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## FRESH HARD TIMES



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O4fia4nzc50>

*Fresh Hard Times* marks a departure for myself and Lonnie Glass from our normal Guthrie folk-acoustic vibe. All credit goes to Lonnie. Out of the blue he heard something more 'industrial' emanating from the lyrics I'd given him. From there it seemed an easy hop, skip and jump to a video availing itself of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* and his man-machine aesthetic. Among other things, Lang's vision is a canary in the mineshaft warning us of the impending trans-human. The human/robot dichotomy of Maria and the duteous cog-in-gear workers (antecedents of today's customer service automatons?) presage such artists as Devo, Klaus Nomi, Gary Newman, the Chemical Brothers and even Philip Glass. Luddism, one can assume, is a thoroughly lost cause. We have birthed the machine. It lives through us and, quite conceivably one day, will flourish in our absence.



As for the current plight of the flesh-and-blood working man, the macroeconomic environment may be sowing further Langian seeds. Running across *Time* magazine's October 13 2008 cover the other day, it occurred to me they'd been playing our song, or at least humming a similarly forlorn tune. In the intervening eighty years since *Metropolis*' debut (roughly coincident with the onset of the *first* Great Depression), the Hands and Brain are still far from a heartfelt reconciliation. If recent trends in wealth distribution are any indication, the gulf is only widening. Absent period garb, the dispirited workers seem interchangeable. Think about it. *Metropolis*, made in 1927, was a futurist vision of 2026 while *Time*'s cover picture, circa 1929, is an attempt to draw parallels with today, 2008. Human progress is a relic of the Age of Reason. Nothing has changed. The past, like the future, is now.

Have we given good old-fashioned deprivation short shrift? Hard times are often the crucible for catharsis. Suffering, we've been told, is good for the soul --though who's ever in a great hurry to try it out? The salutary WWII generation made its bones during the depths of the Great Depression. Suddenly prosperity seems bankrupt --in more ways than

one. Forgive me, but I see soup kitchens in America's future even as I relish the prospect of being proven dead wrong. Let's see if the future for once can overthrow the past.