

Virtual Sept. 8, 2020 (41:2)

Fritz Lang: **M/M—EINE STADT SUCHT EINEN MÖRDER** (1931, 117m)

*Spelling and Style—use of italics, quotation marks or nothing at all for titles, e.g.—follows the form of the sources.
Cast and crew name hyperlinks connect to the individuals' Wikipedia entries*



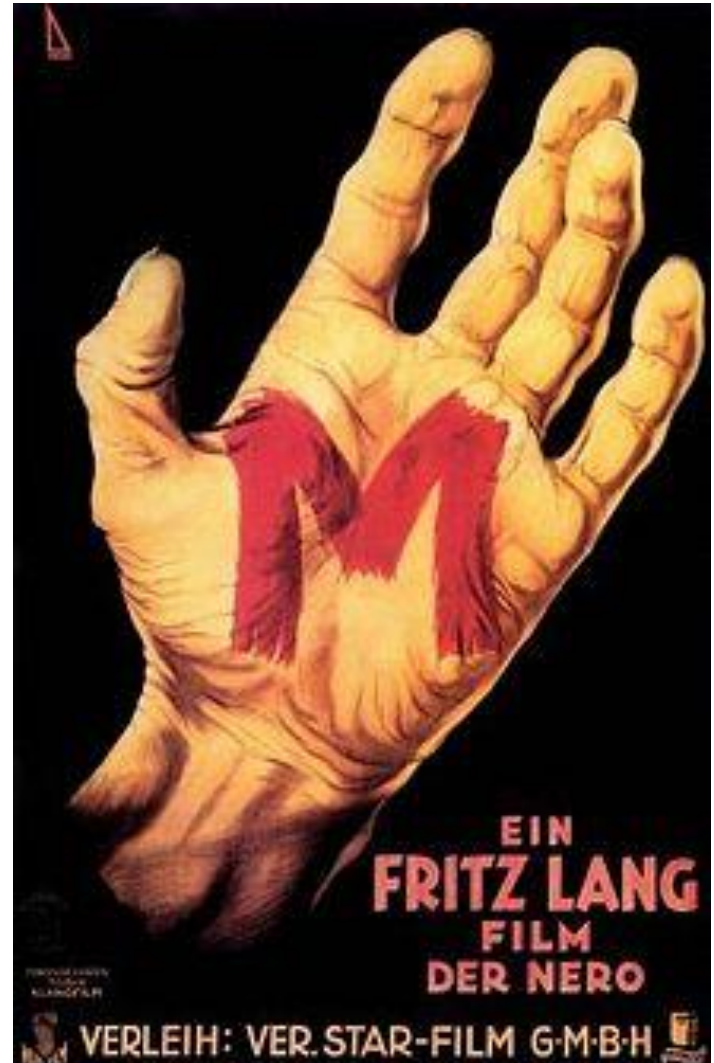
[Bruce Jackson & Diane Christian video introduction to this week's film](#)

Zoom link for Tuesday, September 8, post-screening discussion:
<https://buffalo.zoom.us/j/99325339270?pwd=bzIxSTlQdW8reU8vS295T0RwVnRRQT09>

Meeting ID: 993 2533 9270
Passcode: 423955

Directed by Fritz Lang
Script by Thea von Harbou and Fritz Lang
Based on an article by Egon Jacobson
Produced by Seymour Nebenzal
Cinematography by Fritz Arno Wagner
Edited by Paul Falkenberg
Art Direction by Emil Hasler, Karl Vollbrecht
Makeup by Wilhelm Weber

Peter Lorre...Hans Beckert
Ellen Widmann...Frau Beckmann
Inge Landgut...Elsie Beckmann
Otto Wernicke...Inspector Karl Lohmann
Theodor Loos...Inspector Groeber
Gustaf Gründgens...Schränker
Friedrich Gnaß...Franz, the burglar
Fritz Odemar.. The cheater
Paul Kemp...Pickpocket with six watches
Theo Linggen...Bauernfänger
Rudolf Blümner...Beckert's defender
Georg John...Blind panhandler
Franz Stein...Minister
Ernst Stahl-Nachbaur...Police chief
Gerhard Bienert...Criminal secretary
Karl Platen...Damowitz, night watchman
Rosa Valetti...Elisabeth Winkler, Beckert's landlady



Hertha von Walther...Prostitute

Fritz Lang (b. Friedrich Christian Anton Lang, December 5, 1890, Vienna, Austria-Hungary [now Austria] – August 2, 1976, Beverly Hills, Los Angeles, California) has 46 directing credits: 1960 *Journey to the Lost City*, 1960 *The 1,000 Eyes of Dr. Mabuse*, 1959 *The Tomb of Love*, 1959 *Der Tiger von Eschnapur*, 1956 *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*, 1956 *While the City Sleeps*, 1955 *Moonfleet*, 1954 *Human Desire*, 1953 *The Big Heat*, 1953 *The Blue Gardenia*, 1952 *Clash by Night*, 1952 *Rancho Notorious*, 1950 *American Guerrilla in the Philippines*, 1950 *House by the River*, 1947 *Secret Beyond the Door...*, 1946 *Cloak and Dagger*, 1945 *Scarlet Street*, 1944 *The Woman in the Window*, 1944 *Ministry of Fear*, 1943 *Hangmen Also Die!*, 1942 *Moontide* (uncredited), 1941 *Confirm or Deny* (uncredited), 1941 *Man Hunt*, 1941 *Western Union*, 1940 *The Return of Frank James*, 1938 *You and Me*, 1937 *You Only Live Once*, 1936 *Fury*, 1934 *Liliom*, 1933 *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*, 1933 *The Last Will of Dr. Mabuse*, 1931 *M*, 1929 *By Rocket to the Moon*, 1928 *Spies*, 1927 *Metropolis*, 1924 *Kriemhild's Revenge*, 1924 *Siegfried*,

1922 *Dr. Mabuse: The Gambler*, 1921 *Destiny*, 1921 *Vier um die Frau*, 1920 *Das wandernde Bild*, 1920 *Die Spinnen*, 2. Teil - *Das Brillantenschiff*, 1919 *Harakiri*, 1919 *Die Spinnen*, 1. Teil - *Der Goldene See*, 1919 *Der Herr der Liebe*, and 1919 *Halbblut*.

Thea von Harbou (script) (b. Thea Gabriele von Harbou, December 27, 1888, Tauperlitz, Germany – July 1, 1954, West Berlin, Germany) has 77 writing credits, among them 1959 *The Tomb of Love* (novel), 1959 *Der Tiger von Eschnapur* (novel "Das Indische Grabmal"), 1953 *Dein Herz ist meine Heimat*, 1951 *M* (scenario - uncredited), 1951 *Affairs of Dr. Holl*, 1950 *Erzieherin gesucht*, 1950 *Es kommt ein Tag*, 1948 *Fahrt ins Glück*, 1948 *Via Mala*, 1945 *Kolberg*, 1945 *Life Goes On* (novel), 1944 *Eine Frau für drei Tage*, 1943 *Die Gattin*, 1943 *Gefährtin meines Sommers*, 1943 *The Genius and the Nightingale* (screenplay / story), 1942 *Mit den Augen einer Frau*, 1941 *Annelie*, 1941 *Clarissa*, 1941 *Am Abend auf der Heide*, 1940 *Wie konntest Du, Veronika!*, 1940 *Lauter Liebe*, 1939 *Hurrah! I'm a Papa*, 1939 *Menschen vom Variété*, 1939 *Stars of Variety*, 1938 *Die Frau am Scheidewege*, 1938 *Covered Tracks*, 1938 *Only for Thee* (story), 1938 *Jugend*, 1938 *Le tombeau hindou* (novel "Das indische Grabmal"), 1938 *Le tigre du Bengale* (novel), 1938 *Das indische Grabmal* (novel), 1938 *The Tiger of Eschnapur* (novel "Das Indische Grabmal"), 1937 *Mother Song*, 1937 *Der zerbrochene Krug*, 1937 *Versprich mir nichts!*, 1937 *Der Herrscher*, 1936 *A Woman of No Importance*, 1936 *Eskapade* (adaptation), 1936 *Die unmögliche Frau*, 1935 *Der Mann mit der Pranke*, 1935 *Ich war Jack Mortimer*, 1935 *Ein idealer Gatte*, 1935 *Princess Turandot*, 1935 *The Making of a King*, 1934 *Prinzessin Turandot*, 1934 *Was bin ich ohne Dich*, 1934 *Hanneles Himmelfahrt*, 1934 *Elisabeth und der Narr*, 1933 *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*, 1933 *Der Läufer von Marathon*, 1933 *The Last Will of Dr. Mabuse* (scenario), 1932 *Das erste Recht des Kindes*, 1931 *M*, 1929 *By Rocket to the Moon* (manuscript / novel "Frau im Mond"), 1928 *Spies* (novel / screenplay), 1927 *Metropolis* (novel / screenplay), 1925 *The Chronicles of the Gray House*, 1924 *Michael* (adaptation and screenplay), 1924 *Kriemhild's Revenge*, 1924 *Siegfried*, 1924 *Finances of the Grand Duke*, 1923 *Die Austreibung*, 1923 *The Princess Suwarin*, 1923 *Der steinerne Reiter* (idea), 1922 *Phantom* (adaptation), 1922 *Dr. Mabuse: The Gambler*, 1922 *Der brennende Acker*, 1921 *Mysteries of India, Part I: Truth* (novel / scenario), 1921 *Destiny*, 1921 *Das Haus des Dr. Gaudeamus* (novel "Haus ohne Tür und Fenster"), 1921 *Vier um die Frau*, 1921 *Mysteries of India, Part II: Above All Law* (novel / scenario), 1920 *Das wandernde Bild*, 1920 *Die Legende von der heiligen Simplicia*, and 1920 *Frauen vom Gnadenstein*.

Fritz Arno Wagner (December 5, 1894, Schmiedefeld am Rennsteig, Thuringia, Germany – August 18, 1958, Göttingen, Lower Saxony, Germany) has 145 cinematographer credits, some of which were 1958 *Ohne Mutter geht es nicht*, 1958 *Wehe, wenn sie losgelassen*, 1958 *The Csardas Princess*, 1957 *Liebe, Jazz und Übermut*, 1957 *Kindermädchen für Papa gesucht*, 1957 *Das Mädchen ohne Pyjama*, 1957 *Ferien auf Immenhof*, 1956 *Corinna Darling*, 1956 *Tausend Melodien*, 1956 *My 16 Sons*, 1954 *Melody Beyond Love*, 1954 *The Faithfull Hussar*, 1954 *Aus eigener Kraft*, 1954 *Die tolle Lola*, 1954 *Eternal Love*, 1953 *Der Vetter aus Dingsda*, 1953 *Die Rose von Stambul*, 1953 *Fräulein Casanova*, 1952 *1. April 2000*, 1952 *Don't Ask My Heart*, 1950 *Das Mädchen aus der Südsee*, 1950 *Wonderful Times*, 1950 *Frauenarzt Dr. Prätorius*, 1949 *Du bist nicht allein*, 1949 *The Bridge*, 1948 *Palace Scandal*, 1948 *Girls Behind Bars*, 1943 *Laugh Pagliacci*, 1942 *The Dismissal*, 1942

Der Fall Rainer, 1941 *Was geschah in dieser Nacht*, 1941 *Uncle Kruger*, 1940 *Friedrich Schiller - Der Triumph eines Genies*, 1940 *Feinde*, 1940 *Aus erster Ehe*, 1940 *The Fox of Glenarvon*, 1939 *Robert Koch, der Bekämpfer des Todes*, 1939 *Der vierte kommt nicht*, 1939 *Ein hoffnungsloser Fall*, 1937 *Two Merry Adventurers*, 1937 *Glamorous Night*, 1936 *Unter heißem Himmel*, 1936 *Savoy-Hotel 217*, 1935 *Schwarze Rosen*, 1935 *Les dieux s'amusent*, 1935 *Amphitryon*, 1935 *Le diable en bouteille*, 1935 *Princess Turandot*, 1934 *Liebe, Tod und Teufel*, 1934 *Prinzessin Turandot*, 1933 *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*, 1933 *Spies at Work*, 1933 *The Last Will of Dr. Mabuse*, 1932 *La chanson d'une nuit*, 1932 *Be Mine Tonight*, 1932 *La belle aventure*, 1932 *Das schöne Abenteuer*, 1932 *The Song of Night*, 1932 *Things Are Getting Better Already*, 1931 *M*, 1931 *La barcarolle d'amour*, 1931 *The 3 Penny Opera*, 1931 *1929 Napoleon at St. Helena*, 1929 *Diary of a Lost Girl*, 1927 *A Modern Dubarry*, 1926 *It's Easy to Become a Father*, 1926 *Adventure Mad*, 1926 *Der rosa Diamant*, 1925 *Das Fräulein vom Amt*, 1925 *Pietro der Korsar*, 1925 *The Chronicles of the Gray House*, 1922 *Nosferatu*, 1922 *Der brennende Acker*, 1922 *Bardame*, 1922 *Das hohe Lied der Liebe*, 1922 *Lebenshunger*, 1922 *Wem nie durch Liebe Leid geschah!*, 1921 *Pariserinnen*, 1921 *Destiny*, 1921 *Arme Violetta*, 1921 *Playing with Fire*, 1921 *The Haunted Castle*, 1920 *Die geschlossene Kette*, 1920 *Das Martyrium*, 1920 *Das Skelett des Herrn Markutius*, 1919 *Der Galeerensträfling*, and 1919 *Vendetta*.

Paul Falkenberg (b. Paul Victor Falkenberg, October 26, 1903, Berlin, Germany – January 13, 1986, New York City, New York) has 12 editing credits: 1965 "F.D.R.", 1960 *Hideout in the Sun*, 1956 *Modesta* (short), 1935 *Letzte Liebe*, 1934 *Salto in die Seligkeit*, 1933 *The Adventures of King Pausole*, 1931 *The Great Love*, 1931 *Die Koffer des Herrn O.F.*, 1931 *M*, 1931 *Schuberts Frühlingstraum*, 1931 *1914, die letzten Tage vor dem Weltbrand*, and 1930 *Die Lindenwirtin*.



Peter Lorre... Hans Beckert (b. László Löwenstein, June 26, 1904, Rózsahegy, Austria-Hungary [now Ruzomberok, Slovakia] – March 23, 1964, Los Angeles, California) has 113 film and tv credits, some of which are 1964 *The Patsy*, 1964 *Muscle Beach Party*, 1963 *The Comedy of Terrors*, 1963 "Kraft Suspense Theatre", 1963 "77 Sunset Strip", 1963 "The DuPont Show of the Week", 1963 *The Raven*, 1962

“Route 66”, 1962 *Five Weeks in a Balloon*, 1962 *Tales of Terror*, 1961 “The Gertrude Berg Show”, 1961 *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea*, 1961 “The Best of the Post”, 1961 “Checkmate”, 1960 “Rawhide”, 1954-1960 “The Red Skelton Hour” (9 episodes), 1960 “Wagon Train”, 1956-1960 “Playhouse 90” (6 episodes), 1960 *Scent of Mystery*, 1957-1960 “Alfred Hitchcock Presents”, 1959 “Five Fingers”, 1959 *The Big Circus*, 1958 “The Milton Berle Show”, 1958 “Collector's Item”, 1957 *Hell Ship Mutiny*, 1957 *The Sad Sack*, 1957 *The Story of Mankind*, 1957 *Silk Stockings*, 1954-1957 “Climax!”, 1957 *The Buster Keaton Story*, 1956 “The 20th Century-Fox Hour”, 1956 *Around the World in Eighty Days*, 1956 *Congo Crossing*, 1955-1956 “Studio 57”, 1956 “Screen Directors Playhouse”, 1955 “The Star and the Story”, 1955 “The Eddie Cantor Comedy Theater”, 1955 “Producers' Showcase”, 1955 “The Best of Broadway”, 1955 “Young Couples Only”, 1955 “Rheingold Theatre”, 1954 *20000 Leagues Under the Sea*, 1954 “Schlitz Playhouse”, 1953 “The United States Steel Hour”, 1953 “Beat the Devil”, 1953 “All Star Revue”, 1952 “Suspense”, 1952 “Lux Video Theatre”, 1951 *Der Verlorene*, 1950 *Double Confession*, 1950 *Quicksand*, 1949 *Rope of Sand*, 1948 *Casbah*, 1947 *My Favorite Brunette*, 1946 *The Beast with Five Fingers*, 1946 *The Verdict*, 1946 *The Chase*, 1946 *Black Angel*, 1946 *Three Strangers*, 1945 *Confidential Agent*, 1945 *Hotel Berlin*, 1944 *The Conspirators*, 1944 *Arsenic and Old Lace*, 1944 *The Mask of Dimitrios*, 1944 *Passage to Marseille*, 1943 *The Cross of Lorraine*, 1943 *Background to Danger*, 1943 *The Constant Nymph*, 1942 *Casablanca*, 1942 *The Boogie Man Will Get You*, 1942 *Invisible Agent*, 1942 *In This Our Life*, 1941 *All Through the Night*, 1941 *The Maltese Falcon*, 1941 *They Met in Bombay*, 1941 *Mr. District Attorney*, 1941 *The Face Behind the Mask*, 1940 *You'll Find Out*, 1940 *Stranger on the Third Floor*, 1940 *Island of Doomed Men*, 1940 *I Was an Adventuress*, 1940 *Strange Cargo*, 1939 *Mr. Moto Takes a Vacation*, 1939 *Mr. Moto in Danger Island*, 1939 *Mr. Moto's Last Warning*, 1938 *Mysterious Mr. Moto*, 1938 *I'll Give a Million*, 1938 *Mr. Moto Takes a Chance*, 1938 *Mr. Moto's Gamble*, 1937 *Thank You, Mr. Moto*, 1937 *Lancer Spy*, 1937 *Think Fast, Mr. Moto*, 1937 *Nancy Steele Is Missing!*, 1936 *Crack-Up*, 1936 *Secret Agent*, 1935 *Crime and Punishment*, 1935 *Mad Love*, 1934 *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, 1933 *High and Low*, 1933 *Unsichtbare Gegner*, 1933 *Was Frauen träumen*, 1933 *Les requins du pétrole*, 1932 *F.P.I. Doesn't Answer*, 1932 *Stupéfiant*, 1932 *Dope*, 1932 *Schuß im Morgengrauen*, 1932 *Fünf von der Jazzband*, 1931 *Die Koffer des Herrn O.F.*, 1931 *Bombs Over Monte Carlo*, 1931 *M*, 1931 *A Man's a Man* (short), 1930 *The White Devil*, and 1929 *Die verschwundene Frau*.

Ellen Widmann... Frau Beckmann

(December 15, 1894, Biel, Switzerland – October 22, 1985, Zurich, Switzerland) appeared in 24 films and tv series: 1975-1976 “Emil i Lönneberga”, 1973 “Ein Schweizer wie bestellt”, 1972 *The Fall*, 1971 *Emil i Lönneberga*, 1970 *Dällebach Kari*, 1968 *Die sechs Kummerbuben*, 1966 “Der letzte Raum”, 1965 “Gsetz isch Gsetz”, 1964 “Die Silberflöte”, 1963 “Eine Dummheit macht auch der



Gescheiteste”, 1963 *Sittlichkeitsverbrecher*, 1960 *Anne Bäbi Jowäger - I. Teil: Wie Jakobli zu einer Frau kommt*, 1958 *Kinder der Berge*, 1958 “Verschlossene Räume”, 1957 *Der 10. Mai*, 1957 *Bäckerei Zürer*, 1956 *Oberstadtgass*, 1950 *The White Hell of Pitz Palu*, 1943 *Menschen, die vorüberziehen*, 1941 *Der letzte Postillon vom St. Gotthard*, 1941 *Bieder der Flieger*, 1940 *Fräulein Huser*, 1939 *Wachtmeister Studer*, and 1931 *M*.

Inge Landgut... Elsie Beckmann (November 23, 1922, Berlin, Germany – May 29, 1986, West Berlin, West Germany) has 46 acting credits: 1984 *Schneeweißchen und Rosenrot*, 1981 “Der Fall Maurizius”, 1980 “Schicht in Weiß”, 1980 *Stern ohne Himmel*, 1979 “Ein Kapitel für sich”, 1978 “Ein Mann will nach oben”, 1976 “Pension Schöller”, 1975 “Tadellöser & Wolff”, 1971 “Doppelgänger” (13 episodes), 1966 *Half-Breed*, 1966 “Große Liebe”, 1964 *Yellow Devil*, 1964 “Pension Spreewitz” (8 episodes), 1962 “Jedermannstraße 11”, 1958 *Isn't Mama Fabulous?*, 1953 “Der Fall Sieveking”, 1953 “Lied der Taube”, 1952 *Full House*, 1951

Torreani, 1951 *Hilfe, ich bin unsichtbar*, 1950 *Der Fall Rabanser*, 1950 *Dreizehn unter einem Hut*, 1949 *Our Daily Bread*, 1949 *Diese Nacht vergess ich nie*, 1948 *Mr. Gaspary's Song*, 1941 *Women Are Better Diplomats*, 1938 *Schneeweißchen und Rosenrot*, 1938 *Was tun, Sybille?*, 1938 *The Girl of Last Night*, 1937 *Liebe kann lügen*, 1937 *Das Wiener Modell* (short), 1935 *Das Einmaleins der Liebe*, 1934 *Hanneles Himmelfahrt*, 1931 *Luise, Königin von Preußen*, 1931 *Emil und die Detektive*, 1931 *M*, 1930 *Der Detektiv des Kaisers*, 1930 *Phantome des Glücks*, 1930 *Lohnbuchhalter Kremke*, 1929 *The Unusual Past of Thea Carter*, 1929 *Frauen am Abgrund*, 1929 *Mother Love*, 1929 *Perjury*, 1929 *Indizienbeweis*, 1928 *Angst - Die schwache Stunde einer Frau*, and 1928 *Violantha*.

Otto Wernicke... Inspector Karl Lohmann (September 30, 1893, Osterode am Harz, Germany, November 7, 1965, Munich, Bavaria, West Germany) appeared in 89 films: 1959 *Immer die Mädchen*, 1959 *Liebe auf krummen Beinen*, 1959 *Die feuerrote Baroness*, 1956 *Das Sonntagskind*, 1956 *The Captain from Köpenick*, 1956 “Die letzte Patrouille?”, 1956 *Studentin Helene Willfüer*, 1955 *Sky Without Stars*, 1951 *Schatten über Neapel*, 1951 *Amore e sangue*, 1950 *Die fidele Tankstelle*, 1950 *Vom Teufel gejagt*, 1950 *Wer fuhr den grauen Ford?*, 1949 *Du bist nicht allein*, 1949 *Amico*, 1949 *Lang ist der Weg*, 1948 *Der Herr vom andern Stern*, 1947 *Zwischen gestern und morgen*, 1945 *Kolberg*, 1945 *Der Fall Molander*, 1945 *Kamerad Hedwig*, 1944 *Das Leben ruft*, 1944 *Seinerzeit zu meiner Zeit*, 1944 *Der große Preis*, 1943 *Titanic*, 1941 *Uncle Kruger*, 1940 *Was wird hier gespielt?*, 1939 *Maria Ilona*, 1939 *Der Stammbaum des Dr. Pistorius*, 1939 *St. John's Fire*, 1939 *D III 88: The New German Air Force Attacks*, 1938 *Nordlicht*, 1938 *Geheimzeichen LB 17*, 1938 *Woman Comes in the Tropics*, 1937 *The Private's Job*, 1937 *Heimweh*, 1937 *Wie der Hase läuft*, 1937 *Dangerous Crossing*, 1937 *Strong Hearts in the Storm*, 1936 *Onkel Bräsig*, 1936 *Das Schloß in Flandern*, 1936 *Street Music*, 1935 *Knockout - Ein junges Mädchen, ein junger Mann*, 1934 *Peer Gynt*, 1934 *Between Heaven and Earth*,

1934 *Stupid Mama*, 1934 *Der Herr der Welt*, 1934 *Die vertauschte Braut*, 1934 *Achtung! Wer kennt diese Frau?*, 1934 *The Fugitive from Chicago*, 1933 *The Tunnel*, 1933 *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*, 1933 *Die blonde Christl*, 1932 *Peter Voss, der Millionendieb*, 1932 *Die nackte Wahrheit*, 1932 *Stürme der Leidenschaft*, 1931 *M*, 1928 *Die Hölle von Montmartre*, 1925 *Das Parfüm der Mrs. Worrington*, 1925 *Die suchende Seele*, 1924 *Mädchen, die man nicht heiratet*, 1923 *Wo Menschen Frieden finden*

Theodor Loos... Inspector Groeber (b. August Konrad Loos, May 18, 1883 in Zwingenberg, Hessen, Germany – June 27, 1954, Stuttgart, Germany) appeared in 198 films, among them 1962 *The Maharajah's Blonde*, 1954 *Rosen aus dem Süden*, 1954 *Circus Girl*, 1953 *Stars Over Colombo*, 1949 *Mordprozeß Dr. Jordan*, 1947 *Geld ins Haus*, 1945 *Der Fall Molander*, 1945 *Shiva und die Galgenblume*, 1944 *Philharmonic*, 1943 *Gabriele Dambrone*, 1943 *Titanic*, 1943 *Reise in die Vergangenheit*, 1942 *The Dismissal*, 1942 *Andreas Schlüter*, 1942 *Rembrandt*, 1942 *Die Sache mit Styx*, 1940 *Jud Süß*, 1939 *Robert Koch, der Bekämpfer des Todes*, 1939 *Parkstrasse 13*, 1939 *Elbefahrt* (short), 1938 *Roman eines Arztes*, 1917 *Das Licht in der Nacht*, 1917 *Der geigende Tod*, 1917 *Die schwarze Loo*, 1917 *...und führe uns nicht in Versuchung*, 1916 *Homunculus, 1. Teil*, 1916 *Abseits vom Glück*, 1916 *Das Haus der Leidenschaften*, 1916 *Die Andere* (short), 1916 *Die grüne Phiole*, 1916 *Die Richterin von Solvigsholm*, 1915 *Der geheimnisvolle Wanderer*, 1915 *Doch die Liebe fand einen Weg*, 1915 *Maria Niemand und ihre zwölf Väter*, 1914 *Arme Eva*, 1914 *Das Haus ohne Tür*, 1914 *Das Hochstapler-Trio*, 1914 *Im Schützengraben*, 1913 *Die Eisbraut*, and 1913 *Das goldene Bett*.

FRITZ LANG from *World Film Directors Vol.1* Ed. John Wakeman. The H.W. Wilson Co., New York, 1987 entry by Philip Kemp

Austrian-American director and screenwriter, was born in Vienna, the only child of middle-class parents. His father, Anton Lang, was a municipal architect. His mother, Paula Schlesinger Lang, had been born Jewish but had converted to Catholicism early in life. Lang was educated at the local *Volksschule* (primary school), and moved on to the *Realschule* (secondary school) in 1901, where he specialized in architecture, since Anton Lang intended his son to follow the paternal calling. "Yet I had heard too many of his complaints about the disadvantages of his profession to feel much enthusiasm at the prospect," Lang said. His own ambition at the time was to become a painter. He was also, like his parents, a regular and enthusiastic theatre-goer.

Early in adolescence Lang suffered a serious illness, during which he had a vision of Death. As he later described it: "I saw myself face to face, not terrifying, but unmistakable, with Death. Made of black and white, light and shade, the rib cage, the naked bones....I don't know whether I should call the fear I experienced at that moment one of fear. It was horror, but without panic....I recovered quickly. But the love of death, compounded of horror and affection...stayed with me and became part of my films."

Still following his father's wishes, Lang enrolled in 1908 at the *Technische Hochschule* to study architecture. He was very soon bored and instead began studying art at the Vienna Academy of Graphic Arts, where he was strongly influenced by Klimt and Egon Schiele. He also made the most of other opportunities that Vienna offered. "I was precocious and started having affairs very early.



Viennese women were the most beautiful and the most generous women in the world." To help pay for his studies, Lang occasionally worked as master of ceremonies at two of the city's cabarets, *Femina* and *Hölle* (Hell). This activity finally exhausted his father's patience, so around 1909 Lang ran away from home—"something every decent young man should do"—and made his way to Brussels, where he lived by selling sketches in the cafés.

After unwittingly getting himself involved in an art-faking racket, Lang headed for Munich, where he studied art at the School of Arts and Crafts under Julius Dietz. In 1910 he embarked on a long sea journey, which took him to North Africa, Asia Minor, China, Japan, and Bali. On his return to Europe he settled in Paris, renting a studio in Montmartre and studying at the Académie Julien. He made a living by designing clothes and selling postcards, watercolors, and cartoons, and also began to take a serious interest in the cinema: "I already subconsciously felt that a new art...was about to be born." Painting, though, was still his main interest, and he was preparing his first exhibition when war was declared. Lang just managed to get himself on the last train across the French border and safely back to Vienna, when, despite defective eyesight, he was called up for active service in the army.

Promoted to lieutenant, Lang served on the Russian, Balkan and Italian fronts, received several wounds (one of which cost him the sight of his right eye) and various decorations. "For four years I saw life stripped to its rawest, hunger and desperation and death—scenes that neither fiction nor the screen can ever picture." While in military hospital he began writing film scripts and sold two of them to Joe May, at that time one of Germany's leading producer-directors....

Early in 1918 Lang was declared unfit for further service. Whiling away his time in Vienna, he was offered a part in a Red Cross play, and after driving the fee up to 1,000 kronen he accepted. Among the audience was Erich Pommer, head of the Decla film company in Berlin. Pommer was unimpressed with Lang's acting ability but struck during a subsequent meeting by his ideas on the cinema, and offered him a contract with Decla as a scriptwriter.

Lang arrived in Berlin shortly in September 1918, shortly before the end of the war. His first scripts for Decla...were all three directed by Otto Rippert, and received good reviews. By the time they were released, Lang had already persuaded Pommer to let him direct a film. *Halbblut* (*The Half-Caste*, 1919), filmed in five days to Lang's own script, was a triangular melodrama with its apex the half-caste of the title, first of the many *femmes fatales* in Lang's films. No prints of *Halbblut* are extant, nor of his next picture, *Der Herr der*

Liebe (*The Master of Love*, 1919), of which little is known; but both were successful enough for Pommer to let Lang embark on a major production, the first episode of an adventure serial, *Die Spinnen* (*The Spiders*).

The influence of Feuillade (whose *Fantômas* series Lang would have seen in pre-war Paris) and of Hollywood's Pearl White-style cliffhangers can be detected in the episodic, comic-book construction of *Die Spinnen*. The first part, *Der Goldene See* (*The Golden Lake*, 1919), contained all the standard ingredients: a sinister, all-powerful secret society, with masked minions to execute its nefarious designs; a (supposedly) irresistible and demonic temptress; and intrepid and resourceful hero; hidden Inca treasures, exotic locations, last-minute rescues, human sacrifices, snakes, all thrown together with a blithe disregard for verisimilitude or narrative structure. The acting was none too subtle, either. But Lang and Pommer evidently knew their public; the film was hugely successful on release, establishing Decla as one of the major German companies.

Before continuing *Die Spinnen*, Lang was assigned to direct *Harakiri* (1919), a version of David Belasco's oriental weepie, *Madame Butterfly*, on which Puccini had based his opera. The film survives only in one fragile, rarely shown print, but was praised at the time for its "vivid realistic picture of life as it is." Lang's next film was to have been *Das Kabinett des Dr. Caligari* (1919), on the scenario of which he collaborated; but distributors were clamoring for the next part of *Die Spinnen*, and *Caligari*, much to Lang's disappointment went instead to Robert Wiene. *Das Brillantenschiff* (*The Diamond Ship*, 1920), episode two of *Die Spinnen*, provided the mixture as before, with an even more convoluted plot.

By this stage in his career Lang had already evolved his working method, which entailed meticulous preparation of every aspect of filmmaking. Carl de Vogt, who played the hero of *Die Spinnen*, noted that Lang "was dominated by a fanatical love for the cinema and the demands he made on his actors were enormous.... In contrast to other directors he always knew exactly what he wanted. He was indefatigable in his work and never self-indulgent." Theo Linggen, another of Lang's actors, recalled that "one did what one was told to do to the letter of the timetable, by which I mean that no improvisation was tolerated. Everything... was fixed and calculated in advance. This might suggest... pedantry, but that is the exact opposite of the truth: the mastering of all aspects, the intelligent use of this method, and the conviction that technology can only be mastered by technology—these were probably Lang's main strengths as a film director."

To supplement his income, Lang had continued to take occasional assignments for Joe May while working at Decla, and had been assistant director on May's *Die Herrin der Welt* (*The Mistress of the World*, 1919). Now, annoyed over his loss of *Caligari* and the rejection of his *Spinnen* scripts, Lang signed a contract with May to direct *Das Wandernde Bild* (*The Wandering Image*, 1920). No prints are known to exist of this film.... It was also his first collaboration with Thea von Harbou, the popular novelist who was to coscript all his films until his departure from Germany in 1933.

Lang and von Harbou next wrote a two-part exotic adventure, *Das Indische Grabmal* (*The Indian Tomb*) which Lang expected to direct but which May arrogated to himself. Since he never much liked May but had a high personal regard for Pommer, Lang returned to Decla (or Decla-Bioscop, as it had become through a merger), taking von Harbou with him, and directed the last of his "lost" films, *Kämpfende Herzen* (*Struggling Hearts*, 1920). The film's alternative title was *Die Vier um die Frau* (*Four Around a Woman*), apparently a fair summary of the plot. In Germany Lang was by now recognized as one of the foremost directors, though he was as yet little-known abroad....

"In Europe," Lang later wrote about the post-war period, "an entire generation of intellectuals embraced despair. . . . Young people engaged in the cultural fields, myself among them, made a fetish of tragedy."...

Lang always deprecated references to his films as "expressionist," maintaining that he never restricted himself by conforming to a single artistic fashion. Nonetheless, expressionism—the visual distortion and stylization of reality to express psychological states and heighten emotional response—undeniably influences many of Lang's films, if

never to the extremes of Wiene's *Caligari*, with its contorted, aggressively two-dimensional sets. In *Der Müde Tod* (*Destiny*, 1921)

the vast wall, extending beyond the confines of the screen, that surrounds Death's realm, the misty vastness of the cathedral in which burn countless candle-souls of humankind, and the storybook toy-town, all draw on expressionist elements in their design. Lotte Eisner even regarded much of the film as deliberate parody of expressionism, especially the Chinese episode.... This episode also featured the film's most impressive special effects, including a miniaturized army and a journey by flying carpet. These were much admired and emulated. In the United States, Douglas Fairbanks bought the distribution rights but delayed the release until after the premiere of his own *Thief of Bagdad*,

which copied several of Lang's best tricks. Meanwhile Lang, now internationally famous, began work with von Harbou on a two-part crime thriller, *Dr. Mabuse der Spieler* (*Dr. Mabuse the Gambler*, 1922).

In some ways *Dr. Mabuse* returns to the world of *Die Spinnen*. Mabuse is a fiendish mastermind, a man of a thousand disguises, gifted with sinister hypnotic powers, leader of a gang of criminals and cutthroats. During the course of the complicated plot he manipulates the Stock Exchange, steals treaties, murders, runs crooked gambling dens, abducts women; finally brought to bay by a determined public prosecutor, he goes mad, and is taken away babbling incoherently.

Von Harbou and Lang took pains to stress the contemporary relevance of the *Mabuse* films. The two parts, *Der Grosse Spieler* (*The Great Gambler*) and *Inferno* were respectively subtitled *Ein Bild der Zeit* (*A Portrait of the Age*) and *Ein Spiel von Menschen unserer Zeit* (*A Play About People of Our Time*). Today, to claim any kind of



documentary realism for such overblown melodramatics may seem ludicrous, but at the time the suggestion was evidently found credible. “The film is a document of our time,” wrote a reviewer in *Die Welt am Montag*, “an excellent portrait of high society with its gambling passion and dancing madness, its hysteria and decadence, its expressionism and occultisms. An article in *BZ am Mittag* described the films as “a condensation of the spirit of the age, a playful re-enactment....Not one important symptom of the postwar years is missing.”

The protean personality of Mabuse—resourcefully played by von Harbou’s first husband, Rudolf Klein-Rogge—dominates the action, manipulating all the other characters and events. Even the police seem reduced to a mere rival gang—as so often in Lang’s films, villains and heroes, crime and justice tend to become interchangeable. *Mabuse* remains memorable not for its limping and flawed plot but for the darkly brooding atmosphere Lang creates, a disturbing compound of hysteria and fatalistic passivity.

In August 1922, a few months after the release of *Dr. Mabuse*, Fritz Lang and Thea von Harbou were married. It was a second marriage for both of them. Von Harbou had separated quite amicably from Klein-Rogge, who readily continued to appear in Lang’s films. Lang’s first wife, about whom little is known, had been a Russian Jew from Vilna. She had died in 1920—according to some accounts, she killed herself on learning of the passionate affair between her husband and von Harbou.

Dr. Mabuse was enormously successful, both in Germany and abroad, and on the strength of it Pommer announced an even more ambitious project: a two-part epic superproduction, *Die Nibelungen* (1924). The basis for Lang and von Harbou’s script was not Wagner’s operatic tetralogy but the original medieval epic, *Das Nibelungenlied*, on which Wagner had also drawn. Preparations for the massive production took nearly two years, and shooting lasted nine months. During filming, Decla-Bioscop merged with UFA. Lang was now the star director of the world’s largest studio outside Hollywood.

Siegfried, the first part of *Die Nibelungen* tells how the hero slays a dragon, meets and marries the Burgundian Princess Kriemhild, and is killed through the treachery of Hagen and the jealousy of Brunhild, an Icelandic princess whom he has wooed on behalf of Kriemhild’s brother, Gunther. “For sheer pictorial beauty of structural architecture, *Siegfried* has never been equalled,” wrote Paul Rotha....

Arguments over whether Lang, however unwittingly, was creating fascist cinema have inevitably clustered around *Die Nibelungen*. Hitler and other leading Nazis certainly admired *Siegfried* greatly (*Kriemhild’s Rache* less so), and after Lang’s departure from Germany it was revived in a sound version, complete with chunks of Wagner. The film’s grandiose architecture evidently influenced Speer in his staging of the Nuremberg rallies, as well as Leni Riefenstahl’s notorious propaganda film, *Triumph des Willens*.

Metropolis (1926), “an exaggerated dream of the New York skyline, multiplied a thousandfold and divested of all reality” (Lotte Eisner), was by far the most ambitious film ever produced in Germany. Originally budgeted at 1.9 million marks, it eventually cost over 5 million, took nearly a year to shoot, and ruined UFA. The company was refused a state subsidy and passed into the control of Alfred Hugenberg, a millionaire industrialist and press baron with Nazi sympathies.

Lang envisioned a repressive technological future (set in the year 2000), in which the gulf between the classes has become brutally absolute. The ruling aristocracy lead lives of idle luxury in sunlit gardens, while the workers, housed in subterranean caverns, have been reduced to a soulless army of slaves....Luis Buñuel, reviewing *Metropolis* in 1927, described it as “two films glued together by their bellies.” Most critics, then and since, have agreed with him. The plot of the film is puerile, incoherent, and feebly motivated, culminating in an embarrassingly trite and sentimental ending. Lang himself claimed that he “detested [the film] after it was finished,” and admitted that “you cannot make a social-conscious picture in which you say that the intermediary between the hand and the brain is the heart—I mean that’s a fairytale—definitely.”

Visually, though, *Metropolis* is superb, and remains so even in the face of modern megaproductions....Although a commercial disaster, *Metropolis* was widely shown and hugely influential. Countless sci-fi films owe a debt to it....Disappointed by the financial failure of *Metropolis*, Lang now formed his own production company, Fritz-Lang-Films, to release through UFA. For its first

project, Lang and von Harbou reverted to the proven box-office values of *Dr. Mabuse*, applying them with minor modifications to the world of international espionage....Despite all the parallels *Spione* (*The Spy*, 1928) improves greatly on *Dr. Mabuse* in both pacing and atmosphere....Once again, Lang conceded scant moral superiority to the forces of law; espionage and counterespionage operate in the same ethical jungle.

Lang had originally planned to include a space-ship sequence in *Metropolis* but was forced to abandon it by the film’s spiraling costs. He now returned to the idea



for his last silent picture, *Die Frau im Mond* (*The Woman in the Moon*, 1929), in which an ill-assorted band of scientists, capitalists, and stowaways travel to the moon in search of gold. Lang took great trouble over the technical details of the rocketship and its launching, calling in Herman Oberth and Will Ley as scientific advisors....Many of Lang’s silent films—especially *Metropolis* and *Dr. Mabuse*—suffered mutilation at the hands of foreign distributors. Lang was much angered by this, though he could do nothing about it; but he could and did object when UFA proposed that *Die Frau*, along with other current films, should be converted to sound. Since the film had been planned silent, that—he insisted—was how it should be shown, without even added music or sound effects. As a result of this quarrel, Lang broke completely with UFA and even contemplated giving up filmmaking to become a

scientist. Luckily, he reconsidered, and went on to make what is generally recognized as his finest film.

When Lang announced his new project, his first sound film, under the working title of *Mörder unter uns* (*Murderers Among Us*), he encountered unexpected hostility. Anonymous threatening letters arrived, and he was refused use of the studios he wanted. Not until he explained that the film was to be about a sex murderer did opposition cease. The Nazis, apparently, had assumed the title referred to them.

Based on the real-life case of Peter Kürten, who had terrorized Düsseldorf in the 1920s, *M* (1931) shows a city shaken by mounting hysteria as children are murdered and the police flail ineffectually, arresting suspects at random. Finally, the underworld organize themselves to trap the killer, since the increased police vigilance is disrupting their activities; child-murderers, Lang suggests with Brechtian irony, must be discouraged, since they are bad for business.

In *M*, for the first time in Lang's work, style and content fuse into a taut, effective whole. The brooding urban menace that he had brought to *Dr. Mabuse* and *Spione*, the dark fatalism of *Der Müde Tod*, the acute spatial instinct of *Siegfried* and *Metropolis*, are at last placed at the service of a plot that needs no apology. Sound is used creatively and dramatically, with no hint of inexperience, to counterpoint and enrich the images, often overlapping across scenes to achieve fast narrative ellipses. Violence, as Lang always preferred, is suggested rather than shown: a child's killing is conveyed by a ball rolling out of a bush, a stray balloon caught in overhead wires—thus (as Lang wrote) “forcing each individual member of the audience to create the gruesome details of the murder according to his personal imagination.”

As Franz Becker, the murderer, Peter Lorre's performances made him deservedly world-famous. Squat, chubby, and vulnerable, obsessively whistling his snatch of Grieg (performed by Lang since Lorre couldn't whistle), smiling with a shy kindness as he buys his victim a balloon, grimacing before a mirror in an attempt to grasp his own monstrosity, he presented a chillingly plausible incarnation of helpless schizophrenia....

Although it encountered censorship problems in a few countries, *M* enjoyed widespread success. Some critics found the subject-matter “disgusting,” but most were enthusiastic. Graham Greene vividly likened the film to “looking through the eye-piece of a microscope, through which the tangled mind is exposed, laid flat on the slide: love and lust, nobility and perversity, hatred of itself and despair jumping at you from the jelly.” *M* rapidly achieved classic status, confirmed by Joseph Losey's ill-advised remake of 1951, in which the action was transferred to Los Angeles. Lang dryly commented that, when Losey's film was released, “I had the best reviews of my life.”



Seymour Nebenzal, for whose Nero Films Land had made *M*, urged him to make a new *Dr. Mabuse* film. Initially reluctant, Lang gradually began to see possibilities in the idea of his master-criminal directing operations from within the lunatic asylum in which, at the end of the earlier film, he had been incarcerated. In later years Lang consistently maintained that *Das Testament des Dr. Mabuse* (*The Last Will of Dr. Mabuse*, 1933) was intended as “a veiled comment on Nazism,” and that he put Nazi slogans into the mouth of the deranged criminal. This seems slightly improbable, since von Harbou, who coscripted as usual, was by this time a keen member of the Nazi party. On the other hand, the film was certainly found subversive enough to be banned by Goebbels.

Mabuse himself dies midway through *Das Testament*; but by then he has gained control over the mid of the director of the asylum, Dr. Baum, through whom his orders are transmitted to his gang. After Mabuse's death his spirit continues to possess Baum who goes steadily out of his mind and by the end of the film has been completely taken over, like Norman Bates in *Psycho*, by his alter ego.

As Mabuse/Baum's chief opponent, Lang reintroduced the stolidly humorous Inspector Lohmann (played by Otto Wernicke), who had headed the police investigation in *M*.

As with *Spione* and the earlier Mabuse films, the plot of *Das Testament* is less interesting than the atmosphere of tangible menace that Lang creates. The opening sequence is especially effective....Menace is inexplicable, impersonal, and ubiquitous.

Soon after *Das Testament* had been banned by the newly elected Nazi government, Lang was summoned to an interview with Goebbels. Apprehensively, he

presented himself in the customary formal dress. Goebbels—“he was a charming man when he wanted to be”—explained that he and Hitler had much admired *Metropolis* and *Die Niebelungen*, and invited Lang to head the Third Reich's film industry. Lang expressed his gratitude and delight. “I could only think ‘How do you get out of here?’ I wanted to get some money out of the bank. Outside the window there was a big clock, and the hands went slowly round.” Goebbels talked on. At last Lang could make a polite departure, but the banks had closed. He rushed home, grabbed all his loose cash and portable valuables, and caught a train for Paris, leaving behind his wife, his money, his extensive art collection, and his position as Germany's foremost director. “I must begin again. It is not easy. But, yes, it was good. I was *arrivé*—fat in my soul, fat around the heart. Darling, too much success...oh, it is not good for the man.” Thea von Harbou remained behind in Germany where she continued to make films for the Nazis. She and Lang were divorced about a year later....

Like most prominent European filmmakers, Lang had received frequent offers from Hollywood, but he had always turned them down. Now, however, when David O. Selznick arrived in Paris on a talent hunt, Lang accepted a contract with MGM, and sailed for America in June 1934. Not for the first time, Hollywood, having

acquired its “trophy” (Lang’s own term), had trouble deciding how to display it. For eighteen months he stayed on MGM’s payroll without directing a single foot of film. Part of the reason was that the studio heads had grown wary of “Prussian aristocrats” like Stroheim and Sternberg and suspected that Lang, with his monocle, formal manner, and exacting reputation, might prove another of the breed....

Though frustrated at not working, Lang had no intention of wasting his time and set out to learn the language and the customs of his adopted country, becoming an American citizen in 1935. ...

If a single consistent theme can be isolated from Lang’s oeuvre, it would be the struggle of the individual against fate. But fate, for Lang, is not a metaphysical concept or a supernatural power. Even when—as in *Der Muede Tod* or *Die Niebelungen*—supernatural elements are introduced, they never decide the outcome; Siegfried’s Tarnhelm is merely an enabling device, an instrument, like a gun or a fast car. Lang’s fate is always some human force or factor—a criminal organization, social pressure, a psychological impulse within the individual. The socially critical aspect of this theme, implicit in his German films, became increasingly overt in his Hollywood output.

Fury (1936), as Gavin Lambert has pointed out, “is not...about a lynching, but an almost abstract study of mob hysteria; this hysteria has a number of results, of which the attempted lynching is one and the ferocious destructive bitterness it arouses in the victim...is another.”...

“Every serious picture that depicts people today,” Lang once remarked, “should be a kind of documentary of its time.”

Lang’s “social trilogy” [*Fury*, *You Only Live Once* (1937), *You and Me* (1938)] as his first three Hollywood films are sometimes called, ended with a flop.... The outbreak of war allowed Lang to return to a far more congenial genre. The sinister, pervasive criminal organizations of his German movies, dedicated to terror, destruction, and world domination, had become awful reality and taken over most of Europe; who better than Fritz Lang to depict the struggle against them? Lang’s anti-Nazi films, wrote Peter Bogdanovich, are “characterized by an intense personal involvement, a vivid awareness of the fascist mind, missing from other similar movies of the period.”...

François Truffaut identified Lang’s “favorite theme” as “moral solitude, a man alone, conducting a struggle against a semi-hostile, semi-indifferent universe”—an apt summary of *Ministry of Fear* (1944).

...Lang moved on to RKO to direct the last, and most individual of his three Westerns, *Rancho Notorious* (1952)...Lang’s career was now at a low ebb.... One reason for this, he discovered, was that he was considered politically suspect, having associated with such “premature anti-fascists” as Brecht, Eisler, and Ring Lardner Jr.; he had, therefore, as a “potential Communist,” been blacklisted. He was only rescued from limbo after eighteen months by Harry Cohn, with whom Lang, unlike most people, got on well....

Lang’s stature within the industry—and to a lesser degree among critics—was diminished during his years in Hollywood. From the mid-1920s until 1933, Lang was recognized as the greatest director in Germany, and perhaps in Europe. By the time he arrived in the States, he was no more than one of the many distinguished European refugees; by 1950, he had become just another directorial hack and politically dubious at that. (Lang’s own independent temperament, and refusal to stay tied to any one studio, most likely contributed to Hollywood’s dismissive stance towards him.) The hope that he might repeat earlier glories by returning to Germany was disappointed. It was mainly during his retirement, when the overall shape of his career could be assessed, that Lang regained his status as one of cinema’s greatest artists. Pauline Kael rated him with Eisenstein, Gance, Griffith, and Welles as one “whose prodigious failures make other people’s successes look puny.”

...Throughout his films, both American and European, Lang

created a distinct world, consistent and unmistakable, marked by the intensity of his vision. “Fritz Lang’s America is not essentially different from Fritz Lang’s Germany,” maintained Gavin Lambert: “it is less openly macabre, its crime and terror exist on a comparatively realistic level, but both countries are really another country, a haunted place in which the same drama constantly occur. ...

At his best, Lang is the greatest exponent of the Cinema of Paranoia. His films feed upon, and nourish, the irrational fear that nothing is as it seems, that a hidden menace lurks behind all bland appearances, and that even the most amiable of individuals—especially the most amiable—is a member of some vast malignant conspiracy, from which we alone are excluded.

“No other director,” wrote David Thomson, “convinces us that the melodramatic threat of extinction in the crime movie is the metaphor of a much greater danger. . . . Lang’s films begin in top gear and then advance into higher ratios unknown to other directors.”

from *M. Anton Kaes, bfi Publishing., London, 2001.*

In his famous 1961 television interview, ‘Le Dinosaur and le Bébé’, Jean-Luc Godard asked Lang which of his forty films he thought would last. Without skipping a beat, Lang replied ‘M’. Godard agreed. No discussion, no other title given. In a 1995 survey of several hundred German film critics and scholars *M* was voted the most important German film of all time. Current movie guides typically describe Lang’s film as an ‘acclaimed classic’ or a ‘masterpiece. ...

The making of *M* coincided with the rapid disintegration of the political and social structure of the Weimar Republic. In June 1930, when the first notices about Fritz Lang’s new, still untitled film project were published in *Film-Kurier*, the worldwide recession had reached Germany in the form of massive unemployment, rising criminality and political unrest....

Even more than serial pulp fiction, the daily press had played a major role in disseminating representations of crime. Serial



killings were a favourite subject matter at the time of the Weimar Republic; serial crime reinforced the newspaper's own seriality. ...

"I have distilled all typical events from the plethora of materials and combined them with the help of my wife into a self-contained film story. The film *M* should be a document and an extract of facts and in that way an authentic representation of a mass murder complex."...

In his 1930 work journal, Lang recorded an idea for a scene in *M* that was never filmed: 'War scene as an excuse of the child murderer before the underworld court.' If ever there was a doubt that World War I figured in Lang's mind as a subtext for *M*, this note dispels it. This scene

might have been filmed as a flashback to Beckert's traumatic experience at the war front. It might have explained Beckert's drive to kill as a compulsion to repeat the murder he was forced to commit in combat. Freud's work on war neurosis in 1918 sheds light on what the film leaves unsaid. The mental breakdown of thousands of soldiers, Freud argued, were the result of an unsolvable mental conflict that splits the ego: The conflict is between the ego of the peacetime and the new war-ego of the soldier and it becomes acute as the peace-ego is faced with the danger of being killed through the risky undertakings of his newly formed parasitical double. Or one might put it, the old ego protects itself from the danger to life by flight into the traumatic neurosis in defending itself against the new ego which it recognizes as threatening its life....



On 12 May 1931, one day after *M*'s premier, the League for Human Rights held a public debate about the death penalty. Using arguments from Lang's film to discuss the pending fate of Peter Kürten, the League's so-called abolitionists argued against the death penalty under any circumstances but met vociferous resistance.... Although Lang always insisted that *M* was a plea against the death penalty, the film is ambiguous enough that Goebbels could note in his diary of 21 May 1931: 'Fantastic! Against humanitarian sentimentality. For the death penalty. Well made. Lang will be our director one day.'

from *M*. Criterion. "Fritz Lang's *M*: Filmed Sadism" Gabriel Tergit. (1931)

FL: "It was important to me with *M* not only to examine what drives a person to commit such a dreadful crime as the murder of children but also to broach the topic of the pros and cons of the death penalty. However, the tenor of the film is not condemnation of the murderer but rather a warning to mothers. You have to take better care of the kids. This accent was particularly important to my then wife, writer Thea von Harbou. Together, we wrote the manuscripts of almost all my German films before 1933, and, of course, she also participated substantially in the development of this material. For many years, she was my most important collaborator and helper. . .

FL: *M* was my first sound film. At the time, there were hardly more sound films in Germany than you could count on the fingers of one hand. Of course, I had to come to terms with the new medium of sound....

At the time I realized that it wasn't just possible to use sound as a dramaturgical device but essential. Some examples in *M* are when the silence of the streets—I deliberately left out the optional street noise—is suddenly pierced by the shrill police whistles, and you hear the unmelodic, recurring whistling of the child murderer, which gives wordless expression to his morbid impulses.

I also believe that *M* was the first to use the device of letting the sound or dialogue from the end of one scene run into the beginning of the next one, which not only accelerates the tempo of the film but also strengthens the dramaturgically necessary

association of thoughts between two successive scenes. It was also the first time that dialogue in two parallel scenes—the repetitive discussion among the members of the union of criminals and inspectors gathered in the police headquarters about how to find the child murderer—was utilized so that the entire dialogue forms a whole, as it were. That is, when one of the criminals begins a sentence, the gist of what he is saying is finished by one of the police inspectors, and vice versa. Both methods later came into general use....

I don't believe at all that film is bound by any rules. It is always new, and a principle that is right in one sequence can be completely wrong in the next one.

from *Who the Devil Made It Conversations with Legendary Film Directors*. Peter Bogdanovich. Ballantine Books, NY, 1997.

When Alfred Hitchcock started to be known, he was sometimes called "the English Fritz Lang." After Hitler's ascendance, Lang tells of being approached by Goebbels to run the Third Reich's new film industry; Hitler was apparently a great admirer of his pictures, especially *Metropolis*. Lang 'agreed to everything,' and that evening, unable to get to the bank in time, he fled Germany for Paris, leaving almost everything he owned behind. Soon afterward he was notified that all his money and possessions had been confiscated. In the same year, 1933, Lang's talented wife and collaborator, Thea von Harbou, divorced him and joined the Nazi movement. Lang soon came to Hollywood, where he made many fine pictures, but never achieved the respect or power he had in Germany, and ended up blind in Beverly Hills, sometimes being referred to as "the German Alfred Hitchcock." ...

FL: Our lives go by much faster than the lives of our parents. My parents went twice a month to see a play and then they discussed it with friends—it was an event; they absorbed two stories about human beings. But when you are used—as I was in 1912-14—to seeing a film every day or even twice a day. You are absorbing so much more—so many facts, so many stories about life. And so we don't live slowly anymore and time goes much faster. When the problem

comes up about the younger generation's marriages going on the rocks, perhaps the question is, has a man or a woman *enough* with one other woman or man? Maybe you can absorb much more than before, including husbands and wives....

PB: How did the story for M [1931] originate?

FL: I discussed with my wife, Mrs. Von Harbou, what was the ugliest, most utterly loathsome crime and we thought at first it as the sending of anonymous letters—I think we even started to write a synopsis. But then we both decided that the most horrible crime was that of a child murderer. I had many friends in Berlin's Homicide Department, which was called Alexanderplatz, and through them I came in touch with various murderers. Kürten, the infamous killer of Düsseldorf, I never met. Our story was finished before he was caught....

PB: Why do you like to work from newspapers?

FL: I think motion pictures are not only the art of our century, but to borrow a word from Abraham Lincoln, the art "of the people, for the people, by the people." It was invented just at the right time—when people were ready for an art of the masses. Do you realize, by the way, what really made propaganda for the American way of life? American motion pictures. Goebbels understood the enormous power of film as propaganda, and I'm afraid that even today people don't know what a tremendous means of propaganda motion pictures can be.. But anyway, where do we get our knowledge of life? From facts, not from fiction. Naturally, you can learn a lot of things from novels and plays, but it is always seen through another man's eyes. Don't forget, in those days there was no television: today when there's a riot, you *see* it; from Vietnam, you can see what a war in the jungle is. Before that, newsreels took a long time to come to the movie house, and only the newspapers were fresh information.

A director should know everything. A director should be at home in a brothel—which is very easy—but he should also be at home in the Stock Exchange—which is already a little more difficult. He should know how the Duke of Edinburgh behaves, how a worker or how a gangster behaves. Now, I would say it is impossible to learn all this out of experience. But the next best thing is to read newspapers—even if they are not objective, you can learn to separate the objective from the subjective.

PB: When you say a director should know everything, do you also mean the technical aspects of filmmaking?

FL: Yes, definitely. Erich Pommer, who was responsible for me, told me two things, which I followed: first he said, "Fritz, you have to tell a story with the camera. Therefore, you have to *know* the camera and what you can make the camera do." Lighting is part of that; so is

camera movement. You have to know the instruments with which you tell your story. The second thing he said was, "Never have an affair with an actress." *He* didn't obey it; *I* didn't obey it. *But* I never did it—and never *do* it—during a picture. What happens afterward is my private business. But that during the shooting somebody should say to me, "Last night you said, 'Sweetheart' and 'Beautiful,' and today you order me around!"—nothing doing. It's as simple as that. Good advice....

PB: Do you ever change things on the set?

FL: ...to change something dramatically could spoil the whole picture. Every film has its rhythm and you must have this rhythm from the beginning....

PB: Did you have anything to do with the American version of M?

FL: No. After the war, the financier smuggled *M* out of Germany; he was much cleverer than I—he had all the contracts and everything. I had nothing, because Goebbels talked to me from one o'clock till three—the banks closed at two-thirty—and I left the country the same day without taking anything with me; and I never went back. My lawyer became an ardent Nazi, and years later when I asked for the contracts: "We were bombed out—I can't remember anything." A quarter of a century had passed and I couldn't do anything—I was cheated out of all the money I should have earned. So here in the States, a man (he is dead too. I am the last dinosaur you know) came to me and said, "Look the financier would like you to do a remake of *M*." I said, "If he doesn't want to be slapped in the face, he'd better leave me alone."

I had to go to the Philippines. My lawyer here said, "Fritz, you can be sure that nothing will happen," because otherwise I would have prevented it. When I came back from the Philippines I found that my lawyer had left me in the lurch, and the picture was made by Mr. [Joseph] Losey. The financier tried to destroy all the prints and the negative of *M*, but for some reason—talk about fate—he couldn't do it.

The Losey picture—I've never seen it—was released, and later I made a joke that it only played in an asylum for blind men, because it didn't run very long. It was a big flop, and I never got such good reviews in my whole life as when this film was reviewed. My picture was a documentary of that period in Germany. I had talked with two or three mass murderers, I had seen all those horrible things, and, in my opinion, the murder was described efficiently enough as I did it: "I walk through the streets and then I come to. Have I done it? Have I really done it?"

Mr. Losey, I found out later, had tried to explain him out of his environment and so on. He also made some, let me just say, unfair remarks about my film—that he thinks his is much better and that my film wouldn't stand up nowadays....



PB: Do you like While the City Sleeps as much as M and Fury, which I understand are your favorite films?

FL: No, but I think—and this will only be proved by how it holds up over the years—that *While the City Sleeps* is at least an equally good picture.... I think both *M* and *Fury* are honest films. *M* is much more honest than *Fury*, because, as I told you before, an honest motion picture about lynching has to be made with a different premise.... *M* is practically the only picture I made in which nobody else had a hand except me myself. Maybe that influences me.

Also, don't forget, *M* was the first picture about a sex maniac. A film without a love story was unheard of in those days. And if I hadn't had that contract this film would never have been made.... *M* and *Fury* are social criticisms about two very important things. I really put my finger on something.

from Fritz Lang Interviews. Edited by Barry Keith Grant. University of Mississippi Press, 2003.

Lang: I am always questioned about my "Expressionist period." I respond with: "I don't understand what you mean by that. I am always counted among expressionists, but I personally place myself among the realists. In films, it is too easy to associate ideas and images with things that don't necessarily belong in the film in question...."

I can't say what I found in Expressionism; all I can say is that I used it, that I tried to master it. I believe that the more we tend toward simplicity, the more we progress.

Which brings me back to the Western. It is a genre full of simple ideas. Each year, there are new ones for the young, because each year there is a new generation. Critics say that in today's war films there is nothing new. But what can one say about war that is new? The important thing is that we repeat it again and again.

To fight, that is what counts. If we think there is the smallest chance to succeed, we must continue to do what we believe is good. Perhaps this is a sort of martyrdom, even if I don't believe it, but it is the essence of life, fighting for the causes we believe to be right. That is truly the problem that has always interested me—not obsessed or possessed me, because I was possessed only once—that's all, in one way or another it is inevitable. You get caught in the works, and you can't escape. But aside from that, what I always wanted to show and define is the attitude of struggle that must be adopted in the face of destiny. Whether or not the individual wins this fight, what counts is the fight itself, because it is vital.

You know, I have never made a film which made a compromise. That's one of life's important things, and which we have a tendency to forget. A producer—during the war—called me into his office, at a moment when I wasn't working, and gave me a point of departure for a film. It was extremely favourable towards the war: I refused to make it.

To make a film for one person, whether producer, director, actor or critic, makes no sense. The cinema always has been and should continue to be a mass art.

Roger Ebert: "M"

The horror of the faces: That is the overwhelming image that remains from a recent viewing of the restored version of "M," Fritz Lang's famous 1931 film about a child murderer in Germany. In my memory it was a film that centered on the killer, the creepy little Franz Becker, played by Peter Lorre. But Becker has relatively limited screen time, and only one consequential speech--although it's a haunting one. Most of the film is devoted to the search for Becker, by both the police and the underworld, and many of these scenes are played in closeup. In searching for words to describe the faces of the actors, I fall hopelessly upon "piglike."

What was Lang up to? He was a famous director, his silent

films like "Metropolis" worldwide successes. He lived in a Berlin where the left-wing plays of Bertolt Brecht coexisted with the decadent milieu re-created in movies like "Cabaret." By 1931, the Nazi Party was on the march in Germany, although not yet in full control. His own wife would later become a party member. He made a film that has been credited with forming two genres: the serial killer movie and the police procedural. And he filled it with grotesques. Was there something beneath the surface, some visceral feeling about his society that this story



allowed him to express?

When you watch "M," you see a hatred for the Germany of the early 1930s that is visible and palpable. Apart from a few perfunctory shots of everyday bourgeoisie life (such as the pathetic scene of the mother waiting for her little girl to return from school), the entire movie consists of men seen in shadows, in smoke-filled dens, in disgusting dives, in conspiratorial conferences. And the faces of these men are cruel caricatures: fleshy, twisted, beetle-browed, dark-jowled, out of proportion. One is reminded of the stark faces of the accusing judges in Dreyer's "Joan of Arc," but they are more forbidding than ugly.

What I sense is that Lang hated the people around him, hated Nazism, and hated Germany for permitting it. His next film, "The Testament of Dr. Mabuse" (1933), had villains who were unmistakably Nazis. It was banned by the censors, but Joseph Goebbels, so the story goes, offered Lang control of the nation's film industry if he would come on board with the Nazis. He fled, he claimed, on a midnight train -- although Patrick McGilligan's new book, *Fritz Lang: The Nature of the Beast*, is dubious about many of Lang's grandiose claims.

Certainly "M" is a portrait of a diseased society, one that seems even more decadent than the other portraits of Berlin in the 1930s; its characters have no virtues and lack even attractive vices. In other stories of the time we see nightclubs, champagne, sex and perversion. When "M" visits a bar, it is to show closeups of greasy sausages, spilled beer, rotten cheese and stale cigar butts.

The film's story was inspired by the career of a serial killer in Dusseldorf. In "M," Franz Becker preys on children -- offering them candy and friendship, and then killing them. The murders are all offscreen, and Lang suggests the first one with a classic montage including the little victim's empty dinner plate, her mother calling frantically down an empty spiral staircase, and her balloon--bought for her by the killer--caught in electric wires.

There is no suspense about the murderer's identity. Early in the film we see Becker looking at himself in a mirror. [Peter Lorre](#) at the time was 26, plump, baby-faced, clean-shaven, and as he looks at his reflected image he pulls down the corners of his mouth and tries to make hideous faces, to see in himself the monster others see in him. His presence in the movie is often implied rather than seen; he compulsively whistles the same tune, from "Peer Gynt," over and over, until the notes stand in for the murders. The city is in turmoil: The killer must be caught. The police put all their men on the case, making life unbearable for the criminal element ("There are more cops on the streets than girls," a pimp complains). To reduce the heat, the city's criminals team up to find the killer, and as Lang intercuts between two summit conferences -- the cops and the criminals -- we are struck by how similar the two groups are, visually. Both sit around tables in gloomy rooms, smoking so voluminously that at times their very faces are invisible. In their fat fingers their cigars look fecal. (As the criminals agree that murdering children violates their code, I was reminded of the summit on drugs in "[The Godfather](#).")

"M" was Lang's first sound picture, and he was wise to use dialogue so sparingly. Many early talkies felt they had to talk all the time, but Lang allows his camera to prowl through the streets and dives, providing a rat's-eye view. One of the film's most spectacular shots is utterly silent, as the captured killer is dragged into a basement

to be confronted by the city's assembled criminals, and the camera shows their faces: hard, cold, closed, implacable.

It is at this inquisition that Lorre delivers his famous speech in defense, or explanation. Sweating with terror, his face a fright mask, he cries out: "I can't help myself! I haven't any control over this evil thing that's inside of me! The fire, the voices, the torment!" He tries to describe how the compulsion follows him through the streets, and ends: "Who knows what it's like to be me?"

This is always said to be Lorre's first screen performance, although McGilligan establishes that it was his third. It was certainly the performance that fixed his image forever, during a long Hollywood career in which he became one of Warner Bros.' most famous character actors ("[Casablanca](#)," "The Maltese Falcon," "The Mask of Dimitrios"). He was also a comedian and a song-and-dance man, and although you can see him opposite [Fred Astaire](#) in "Silk Stockings" (1957), it was as a psychopath that he supported himself. He died in 1964.

Fritz Lang (1890-1976) became, in America, a famous director of film noir. His credits include "You Only Live Once" (1937, based on the Bonnie and Clyde story), Graham Greene's "Ministry of Fear" (1944), "[The Big Heat](#)" (1953, with [Lee Marvin](#) hurling hot coffee in Gloria Grahame's face) and "While the City Sleeps" (1956, another story about a manhunt). He was often accused of sadism toward his actors; he had Lorre thrown down the stairs into the criminal lair a dozen times, and [Peter Bogdanovich](#) describes a scene in Lang's "Western Union" where Randolph Scott tries to burn the ropes off his bound wrists. [John Ford](#), watching the movie, said, "Those are Randy's wrists, that is real rope, that is a real fire."

For years "M" was available only in scratchy, dim prints. Even my earlier laserdisc is only marginally watchable. This new version, restored by the Munich Film Archive, is not only better to look at but easier to follow, since more of the German dialogue has been subtitled. (Lorre also recorded a soundtrack in English, which should be made available as an option on the eventual laserdisc and DVD versions.) Watching the new print of "M," I found the film more powerful than I remembered, because I was not watching it through a haze of disintegration.

And what a haunting film it is. The film doesn't ask for sympathy for the killer Franz Becker, but it asks for understanding: As he says in his own defense, he cannot escape or control the evil compulsions that overtake him. Elsewhere in the film, an innocent old man, suspected of being the killer, is attacked by a mob that forms on the spot. Each of the mob members was presumably capable of telling right from wrong and controlling his actions (as Becker was not), and yet as a mob they moved with the same compulsion to kill. There is a



message there somewhere. Not "somewhere," really, but right up front, where it's a wonder it escaped the attention of the Nazi censors.

COMING UP IN THE BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS, FALL 2020, SERIES 41:

- Sept 8: Fritz Lang, *M/ M—Eine Stadt sucht einen Mörder* (1931)
- Sept 15: Akira Kurosawa, *Throne of Blood* (1957)
- Sept 22: Ingmar Bergman, *The Seventh Seal/Det sjunde inseglet* (1957)
- Sept 29: Marcel Camus, *Black Orpheus/Orfeo Negro* (1959)
- Oct 6: Luis Buñuel, *The Exterminating Angel/El ángel exterminador* (1962)
- Oct 13: Jean-Pierre Melville, *Le Samurái* (1967)
- Oct 20: Sergio Leone, *Once Upon a Time in the West/C'era una volta il West*, (1968)
- Oct 27: Andrei Tarkovsky, *Solaris/ Солярис* (1972)
- Nov 3: Werner Herzog, *Aguirre, the Wrath of God/Aguirre, der Zorn Gottes* (1972)
- Nov 10: Richard Rush, *The Stunt Man* (1980)
- Nov 17: Wim Wenders, *Wings of Desire/Der Himmel über Berlin* (1987)
- Nov 24: Krzysztof Kiesłowski, *Three Colors; Red/ Trois couleurs: Rouge/ Trzy kolory. Czerwony* (1994)
- Dec 1: Charlie Chaplin, *The Great Dictator* (1940)

CONTACTS:

email Diane Christian: engdc@buffalo.edu...email Bruce Jackson bjackson@buffalo.edu...
 for the series schedule, annotations, links and updates: <http://buffalofilmseminars.com>...
 to subscribe to the weekly email informational notes, send an email to addtolist@buffalofilmseminars.com....

The Buffalo Film Seminars are presented by the State University of New York at Buffalo and the Dipson Amherst Theatre, with support from the Robert and Patricia Colby Foundation and the Buffalo News.

