**IB Film 1: W16.3**

**Production Design and Meaning**

**Introduction**

Since you are submitting your Space Chase production assignment this week, and have been no doubt working with how production design creates meaning in a film,  we thought that we’d finish our discussion of Metropolis with some thoughts about the role of art design in a film and how it creates meaning for the viewer.

Previously, we discussed German expressionism and the way early filmmakers were able to use design - props, settings, and lighting - to externalise the emotions of their characters so audiences could be taken into the world the character sees.

In the case of The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, the viewer is even taken right inside the head of an insane character, using production design.

The mise-en-scene and composition of objects in the frame can reveal much about story and meaning to the audience.

Hopefully, you saw the influence of design when you watched Metropolis.

Production Design

Now that you have watched *Metropolis*, consider the way the art design of the film creates *meaning* for the viewer.

Creating Meaning - Metropolis

[The Class Divide](https://learn.pamojaeducation.com/courses/463/module/4807/lesson/92175/lesson)

One of the central visual ideas of *Metropolis*is the use of vertical space.

Fritz Lang says one of the inspirations for the film was his first visit to New York and encountering skyscrapers for the first time.

In the film, we encounter a futuristic city with gigantic buildings, the space between them resembling canyons with planes flying between them and cars driving on gigantic suspended highways.

The giant size of the buildings conveys the future to us, but the point is also quickly made that the rich live at the top of the buildings and the poor live in the cavern-like dwellings beneath the city.

In *Metropolis*, the upper class literally live high above the lower classes, a point even made by the intertitles at one point.

[Introduction of Science Fiction](https://learn.pamojaeducation.com/courses/463/module/4807/lesson/92175/lesson)

Rotwang, the Scientist who creates the evil robot version of Maria, lives in a small, medieval-looking building, and the room in which he creates the robot features a pentagram - a star that is often associated with witches.

The science fiction film convention of the mad scientist had not yet come to be, but here the art design links the scientist to the notion of a medieval wizard - similar to the character of Dr. Caligari.

In Rotwang and Dr. Caligari, we can see the convention of the mad scientist being introduced to film.

[Art Design and Symbolism](https://learn.pamojaeducation.com/courses/463/module/4807/lesson/92175/lesson)

Art design functions as symbolism as well.

When the M-machine explodes and the workers are killed, Freder is thrown against the wall and has a vision.

He sees the workers transform into slaves and the machine transform into the god Moloch.

As he watches, workers are lead up the stairs to the machine like slaves and fed to the constantly moving gears that look like horrible teeth.

In this scene, we see things from Freder’s point-of-view, and his vision brings to mind the simarity of the workers to slaves in the Bible.

Later, Maria will preach to the workers about the Tower of Babel, and again this will result in a vision of the workers turning into slaves working on the Tower of Babel until they revolt.

[Religious Overtones](https://learn.pamojaeducation.com/courses/463/module/4807/lesson/92175/lesson)

The religious nature of the imagery in the film does not end with the Moloch or the Tower of Babel scenes.

The catacombs Maria preaches in, with its crucifixes and ancient graves, remind us of the early Christians who had to meet in similar places to avoid persecution.

When Freder suffers a mental breakdown, he has visions of the Seven Deadly Sins and sees Death descend upon the city as he hallucinates.

These religious associations are central to one of the key ideas in the film, that there must be a 'mediator between the head and the hands'.

At several points, Freder is associated with Jesus who serves as a mediator between mankind and God.

These associations, created by the narrative and by the design elements of the film, create powerful images and emotions in the film.

One particularly powerful scene is when Freder takes the place of the worker at the machine that looks like a giant clock.

At one point his arms are spread almost as if he is on a crucifix, and he calls out “How long must this go on !”

[Mise-en-scene and Meaning](https://learn.pamojaeducation.com/courses/463/module/4807/lesson/92175/lesson)

Consider from *Metropolis* the design of objects and where they are placed in the frame.

You may want to view the film again and pay attention to the lighting, camera angle, and movement.

All these elements of mise-en-scene reveal the director's intent, letting us understand the film’s theme and *meaning*.

Production Influence

It might also be interesting to consider this film’s influence on *Star Wars.*

The most obvious connection is, of course, the robot Rotwang creates. She is clearly the female version of C-3PO from *Star Wars*.

But you might also notice that Rotwang has a black-gloved, artificial hand...revealing he is part machine himself. This is not too different from Darth Vader who is part machine, and even Luke himself will sport a black glove over a machine hand in *Return of the Jedi*.

At one level, both films stress the need for us to focus on our humanity and not become slaves to technology. How is this conveyed visually?

For example, what are the differences in the performance between the real Maria and the robot Maria in the film?

As you continue to look at films, you will notice again and again how visual design conveys not just information about setting but also emotion and *meaning* to the audience.

The more you are aware of this, the more easily you will be able to use production design and film language to speak to the audiences of your own films.

# **Space Chase**

Provide the URL to your Space Chase production for your classmates to view.

Review at least two of your classmates submissions, and use the same grading rubric provided in the Film Space Chase Sequence lesson to provide constructive feedback on your reviews.