens found themselves adrift in a society whose political rhetoric for most of the post-war era had suggested that every Japanese has a place. They found themselves among the disenfranchised of the world, rendered abject outsiders within the boundaries of their own cities. Among the people disappointed by this turn of events were the many writers and artists of Rintarô's and Ôtomo's generation who had tried to reform Japan in the early post-war period. Despite

their efforts, the country swings increasingly to the Right, and much of their work now seems 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. And it suggests why the generally optimistic discourse on otherness implied by Tezuka's city, where robots and humans were implicitly reconciled, has darkened in an animated city torn apart by the struggle between powerful citizens and the various forms of abject life inhabiting its lower depths.

This most recent version of *Metropolis* articulates a new geopolitics in which fascism's reduction of properly human life to *bare life* takes a form proper to the diffuse and open conditions of place and identity characteristic of our own era. 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 which go together to make up what is often described as "postmodernity." The nationalist or culturalist rhetoric which reacts to this condition further divides the world into camps: zones like those which divide the underground city of the animated metropolis. In this fraught condition, anything is possible: from the complete disintegration of seemingly permanent figures of urban form, to the arbitrary creation of subclasses of humans with no political status, subject to the arbitrary application of police violence. Agamben describes this condition as the global camp. If he is correct, this is the spatialization of the state of exception proper to our own time, a global condition in which the line between Law and a raw state of violence can be obliterated at will. It might also be understood as the condition of apocalypse, in which History and Law

are suspended for an instant—or for eternity. In the global camp, apocalypse might act upon entire cities, leveling them; or it can emerge in the variously coloured zones we set up within them and within a broader geopolitical space, populated by the form of life Walter Benjamin referred to as "the life lived in the village at the foot of the castle" (quoted in Agamben 1998, 53). These are the foreign subjects inhabiting special global regions or urban enclaves, and inhabiting Metropolis' sub-terrain: overlooked by power and unable to do anything about it.

Benjamin, who wrote under the shadow of Hitler's state of emergency, hoped for a messianic or divine violence, as opposed to the bloody mythic one which he saw tearing apart his world (Benjamin 1978, 297). Divine violence promises to deliver us from a world of power structures, and this seems to be one aspect of what is offered us by Tima's rendering as Messiah, and by the leveled city at the end of the animated film. It is unclear today, as it was in Benjamin's time, what might be the end condition of this divine violence. Agamben imagines a "coming community," in which different kinds of people are united not by what they share but rather in the empty content of what they do: gestures without meaning, means without ends, politics out of apolitics (Agamben 1993). Perhaps this is what is left at the end of the animated *Metropolis:* two communities survive in the ruins of the city, the robots and the most impoverished of the humans. Neither community is easily defined: the robots are all patched together from broken pieces, there is no plan behind them anymore. There is even the suggestion of some new life to emerge out of the love between the robot Tima and her human counterpart. This is a world in which all structures have been leveled and from which we can begin to pull together the pieces

that make up some kind of shared bare life. In contrast to Lang's city, which tried to annihilate difference in order to confirm authority and community, Rintarô's city sacrifices authority and identity to reinforce a community of difference. So the Biblical notion of a Tower and City whose existence unites all people – a notion cited in the figure of Babel by both Lang and Rintarô but not by Tezuka – and whose fall implies their scattering into divided communities, is replaced by a community in which different species exist side-by-side, as they had in Tezuka's tale. This is also the urban condition first described by Aristotle when he wrote the words: "similar people cannot bring a city into existence" (quoted in Sennett 1994, 13). If there is some hope to be read in the serial destruction of the *Metropolis*, this might be it.

Consistent with this, if the animated film and others of its kind might be understood as an approximation of a new imaginary articulating the conditions of our time—dark and colorful, ludic and oppressive, a frenetic collage populated by figures imbued with an unsettling mix of childishness, violence, and sex—perhaps we might find in their very contradictions a way beyond our current condition. Such works might be understood as renderings of the complex forms of urban representation which have been called for by writers such as Frederick Jameson (1995), Stephen Cairns (2006), and Edward Soja (1996, 2000): hybrid; full of seams, gaps and patches; thirdspaces beyond this or that race or cultural identity. They suggest a broken or ruptured topology. And they thus might imply a way through borders, an escape from prisons, even a way out of the suspension of history inherent in the dialectical image: its edges dissolved and rendered as mobile as a film. If, as speculated earlier, images play a structural role in the machinery of oppression,

images which undermine their own boundaries would seem to at least reopen the possibility of sabotage that Lang's film shut down. But how city dwellers—and planners—can engage with or use such images is unclear. For some, they might support the forces of dissolution that erase classically modern distinctions between public and private realms and spaces, rendering our civil rights ever more precarious. For others, they might enable the new forms of sociality and communication which free us from the controls of police states and corporate coercion. Or perhaps they suggest some ambiguous hybrid of violence and civility working through new forms of raw and emergent life: a city reborn, and at the same time overthrown.

Notes

[1] An essential part in the goddess' own narrative in Japanese myth was an incident in which ritual pollution led the sun to withdraw from the world.

[2] A director in his own right. He created the seminal work of anime urban destruction Akira (Ôtomo 1988).

[3] The text is "*Ima, ware ware wa, waga kokka wa masa ni tenjô ni itaran to shite iru.*" (Ôtomo 2001). This is rendered in two different subtitling tracks on the DVD as "At this moment our state extends its reach to the stars!" or "presently, we, as a nation, are about to touch the heavens!" (Rintarô 2001, subtitles).

[4] Ishihara is also one of Japan's most prominent authors; his writing, which extends to theatre and film, has also been criticized as reactionary. He recently referred to the March 11, 2011 tsunami as divine retribution.

[5] The Immigration Control Act was amended in 2009 to increase this period to five years, beginning in 2012 (http://www.immi-moj.go.jp/english/newimmiact/ newimmiact_english.html accessed 3 June, 2012).This

set of changes converts the system of "alien registration" (dating from 1951) to one of "resident management." It coincides with government re-evaluation at the vice-ministerial level of policy regarding "co-existence with foreigners (resident in Japan)," which seems to be driven in part by concerns over a statistically higher rate of crime amongst foreign residents than Japanese nationals. (http://www.cas.go.jp/jp/seisaku/kyousei/index.html, in Japanese, accessed 3 June, 2012).

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