FRITZ LANG (5 December 1890, Vienna, Austria—2 August 1976, Beverly Hills, Los Angeles) directed 47 films, from Halbblut (Half-caste) in 1919 to Die Tausend Augen des Dr. Mabuse (The Thousand Eye of Dr. Mabuse) in 1960. Some of the others were Beyond a Reasonable Doubt (1956), The Big Heat (1953), Clash by Night (1952), Rancho Notorious (1952), Cloak and Dagger (1946), Scarlet Street (1945), The Woman in the Window (1944), Ministry of Fear (1944), Western Union (1941), The Return of Frank James (1940), Das Testament des Dr. Mabuse (The Crimes of Dr. Mabuse, Dr. Mabuse's Testament, The Last Will of Dr. Mabuse, 1933), Metropolis (1927), Dr. Mabuse, der Spieler (Dr. Mabuse, King of Crime, Dr. Mabuse: The Gambler, Inferno 1922) and Harakiri (Madame Butterfly (1919). He appears in a number of interesting interview films, among them Jean-Luc Godard's s20 Cinéma de notre temps: Le dinosaure et le bébe, dialogue en huit parties entre Fritz Lang et Jean-Luc Godard (1967). And he plays a movie director making a film in Godard's classic, Le Mépris (Contempt, 1963). The BFI site has the 1962 National Film Theatre interview with Lang on line at http://www.bfi.org.uk/features/lang/interview.html. Michael Grost's excellent critical bio of him on line at http://members.aol.com/MG4273/lang.htm. There's a good deal of Lang material on line at the British Film Institute web site: http://www.bfi.org.uk/features/lang/.

PETER LORRE (László Löwenstein, 26 June 1904, Rózsahegy, Austria-Hungary [now Ružomberok, Slovakia]—23 March 1964, Los Angeles, California, USA, stroke) had only one uncredited screen-role before his star-turning performance in M—as a dentist's patient in Die Verschwundene Frau (1929). He appears in a number of interesting interview films, among them Jean-Luc Godard's s20 Cinéma de notre temps: Le dinosaure et le bébe, dialogue en huit parties entre Fritz Lang et Jean-Luc Godard (1967). And he plays a movie director making a film in Godard's classic, Le Mépris (Contempt, 1963). The BFI site has the 1962 National Film Theatre interview with Lang on line at http://www.bfi.org.uk/features/lang/interview.html. Michael Grost's excellent critical bio of him on line at http://members.aol.com/MG4273/lang.htm. There's a good deal of Lang material on line at the British Film Institute web site: http://www.bfi.org.uk/features/lang/.

Fritz Arno Wagner (5 December 1894, Schmiedefeld am Rennsteig, Germany—18 August 1958, Gottinga, Prussia) has cinematographer credit on 129 films, the earliest of
which is Der Galeerensträfling (1919). The last was Ohne Mutter geht es nicht (1958). He also did Lang’s Das Testament des Dr. Mabuse (1933), F. W. Murnau’s Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens (Nosferatu the Vampire, 1922), and G. W. Pabst’s Die 3groschenoper (Threepenny Opera, 1931) and Das Tagebuch einer Verlorenen (Diary of a Lost Girl, 1929).

On May 15, 1924 the ‘Conference for Cinema Reform’ was opened at the ‘Urania,’ Vienna’s adult education center. The conference saw film as ‘a great cultural feat and a first-rate medium of popular entertainment.’

[The former head of the Film Department of the Foreign Ministry in Berlin, Robert Volz, spoke out in favor of film censorship. Lubitsch’s Die Flämme was shown as was Lang’s Die Nibelungen. Lang attacked what preceding speakers had said “bringing forth very bold and biting views. . . and indulging in tales of his own personal difficulties with the film industry and censorship.”]

Lang spoke very clearly and loudly against the very existence of film censorship, saying he did not believe a people to whom the state had documented its belief in its political maturity by giving it the right to vote needs a guardian just because some claim it is not mature enough to know what might be good or bad for it. The situation is unacceptable, for example, when a censorship board objects to a poster for the Nibelungen film because Siegfried is shown skewered by a spear, while a poster for Blaubart, the circus pantomime, can be seen on an advertising pillar, and shows skulls, naked women and blood merging in a lovely still life. I have nothing against the state introducing restrictions for youths, it’s fine with me, but it should not dictate for adults the kind of relaxation, regeneration and fortification their nerves need.

And now, ladies and gentlemen, I have arrived at the point of departure for the artistic development of a film drama. People who have experienced something as ghastly as a world war, people who are busy working and dealing with life have different views from those snobbish commentators who just go along with events, who sit in their club armchairs—not that I have anything against club armchairs—and try to force their artistic outlook on their fellow beings, while their own highest moments probably amount to the helpless stammerings of a bundle of nerves number by cocaine. The working person, is, thank God, too healthy not to feel a longing in his blood, the recurrent longing for the primeval ideal of humankind, for the vigorous man, the virginal girl and the virtuous woman. Proceeding from these components, this is where regenerating our people’s strength starts and along with it film drama’s. . . And please, do not condemn the sensationalist films of earlier years, for they made the rational development of the film drama possible; we saw the errors of this genre and based on them learned new forms of this novel art. . . .

We have learned that films have different laws than the theater and that film drama has merely something superficially in common with drama on the stage; we also learned that film has different laws than novels and novellas: it was a new art form, and this fact was tremendously important for those who were involved with all their hearts in the artistic development of film. For all art, but for film in particular, the most important law is that a person must be profoundly moved and obsessed with his own work.

And against this background, Lang finished his talk in a fashion which could hardly have astonished his audience.

He cried out two words to them, two words “that during the two years it took to produce the Nibelungen my colleagues and I had constantly envisioned, two words which I rediscovered at the premiere of the Nibelungen about ten days ago in London, that were in German on the coat of arms of the Prince of Wales: ‘Ich dien’ (‘I serve”).

“What I want: to create an art—perhaps a new art—with the aid of the moving image and its nearly unlimited technical possibilities, and in general give artistic form through my films to the final great problems facing mankind.”
My film *M*—a factual report

I thought it fitting to reflect the rhythm of our times, the objectivity of the age in which we are living and to make a film based entirely on factual reports.

Anyone who makes the effort to read closely the newspaper reports these days about a major homicide case of the past few years...will find a strange similarity of events in most instances, circumstances which repeat themselves almost as if natural laws were at work, such as the dreadful, psychotic fear of the general public, the self-accusation of the mentally inferior, denunciations unleashing the hate and all the jealousy which have built up over years of living side by side, attempts to feed the police investigators false leads, sometimes on malicious grounds and sometimes out of excessive zeal.

Bringing out all these things on the screen, separating them from the incidentals, seems to me to confront a film, based on factual reports, with a more substantial responsibility than the artistic reproduction of events: the responsibility of sounding a warning from real events, of educating and in this way of ultimately having a preventive effect.

On May 27, 1932 the movie *M* was shown again at U.T. cinema on Berlin’s Kurfürstendamm and, according to the latest press reports, highly applauded. *Der Angriff*, a rabble-rousing National Socialist newspaper edited by Josef Goebbels, carried a notice in which the movie was subordinated, on ideological grounds, to the National Socialist interpretation of law and Peter Lorre in the leading role was stigmatized as the prototype killer, the impression being amplified by a caricature. This virtually anticipated the inclusion of sequences from the closing scene of Lang’s movie in the anti-Semitic propaganda films *Juden ohne Maske* (1938, Walter Böttcher, Leo v.d. Schmiede) and *Der Ewige Jude* (Fritz Hippler, 1940) for no other purpose but to denounce Lorre as a Jew and thus a child killer.

“Fritz Lang’s movie *M* is showing again in the Ufa-Theater on Kurfürstendamm. Only today we have heard that yet another sex killer sentenced to death has been reprieved. Current events have caught up with *M* again. Apart from its purely cinematic fantasy, this movie is the best argument against the opponents of the death penalty. The killer (Peter Lorre) has lost nothing of his gruesome repulsiveness to this day” (*Der Angriff*, No. 111, May 31, 1932)

Discussion on *M* centered more around the implications for criminal law than on the crimes and criminal investigation procedures. “This evening watched Fritz Lang’s *M* with Magda, Fantastic! Counters all sentimental humanitarianism. For the death penalty! Well done. One day, Lang will be our director,” noted Joseph Goebbels, the later Minister for Enlightenment and Propaganda in his diary on May 21, 1931. However, Lang, had made it clear a number of times that “he had definitely not wanted to make a film advocating the death penalty, but had merely presented for discussion objective arguments for and against the death penalty alongside the basic tenet of the film: ‘protect your children’” (*Lichtbild-Bühne*, No. 121, May 21, 1931). It was precisely his supposedly undecided attitude on the question of the death penalty—the subject of heated discussion in Germany in spring 1931 and one instrumentalized for party political reasons—that Lang came under attack a number of times from Protestants, among others.

[Axel Eggebrecht w/ reference to Peter Lorre] “We got to know one another around the time he was playing, with unparalleled sensitivity, a sex-killer in *M*, directed by Fritz Lang. This classic film has always been important to me, because I have never again observed that fruitful, and at the same time, alarming impact a great actor can have on viewers who are no longer able to distinguish between the real person and the person portrayed.”