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***DAS TESTAMENT DES DR. MABUSE/THE TESTAMENT OF DR. MABUSE 1933 (122 minutes)***



**Directed by** Fritz Lang  
**Written by** Fritz Lang and Thea von Harbou  
**Produced by** Fritz Lang and Seymour Nebenzal  
**Original music by** Hans Erdmann  
**Cinematography by** Karl Vash and Fritz Arno Wagner  
**Edited by** Conrad von Molo and Lothar Wolff  
**Art direction by** Emil Hasler and Karl Vollbrecht

Rudolf Klein-Rogge...Dr. Mabuse  
 Gustav Diessl...Thomas Kent  
 Rudolf Schündler...Hardy  
 Oskar Höcker...Bredow  
 Theo Lingen...Karetzky  
 Camilla Spira...Juwelen-Anna  
 Paul Henckels...Lithographraeger  
 Otto Wernicke...Kriminalkommissar Lohmann /  
 Commissioner Lohmann  
 Theodor Loos...Dr. Kramm  
 Hadrian Maria Netto...Nicolai Griforiew  
 Paul Bernd...Erpresser / Blackmailer  
 Henry Pleß...Bulle  
 Adolf E. Licho...Dr. Hauser  
 Oscar Beregi Sr....Prof. Dr. Baum (as Oscar Beregi)  
 Wera Liessem...Lilli

**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), *M* (1931), *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 *Cinéma de notre temps: Le dinosaure et le bébé, 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).

There's a good deal of Lang material on line at the British Film Institute web site: <http://www.bfi.org.uk/features/lang/>.

**RUDOLF KLEIN-ROGGE** (24 November 1888, Cologne, Germany—30 April 1955, Graz, Wetzelsdorf, Styria, Austria) was married to Thea von Harbou, who was later Fritz Lang's wife and collaborator. He appeared in 87 films, the last of which was *Hochzeit auf dem Bärenhof* (1942). Some of the others were *Das Herz der Königin*/*Mary Queen of Scots* (1940), *Parkstrasse*

13 (1939), *Madame Bovary* (1937), *Intermezzo* (1936), *Der Kaiser von Kalifornien/The Emperor of California* (1936), *Zwischen Himmel und Erde/Between Heaven and Earth* (1934), *Das Testament des Dr. Mabuse/Das Tagebuch des Dr. Mabuse* (1933), *Spione/Spies* (1928), *Casanova* (1927), *The Queen Was in the Parlour* (1927), *Metropolis* (1927), *Der Mann seiner Frau/Her Husband's Wife* (1926), *Die Nibelungen: Kriemhilds Rache/Die Nibelungen: Kreimhild's Revenge* (1924), *Die Nibelungen: Siegfried* (1924), *Dr. Mabuse, der Spieler - Ein Bild der Zeit/Dr. Mabuse: the Gambler* (1922), *Der müde Tod/Between Two Worlds* (1921), *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (1920), *Morphium* (1919) and *Der Film von der Königin Luise - parts 1 and 2* (1913).

**GUSTAV DIESSL** (30 December 1899, Vienna, Austria-Hungary—20 March 1948, Vienna, Austria) appeared in 62 films, the last of which was *Ruf an das Gewissen* (1949). *Some of the others were* *Der Prozeß/The Trial* (1948), *Nebbie sul mare* (1944), *Nora* (1944), *La danza del fuoco* (1943), *La donna del peccato* (1942), *Clarissa* (1941), *Ich verweigere die Aussage/I Refuse to Testify* (1939), *Der Weg nach Shanghai/Moscow-Shanghai* (1936), *Alles um eine Frau/Everything for a Woman* (1935), *Un de la montagne/Mountain Man* (1934), *Das Testament des Dr. Mabuse/Das Tagebuch des Dr. Mabuse* (1933), *Eine von uns/One of Us* (1932), *Menschen hinter Gittern/Men Behind Bars* (1931), *Die weiße Hölle vom Piz Palü/The White Hell of Pitz Palu* (1929), *Die Ehe/The Marriage* (1929), *That Murder in Berlin* (1929), *Die Büchse der Pandora/Pandora's Box* (1929), *Ssanin* (1924) and *Im Banne der Kralle* (1921).

**OTTO WERNICKE** (30 September 1893, Osterode, Harz, Germany—7 November 1965, Munich, Germany) appeared in 86 films, the last of which was *Immer die Mädchen* (1959). *Some of the others were* *Der Hauptmann von Köpenick* (1956), *Amore e sangue/City of Violence* (1951), *Du bist nicht allein* (1949), *Lang ist der Weg* (1948), *Titanic* (1943), *Die Kellnerin Anna/The Waitress Anna* (1941), *Der Stammbaum des Dr. Pistorius* (1939), *D III 38/D III 88: The New German Air Force Attacks* (1939), *Gold in New Frisco* (1939), *Nordlicht* (1938), *Autobus S* (1937), *Das Schloß in Flandern/The Castle in Flanders* (1936), *Henker, Frauen und Soldaten/Hangmen, Women and Soldiers* (1935), *Peer Gynt* (1934), *Der Herr der Welt/Master of the World* (1934), *Der Tunnel* (1933), *S.A.-Mann Brand/Storm Trooper Brand* (1933), *Das Testament des Dr. Mabuse* (1933), *Die verkaufte Braut/The Bartered Bride* (1932), *M* (1931), *Die Hölle von Montmartre* (1928), *Das Parfüm der Mrs. Worrington* (1925) and *Mädchen, die man nicht heiratet* (1924).

**THEODOR LOOS** 18 May 1883, Zwingenberg, Hessen—27 June 1954, Stuttgart, Germany) was in almost 200 films, the last of which was *Die blonde Frau des Maharadscha/The Marharajah's Blonde* (1962). In the early 1930s, he was appearing in 10 films a year. *Some of his other films were* *Die Gefangene des Maharadscha/Circus Girl* (1954), *Mordprozeß Dr. Jordan* (1949), *Titanic* (1943), *Rembrandt* (1942), *Jud Süß/Jew Süss* (1940)(yeah, **that** *Jud Süß*), *Schatten über St. Pauli/Shadows over St. Pauli* (1938), *Die gläserne Kugel/The Glass Ball* (1937), *Weißer Sklaven/White Slaves* (1937), *Verräter/The Traitor* (1936), *Henker, Frauen und Soldaten/Hangment, Women and Soldiers*

(1935), *Stradivari* (1935), *Das Mädchen Johanna/Joan of Arc* (1935), *Der alte und der junge König - Friedrichs des Grossen Jugend/The Making of a King* (1935), *Wilhelm Tell* (1934), *Der Judas von Tirol* (1933), *Das Testament des Dr. Mabuse* (1933), *Spione am Werk/Spies at Work* (1933), *Die unsichtbare Front/The Invisible Front* (1933), *Acht Mädels im Boot/Eight Girls in a Boat* (1932), *Schuß im Morgengrauen/A Shot at Dawn* (1932), *Rasputin, Dämon der Frauen/Rasputin, Demon with Women* (1932), *M* (1931), *Ludwig der Zweite, König von Bayern* (1930), *Napoleon auf St. Helena* (1929), *Heimkehr/Homecoming* (1928), *Luther* (1928), *Bigamie* (1927), *Metropolis* (1927), *Die Nibelungen: Kriemhilds Rache* (1924), *Die Nibelungen: Siegfried* (1924), *Das Kabinett des Dr. Segato* (1923), *Jugend/Youth* (1922), *Das Haus in der Dragonerstrasse* (1921), *Die Toten kehren wieder - Enoch Arden* (1919), *Die Andere/The Other* (1916), *Die Eisbraut* (1913) and *Das goldene Bett* (1913).



**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 filmscripts 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 Lingen, 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).

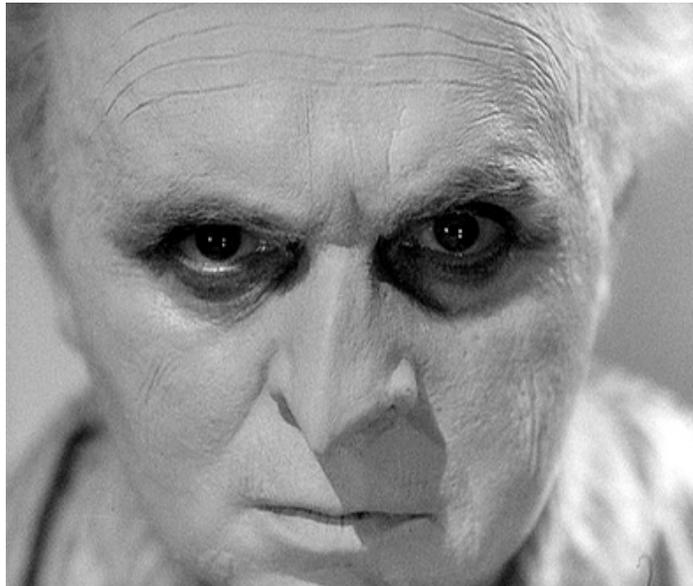
In some ways *Dr. Mabuse* returns to the world of *Die Spinnen*. Mabuse is a fiendish mastermind, a man of a thousand disguises, gifted with sinister hypnotic powers, leader of a gang of criminals and cutthroats. During the course of the complicated plot he manipulates the Stock Exchange, steals treaties, 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 Niebelungenlied*, 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 Niebelungen* 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, Frita-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....

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 mind 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....For eighteen months he stayed on MGM’s payroll without directing a single foot of film. ...

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 Müde 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).

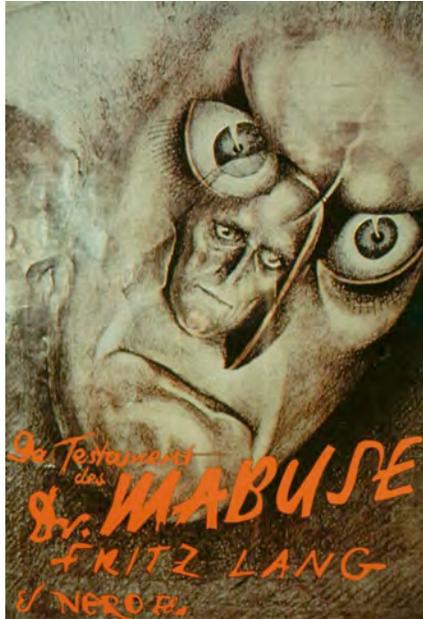
...Lang moved on to RKO to direct the last, and most individual of his three Westerns, *Rancho Notorious* (1952)...Lang’s career was now at a low ebb....One reason for this, he discovered, was that he was considered politically suspect, having associated with such “premature anti-fascists” as Brecht, 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 malign 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 *Fritz Lang His Life and Work. Photographs and Documents. Edited by Rolf Aurich, Wolfgang Jacobsen & Cornelius Schnaubel. Film Museum, Berlin, 2001.*

The Case of Dr. Mause. Thea von Harbou, March 26, 1933

I do not believe that it is possible to “chat” about a subject like *Das Testament des Dr. Mabuse*; it is much too dense, too charged with strictly male energies, too much an interaction of cause and effect, and of grim consequences. The film takes place in two realms: in the austere world of police detectives battling crime (which does without any false romanticism here), on the one hand; and in the mysterious world of those we call mentally ill, and the doctor who devotes himself to their deranged inner worlds, on the other.

Hans Taussig

Because there was no way of predicting how the wind conditions would be on the day of the shoot or how the smoke would exactly develop, Fritz Lang had to have the option of timing the explosions and the ignition of the fire individually depending on the smoke situation. In other words, he had to make sure that a chimney would not collapse at precisely the instant when it

was totally hidden by smoke. To guarantee that he had the greatest possible control over the timing of the fire, the explosion and the collapsing chimneys, Fritz Lang had the various electric cables converge in a detonation box; this would allow him to provoke the effects he wanted by pressing each button himself. Even this detonation box was a masterpiece in its own right.

Oskar Beregi, Rudolph Klein-Rouge The Ban

In early March 1933, 183 Berlin cinemas had booked *Das Testament des Dr. Mabuse* from Universal, the distributors, for the coming weeks. Shortly afterwards, it became known that some fifty films with communist or pacifist leanings or sexual tendencies were in danger of being banned. As the printer had not prepared all of the acts of the Mabuse film in time for its first obligatory viewing by the censorship board, a second session of censors was called for March 29. This time the censors banned the film produced by Nero-Film. The senior government councilor at the Reich Ministry of the Interior, Walter Erbe, who attended the film viewing as a film expert, wrote in a record of the minutes for the Minister that the film posed “a real danger to the state”, since “its endless portrayal of the most serious crimes, a horrifying mixture of crime and madness” presented a grave threat to public security and order. For “the communist elements, who were condemned to political impotence in Germany, this film—which showed a criminal gang organized around different fields of activity—was a verifiable textbook on how to prepare and commit terrorist acts.” The day before, Joseph Goebbels, who had been the Reich Minister for Enlightenment and Propaganda for two weeks, watched the film at Lang’s request and ordered it to be banned. Even up to the end of 1944, however, Goebbels allowed the film which was kept in the Reich Film Archives, to be shown to certain political circles. In place of Lang’s film, *Blutendes Deutschland* was released to cinemas on

March 30; it was a “national factual film” to quote film journalist Fritz Olinsky, writing the following day in the “Berliner Börsen-Zeitung.” This first feature-length Nazi propaganda film showed the course taken by Germany from unity in 1871 to the beginning of the Third Reich. It was categorically anti-bougeois, anti-socialist and anti-Semitic. On April 1, 1933, the first “mass actions” took place against the Jewish population in Germany, announced by Goebbels as “revenge” for alleged injuries. “The stamping of heavy boots resounded from the pavements” wrote commentator Bella Fromm in her diary, “Blood and Banquets.” And she continued: “Now voices rose in carefully rehearsed group recital: “To hell with the Jews” followed by a lusty chorus of the “Horst Wessel song.”

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

### **COMING UP IN THE SPRING 2010 BUFFALO FILM SEMINARS XX:**

Albert Lewin, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* 1945

Jules Dassin, *Night and the City* 1950

Charles Laughton, *The Night of the Hunter* (1955)

Kon Ichikawa, *Biruma no tategoto/The Burmese Harp* 1956

Sam Peckinpah, *Ride the High Country* 1962

Costa-Gavras, *Z* 1969

Peter Yates, *The Friends of Eddie Coyle* 1973

John Cassavetes, *A Woman Under the Influence* 1974

Stanley Kubrick, *The Shining* 1980

Wolfgang Petersen, *Das Boot* 1981

Federico Fellini, *Ginger & Fred*, 1985

Michael Mann, *Collateral* 2004

**Contacts:** ...email Diane Christian: [engdc@buffalo.edu](mailto:engdc@buffalo.edu) ...email Bruce Jackson [bjackson@buffalo.edu](mailto:bjackson@buffalo.edu) ...for the series schedule, weekly crew info on annotations, links and updates: <http://buffalofilmseminars.com> ...for the email informational notes, send an email to either of us. ...for cast and any film: <http://imdb.com/search.html>



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