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Lang and Law: Analyzing Representations of Law, Justice, and Violence in the Films of Fritz Lang

Dante Fresse

Bucknell University, daf029@bucknell.edu

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Lang and Law:
Analyzing the Representations of Law, Justice, and Violence in the Films of Fritz Lang

By

Dante A. Fresse

A Thesis Submitted to the Honors Council
for Honors in Film/Media Studies

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Adviser: Professor Eric Faden



Co-Adviser: Professor Ken Eisenstein



Department Chairperson: John Hunter

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Abstract

This thesis analyzes the representations of Law, Justice, and Violence in the German and American films of Fritz Lang. Through an overview of legal and social unrest in Germany and courtroom drama, criminal conviction, mob violence, and police corruption in America, Lang challenges the legitimacy of Law and shows how it is subverted by outside forces. At other times, Lang shows Law working in collusion with criminal agencies or against the interests of the public. In doing this, Lang's films present images of legal decay in the urban sphere, prompted by anxieties which come about through spatial alienation, city structure, penal institutions, and social cultures of violence. Emerging from Lang's critique of Law is an ethical force which abides by the mechanisms of human nature, which Gunning calls the "destiny-machine." This thesis uses Gunning's theory of the "destiny-machine," in conjunction with philosophical writings of Walter Benjamin to show how a critique of legal violence is shown through Lang films, as well as a correction method which presents itself through the deployment of mystical violence, taking the form of psychological instability and moral conscience in his characters. Through these forms of metaphysical violence, Lang shows images of a new future for Law, where its governing power is drawn from universal, objective moral principles of human nature, rather than the socially constructed and malleable institutions of the Law. My thesis connects these morally governing principles back to the fundamental human and religious experiences of Love.

Preface

Lotte Eisner writes of Fritz Lang as a filmmaker “blessed with an infallible instinct for capturing the atmosphere of the country in which he is working.”¹ Lang’s filmography exists as a transnational entity, capturing the settings and social conditions of 20th century Western Europe and America during the post war years and amid times of great economic crisis. At the core of each of Lang’s most important films lie representations of society, civilization, and penal judgment, which carry deconstructive insights into the binaries of good/evil, lawmaker/lawbreaker, criminal/authority, and citizen/psychopath.

Lang’s films explore Law and punishment, breaking down police investigation, criminal activity, and forms of murder to expose the similarities between lawful and unlawful violence in both Germany and America. Lang’s films reveal moral dilemmas of the Law, including its inability to disseminate universalized justice and its underlying malleability, hindering it from functioning under the outside pressures of bureaucracy and socio-economic conditions. While delegitimizing the penal cultures of Weimer Germany and post-World War II America, Lang’s cinema offers us a vision of justice from beyond the realm of legislative punishment. Taking the role of the ‘author’ of justice in his films, Lang disseminates judgment on all his characters based on a universalized set of moral principles, criticizing lawmakers and lawbreakers alike.

In this thesis, I will analyze several films of Fritz Lang’s German and American periods, establishing relationships between the narratives, themes, characters, and aesthetics and how Lang represents institutions of law, violence, and punishment. Lang presents a social critique on the “criminal underbelly” of society, the average man, and even officers of law enforcement,

¹ Eisner, Lotte H. *Fritz Lang*. Da Capo Press, (1986). P. 146

bringing the viewer to question the merit of the Law as an ultimate enforcer of justice. Moreover, I will elaborate and add to arguments laid out by film scholar, Tom Gunning, who contends that Lang's films inflict divine justice on lawbreaking characters through the recurring presence of Destiny and Fate (the authorial 'hands' of judgment which hover over the Lang's cinematic universe), serving as the true arbiters of moral punishment.

Lang's films are inextricably tied to his biography, connecting his artwork to his own experiences and observations of violence and civil chaos in a volatile Weimer Germany and status as a foreigner in America from 1936-56. Lang's German film *M* (1931) will serve as both the starting point for my discussion of crime and investigation, as well as an intersection between the investigations of criminals and the police. Building from the work of other film scholars, I will argue that *M*'s plot utilizes the city-wide pursuit of an enigmatic killer, Hans Beckert, to introduce a parallel between convicts and the authorities and their relationship to urban space. While each group operates through different methods of investigation, both criminals and officers of Law become intertwined visually through the film's cutting of space and time.

I argue that this film is a representation of the social and cultural climate of Weimer Republic Germany, in which binary conceptions of law and violence broke down, putting pressure on criminal syndicates and police forces in the wake of economic and civil chaos. Lang shows that through the pursuit and capture of Beckert, criminals and police aspire to re-instate a hierarchy of penal order which has been jeopardized by the introduction of the killer's chaos.

Lang's American films, *Fury* (1936), *Scarlet Street* (1945), and *The Big Heat* (1954), shift focus from social and legal order in society to a more intimate study of Law, exploring the inversions of interrelationships between Law and crime through characters which inhabit each world or exist somewhere in between them. In each film, the audience is introduced to characters

who expose the malleability of Law and operate around the parameters of it for personal reward, vendetta, or self-indulgence. These individuals take on a personalized view of justice and ethics to justify their immorality. Through this disobedience to the word of the Law, Lang presents a social critique on criminals, the average man, and even officers within law enforcement. Moreover, Lang identifies issues with the American penal system, identifying the misuse of lawful violence by American police and courtrooms.

My argument will be mapped out in three chapters, moving across two different periods of Lang's personal life and cinematic career, then concluding with an analysis of Lang's last German film before going to America, *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* (1934). This *Mabuse* film will serve to consummate Lang's philosophy towards crime, as well as our understanding of legal fragility, criminal power, and cultural psychology in his films. Chapter 1 focuses on *M*, using the film to connect Langian themes of urban investigation, legal systems, and Fate. Furthermore, I will discuss how *M* explores supernatural concepts of duality within the individual self and justice system. In my analysis, I will incorporate other films, such as *Dr. Mabuse the Gambler* (1921), to show what other visions of modern crime, police surveillance, and civil oppression Lang was imaging during his time in Weimar Germany.

Chapter 2 will serve as a comprehensive examination of Lang's second film from the *Mabuse* trilogy, *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*. This analysis will demonstrate how the evolution, social ascension, demise, and symbolic revival of criminal protagonist Dr. Mabuse captures Lang's psychological perspective on the lawbreaker versus lawmaker relationship, his filmic imagination of character and Fate, and cultural representation of Weimar Law.

Moreover, through *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*, Lang introduces a social critique of the budding ideologies which give rise of Nazi government in World War II. He then illustrates the

limitation of legal powers to control Mabuse by showing how the criminal can commit his crimes from within the confines of the asylum and from beyond the grave. Therein, Mabuse's capacity to commit chaos exists outside of the control of the legal world. Lang relates Mabuse's influence to a god-like force which operates with the same omniscient power as Fate, guiding narratives, plots, and characters similarly to how Lang does himself. Mabuse and Lang operate as competing forces of chaos and order, respectively, in his *Mabuse* films. The influence each force has on the individual Fates and morals of characters synthesizes thematic elements of the director's career, as well as Lang's takes on human psychology in response to outside forces of circumstance, decision, and chance. I hope to show how the aesthetics, themes, and the authoritative roles played by both Lang and Mabuse in *Testament* connect his German and American works, bridging together concepts through *M*, *Fury*, *Scarlet Street* and *The Big Heat*.

Chapter 3 will focus on Lang's American films *Fury* (1936) and *The Big Heat* (1953), including an analysis of Lang's mysticism in *Scarlet Street* (1945). I demonstrate that Lang's main characters, Dave Bannion, Chris Cross, and Joe Wilson, hold subjective views of both justice and ethics to form their own codes of justice in a legal system that is either absent or corrupted in society. Through Lang's American Period, we see how he brings criminal activity into the courtroom and police department, guiding his perception of Law and ethics in post-war America

Throughout these chapters, I argue that love acts as a primary source of ethical guidance for Lang's characters. Moral conflicts, crimes, and potential acts of violence are resolved through character progressions towards romantic love over self-interest, brought on by the appearance of edifying female figures. These female figures—the mothers in *M*, Mrs. Bannion in *The Big Heat*, Lilli in *Testament of Dr. Mabuse*, and Katherine Grant in *Fury*—function as the author's agents

of Fate, as well as counterforces to the Evil will of Mabuse. Through love as a force of moral motivation, Lang directs the ethics of his characters, while showing how the absence of love in his criminals—Hans Beckert and Chris Cross—leads to murder, insanity, and psychological punishment.

My thesis builds on the writings and theories of Lang experts and film authors, such as Anton Kaes, Tom Gunning, Thomas Elsaesser, Colin MacArthur, and Siegfried Kracauer. Moreover, I will be using work from the 20th century social thinkers such as Erich Fromm, Michel Foucault, and Walter Benjamin, who offer moral critiques on lawful violence, hierarchies of power, and modern love. Benjamin's essay "Critique on Violence," from his book *Reflections*, Foucault's *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, and Erich Fromm's *The Art of Loving* will ground my filmic analysis in modern philosophies on the ethics of government, prison, and courtrooms, as well as their outlooks on violence, punishment, and human relationships.

My exploration of Lang's filmography will dually serve as a filmic analysis of the auteur's visual style, mise-en-scene, and aesthetic development across his career, and a social reflection on the depictions of law, ethics, and civil and penal violence in his seminal works. Exploring these complicated themes from a transnational perspective will deepen our understanding of Lang as an artist and cultural observer. Floating between two separate worlds, Lang's nomadism helps us to gain a fuller view of German and American society during volatile points of social instability and civil aggression. By applying such careful analysis to Lang's work, we begin to understand the director's contribution to 20th century discourses which worked

to expose social injustice, legal instability, and deconstruct binary conceptions of law and violence in the modern world.



Figure I: The Face of Justice (*The Blue Gardenia*, 1953)

Chapter 1:

M: Violence, Paranoia, and Law in Weimar Germany

When film historian Gero Gandert, in a 1963 interview with Fritz Lang, asked him to explain the recurring motifs of guilt, innocence, persecution, temptation, and death in his films, the director responded by saying:

my films are based on the struggle of the individual against fate, the grappling of the primarily good person with a higher, superior force, be it a generally accepted injustice or the force of a corrupt organization, society, or authority. Or be it the force of his own conscious or unconscious impulses.²

M, Lang's penultimate German film and first sound picture, shows this internal struggle from the vantage point of a city, grappling against a force of chaos existing within the anatomic architecture of the metropolis itself. The film's plot, revolving around the police's pursuit of the wanted child murderer, Hans Beckert, exposes parallels between the worlds of Law and Crime in this German metropolis. Lang shows how these groups work together to create, impose, and maintain a social order in the city; however, once Beckert's presence de-stabilizes this established hierarchy, the fragility of their social structure is revealed.

In this chapter, I will examine the ways in which Inspector Lohmann's police force, Herr Schranker's gang of criminals, and Hans Beckert, an outsider to both parties, shape a nexus where the social, legal, and psychological fracturing of Germany's Weimar Republic come into vision. Lang's critique of law enforcers and criminals leads to larger philosophical reflections on the ethics of societal Law. Here, the director responds to the moral and legal dysfunctions created by Hans Beckert by authoring justice into his own film. Lang intervenes to introduce personal themes of Fate, mythology, and a universalized justice that influences his characters.

² Lang, Fritz, and Barry Keith Grant. *Fritz Lang: Interviews*. 2003. University Press of Mississippi. 33

The social and legal settings of *M* draw from Germany's condition following World War I. The decade after the First World War introduced economic debt, destabilizing the German currency. Lang's film points to social problems created by this economic instability in the city. Weimar historian Matthew Stibbe connects the Weimar Period's economic shortcomings with the wide spreading of crime in Germany during the late-1910s and 20s. He writes that "by 1923, the German prison population had itself climbed to an estimated daily average of 100,000, a figure far above the pre-war and even wartime rates."³ Along with heightened prison ratings, an environment of cooperation was fostered between lawbreakers and lawmakers in the Weimar Republic. German social critic Christian Graf Von Krockow claims that investigation into the bureaucracy and "legal system within the Weimar Republic reveals a long series of scandals and an almost systematic perversion of justice."⁴ In the political realm, pardons were exchanged for party alliances with conservative German groups. The historian uses an example of legal corruption through politically motivated murders by 'left' and 'right-wing' military supporters:

from 1918 to 1922, there were 22 cases of murder proved from 'the left'; 17 of the culprits received harsh sentences including 10 who were executed. In stark contrast, although there were 354 murders committed by 'the right' in the same period, only *one* received a strong sentence and none were executed"⁵

These judicial decisions were arranged according to political affiliation and economic circumstances of the accused. Von Krockow points out the gap this created between aristocrats and working and lower-class citizens, who were victimized by the privileging of the Law by police. He notes that "Gustav Radburch, Minister of Justice in the Reich...spoke of a "war

³ Stibbe, Matthew. *Germany, 1914-1933: Politics, Society and Culture*, 2014. Routledge. 107

⁴ Krockow, Christian von, and Reicke Schweitzer. *The Germans in Their Century, 1890-1990*. 2009. Manchester University Press. 112

⁵ Ibid. 113

between the people and the Judiciary,” emerging from tensions between the objective word of the Law and the attachment of social hierarchies to it, based on privilege and politics.⁶

Lang’s picture of Germany critiques these institutions of law enforcement during this time of economic and legal instability. Moreover, he capitalizes on the general paranoia surrounding “murder” among urban citizenship to capture popular feelings of distrust towards law enforcement and its capacity to regulate and punish acts of killing. The film opens by presenting an environment which might appear as one of civilian peace and stability. Children play outside while their mothers are indoors, cleaning and ordering the house before lunch. Lang shows images of social stability and routine life on the city’s surface; however, beneath these appearances, Lang shows disturbances which attach ominous undertones to this scene. The first shot of the film shows a ring of children playing a rendition of ‘Duck-Duck-Goose’ --“Just wait a little while, and the nasty man in black will come/With his little chopper, he will chop you up”—which is ended when one of the mothers comes to the balcony and shouts at the children to stop playing the game. Back upstairs, the mothers discuss rumors circulating about a child murderer lurking in the city.

In “Identifying the Suspect”—from Joe McElhaney’s edited collection of essays on Lang’s cinema, *A Companion to Fritz Lang*—Olga Solovieva puts various critical positions and theories on *M* through her own interpretive scope. Solovieva reads the mothers’ horror, sparked by the threat of a deranged murderer kidnapping and killing their children, as the initiator of “the climate of terror [that arises] in the city.”⁷ In Elsie Beckmann’s murder sequence, Lang begins with a wide shot of a school getting out of session, as parents wait outside for their children.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Solovieva, Olga. "Identifying the Subject: Lang's *M* and the Trajectories of Film Criticism." *A Companion to Fritz Lang*. 2015. John Wiley & Sons. 105. Print.

Elsie Beckmann exits the school and walks home by herself; Lang intercuts images of Elsie's journey home with her mother cooking food, washing her clothes, and setting her place for dinner. As Elsie walks through the city streets, Lang isolates her from the mechanized environment. She navigates past the threats of oncoming vehicles and anonymous strangers. The city space seeks to expel Elise from it—cars honk at Elsie to get out of the road, as she crosses the street, she is nearly hit by one and a police officer must help her cross.

Lang stresses the fast-pace and commotion of the urban environment, which acts apathetically towards Elsie's presence as she moves through it. Gunning writes that "Lang's topographical portrayal of urban space, of the interconnections



Figure 1.0: The Murderer's Shadow

and atomization of the world of the metropolis, [shows] a space gridded and integrated, yet strangely blind to itself, unaware of what happens within it...[becoming] a space of danger and, indeed, of warfare."⁸ The mobilized danger of the urban space does not shelter Elise from it; she is thrown into the visual and sonic warfare which rejects idleness and humanity and demands alertness. Contrary to her environment, Elsie is shown bouncing a ball along the street while inattentive and faceless torsos of adults pass her by. Elsie is absorbed in her play, cut off from

⁸ Gunning, Tom. *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity*, 2000, British Film Institute, 175

the sounds and sights of the grey city around her. Film theorist, Stephen Jenkins, observes “a link between the ‘freezing’ of characters as elements of décor and the concentration on significant objects”, suggesting an inverse relationship of symbolism between Lang’s characters and the objects they possess. Elsie’s ball functions as an object of her innocence, as her play with it reinforces the naïve ambivalence with which she engages with the dangers of the city. Lang forces Elsie into contact with the violence of the city—she walks over to a nearby street police and throws her ball against a Wanted sign, offering \$10,000 for the capture of an unidentified murderer.

Much like Lang’s distortion of the game ‘Duck-Duck-Goose,’ he filters the disturbances of the city into Elsie’s innocent play. Elsie, oblivious to the threat being communicated by this poster, separates the dangers of her urban environment from her imagined experience of the city. Lang brings the killer’s presence into Elsie’s world, using her game as an icebreaker for Beckert’s introduction into the story. A silhouette of Beckert moves into frame, points its head down at Elsie and says, “You have a pretty ball!” In this moment, Elsie’s ball is transformed from an object of escape and innocence into a fetishistic item. Beckert’s psychopathic sexualization of the little girl’s play redefines the context of Elsie’s ball and brings her imagined experience into contact with the real danger of the city. Beckert’s shadow casts itself across his own wanted poster, emblemizing his facelessness with a black silhouette which denies the audience a look at the man Elsie speaking to. Instead, as seen in Figure 1.0, the profile of Beckert’s shaded face hovers over the word, “Murderer.” This title immediately fills in for the face that is not shown to the viewer—Lang stitches the name “Murderer” into Beckert’s unseen countenance⁹. Lang’s image of Beckert’s silhouette, Elsie’s bouncing ball, and the wanted

⁹ See Figure 1.0: The Murderer’s Shadow

poster, captures the conflicted nexus of unknown danger, humanity, and crime formed within the city.

Soloviena writes that “Lang wanted quite unambiguously, to address the problem of the social invisibility of psychopathic criminals” within the city.¹⁰ The social phenomenon of the city created condensed groups of people, which produced an overwhelming inundation of physiognomies. These ubiquitous faces appear and disappear throughout Lang’s film, coming as unnamed characters or miscellaneous figures embedded in larger crowds. These mass groupings facilitate the “social invisibility” which Solovieva talks about, allowing for the killer to move through urban space unnoticed. Expert of Weimar cinema, Thomas Elsaesser claims that through Beckert, Lang represents the potentially dangerous and “darker side of the urban *flaneur*.”¹¹ The horror of the invisible murderer is created by the congested topography of the metropolis: unnoticed, mass synchronized and mechanical movements through gridded space give agency to the *flaneur*, the urban wanderer. This invisible wanderer blends into the distracting sounds and sights of the city—car horns, people, and shadows. These disguises become the *flaneur*’s camouflage to move freely through the metropolis, committing crimes without fear of detection by the police.

Beckert’s murder of Elsie is communicated through a montage of images that all reflect an absence (a vacant apartment building, empty playground, and Ms. Beckmann’s echoed cries down a deserted stairwell). The sequence ends with the object of innocence, Elsie’s ball, rolling out of bush, leftwards, onto a grass field, and a balloon, formed to resemble a little girl, floating vertically upwards into an electricity pole before rising into the sky. Lang leaves us with a

¹⁰ Soloviena, Olga. "Identifying the Subject: Lang's M and the Trajectories of Film Criticism." *A Companion to Fritz Lang*. 2015. John Wiley & Sons. 107. Print.

¹¹ Elsaesser, Thomas. *Weimar Cinema and after: Germany's Historical Imaginary*. 2009. Routledge, 145

symbol of Elsie's ascension to an afterlife, having the balloon soar into the sky and out of the image frame. The balloon's ascension captures the religious image of her passage into another world; however, before Elsie is freed from the metropolis, the balloon becomes ensnared once more by the structure of the city—the wires of the electric pole trap the balloon before it floats up and away into the sky.

News Cycles of Elsie Beckmann's Death:

Lang shows the city dive into social hysteria through the rapid circulation of information about Elsie's death, distributed through the city's news cycle. The screen fades from black to the sound of newspaper couriers shouting down the streets of the city, announcing the arrival of a news extra about a "New Crime!" Cutting to a bird's eye view shot, Lang shows a congested group of citizens frantically reaching for copies of the paper from a news courier. This man hands out newspapers from the center of the crowd, shouting the article headline as people continue to surround him: "Who is the Murder?" Lang cuts to an image of Beckert from behind, hunching over the window sill of his apartment and writing the anonymous confession that appears in the newspapers. Beckert's body hovers over the citizens below. The murderer uses his written testament to deploy chaos onto the city. In doing so, Beckert echoes the actions of Mabuse later in *Testament*, who authors dysfunction and disarray through the writing of messages which are then interpreted and implemented into reality by his protégé, Dr. Baum. In this case, however, Beckert uses the already structured forms and cycles of information in the city, i.e. news, to infiltrate and destabilize the order of the urban space, keeping himself at a safe distance from the chaos that unfolds beneath him.

The sonic congestion, created by the shouts of voices in the crowd, as well as Lang's visual packing of people in his frame, shows an eruption of chaos in the city, circling around the

question of the murderer's identity. Gunning identifies Lang's next few shots as a series of "vignettes of typical scenes as the city is gripped by fear...[which] articulates the fragmentary nature of the citizens of the metropolis...each absorbed in their own dramas and reactions to the crisis."¹² Citizens read wanted posters which express the terror of the murderer re-surfacing. Lang contrasts the larger outbursts of people outside with a table of upper-class citizens, reading about the killing from a newspaper in an apartment. The hysteria surrounding the killer's identity creates tension for the citizens in the streets, as well as the men conversing in a club. As the headline is read, each member of the group begins to accuse one another of being the child murderer: one man tells the other that he "saw him go upstairs behind a little girl," the other responds by threatening to bring the other to court.

In one of these vignettes, Lang shows us an old man being suspected of being the killer by surrounding townspeople. The elderly man is asked by a young girl for the time, which he gives her and follows up by asking the child where she lives. A group of mothers nearby alert another man of the interaction and the old man is approached by a massive, younger giant. He stares down at the old man and asks, "What is it to you where that kid lives?" The giant grabs the accused elder, so he cannot run away, and a crowd builds around the two. One of the citizens nearby tells the giant to "punch the old man in the face," another accuses him of being "the murderer." The crowd begins calling for the police as the mass of the group grows, becoming more aggressive, swarming the old man and grabbing at his arms and legs. A citizen yells, "Police! Police!", while another exclaims, "the Police are never here!"

¹² Gunning, Tom. *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity*, 2000. British Film Institute. 176

Lang uses these shouts to make an aural transition to another scene, where another large crowd is chanting for a group of “officers” who have caught a pick-pocket and are arresting him. As he is being escorted downstairs, the thief complains that cops, “can catch pick-pockets all right, but not the child murderer.” As the pick-pocket descends the stairs, the crowd of civilians below becomes frantic in hearing mention of the child murderer; they begin repeat “child murderer” and charge aggressively towards the captured thief. The police push him through the crowd away from the fists of the civilians. This scene is shot from an overhead point of view, putting the viewer in a God-like position over the commotion; this vantage point bears resemblance to the overhead shot of the clustered citizens who first receive news of Elsie’s death.

Lang provides viewers with these vignettes to connect the public’s angst to Beckert’s ability to outmaneuver the Law. The police do not have control over the city, therefore, they are not able to establish omniscience over the commotion taking over the urban environment. Instead, only the viewer is allowed a God-like perspective of all the action happening between citizens in the film—Lang gives his audience this through his spatial and temporal movement in cuts and Birds-eye point of view shots that hover over commotion and action. Lang shows his audience the scope of events in the city, giving them perspective over the chaos triggered by the murderer’s presence. Lang cuts from the aggravated vigilante and law enforcement’s apprehension of the petty pick-pocket shows the social tension and disorganized police methodologies forming in the city. Thereby, in the absence of police order, vigilante violence rise amongst dominant the citizens. The potentially destabilizing power of mob violence is something that Lang explores further in *Fury* (1936), which tie into the theories of modern

philosopher, Walter Benjamin, who classifies the failure of Law as a catalyst for violent reaction from the public, operating counter to the sanctioned violence of the Law.

In Benjamin's "Critique of Violence," the thinker addresses concerns on the relationship between justice and violence and their deployment in society. In this essay, Benjamin examines how the privilege of enacting violence determines how certain groups in society can control and exploit it to gain and preserve power. The Law, for example, is permitted to use violence to preserve its order. Any violence outside the Law becomes unlawful violence, which is, by name, oppositional to the institution of the Law itself. Benjamin writes that "if the existence of violence outside the law...is assured, this furnishes the proof that revolutionary violence, the highest manifestation of unalloyed violence by man, is possible."¹³ The introduction of unlawful violence becomes a threat to the sanctioned violence of the Law. Through this destabilization, social order, as well as the authority of the Law, becomes threatened. Film theorist, Anton Kaes, writes that "in keeping with a general erosion of public trust and governmental authority after the lost war, a failed revolution and a devastating inflation, the Weimar Republic saw violent crime as symptom of a system that seemed rotten at the core."¹⁴ Lang illustrates how the introduction of Beckert's "unalloyed" violence leads to the emergence of other cycles of violence among the public, i.e. revolutionary violence, which threatens the authority of the Law itself.

Inspector Lohmann is frustrated by his inability to assert control over expanding tensions within the city. Even through his exhaustion of police procedures—psychological analyses of Beckert's handwriting, fingerprint forensics, home investigations, physical evidence (an opened candy wrapper and cigarette found behind a bush near the crime scene location), and witness

¹³ Benjamin, Walter. "Critique of Violence," *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978. 300.

¹⁴ Kaes, Anton. *M*. BFI Publications, 2011. 29.

questionings—the police are unable to identify the killer. Law enforcement claims that the investigation has created a “nervousness” amongst the public, but that when asked about the murders, “no one seems to remember anything” or recalls seeing anything suspicious. Without leads, Lohmann’s investigation chases a shadow of Beckert through the city. During Herr Lohmann’s meeting with the other police officials, the commissioner explains that the difficulty of catching Beckert lies in the fact that “the criminal and his victim are only connected by chance. An instantaneous impulse is the killer’s only motive.” Therein, Lang places limitations around the investigative capacities of the police; despite the extensive measures that have been deployed to find the killer, the Law is stopped by their need to wait for the “circumstances” to arise that will lead them to the criminal’s identity.

However, the Law’s inability to capture Beckert also effects Lang’s criminal world. Law enforcement’s increased surveillance over the city has placed more pressure on local criminals. Lang shows this during the scene of Lohmann’s “scourge of the underworld,” where Lohmann and his policemen raid “underground hangouts” for clues about Beckert. As Lohmann and his forces conduct their raids, the police march through the city streets in a militarized manner. The mechanized movements of the police officers structure space through the segmented appearance of each marching group. Such movement dictates the way in which space works to be re-distributed and re-organized to re-instate order.

The chaotic streets are cleared for Lohmann and his police to walk through. Citizens move to the sidewalks and cars are removed from the roads. Mobility becomes easier and the space is reset once the agents of Law descend upon it. The packed and chaotic streets shown during the news break of Elsie’s death become geometrically transformed into ordered rows. These rows resemble the re-deployment of a grid across the city space. Lang first shows police

coming down vertically through the streets, then cuts to them moving across horizontally, from a bird's-eye vantage point of an alleyway cutting up through the frame. These militarized movements of police through the city reinstate the structure of its gridded topography, which functions to guide and regulate the movements of citizens. The horizontal and diagonal crossings of law enforcement reflect a nostalgic attempt to reconstruct the former social environment where movement was easily streamlined and regulated. The desire to re-instate this spatial ordering of the city hints at a nostalgia to return to the former social and legal orders which the police formerly had put in place.

Lohmann arrives at an underground cantina and addresses the crowd of underworld goons, saying, 'Come now children. Let's be reasonable.' The gangsters, in turn, laugh and whistle, calling him "Fatty Lohmann!" This playful relationship between "Fatty Lohmann" and his "troublesome children" suggests a sense of informality between the police department and the city's criminals. Lang's dialogue leads the viewer to interpret a sense of humor, or familiarity, in the relationship shared by Lohmann and the underworld. The way in which Lohmann jokes with the criminals, winks at them, and playfully taunts them while giving out arrests suggests a relationship between the Law and crime worlds which is one of brazen familiarity rather than violent conflict. Anton Kaes writes that this attitude is an accurate reflection of Weimar penal culture during that time: "organized crime in Weimar was a central part of Berlin's urban scene, open and widespread, feared but tolerated. At the core were the so-called *Ringvereine* (ring clubs), gang-like organizations (not unlike the Chicago mafia) and a shadow police force that 'protected business' in exchange for extortion money."¹⁵

¹⁵ Kaes, Anton. *M.* BFI Publ., 2011. 50

Lohmann violates this unspoken agreement by pressing arrests on criminals for miscellaneous crimes which have been committed throughout the city. What he finds from these raids is an abundance of stolen knives, pocket watches, jewelery furs, clothing, and guns, which are all shown being itemized and documented by officers at the end of the screening. Lohmann ends up arresting criminals for a burglary, reported in the city newspaper, and several others for falsified paperwork. The real purpose of his visit, to discover clues about Beckert, remains unaddressed. However, what Lang exposes is an entire culture of unchecked criminals, robbers, and forgers who have evaded detection or attention from the Law. The abundance of goods stolen from the raids show that, “the police venture into the underworld only in times of crisis...only in response to public pressure.”¹⁶ The Law of The Lohmann is asserted over this society of small-time criminals, giving a false sense of empowerment to the police which neglects the reality that Beckert is still at large. Displeased by the police meddling in their lawbreaking affairs, the criminals taunt back at Lohmann saying that, “It would be better if you just caught the killer!”

To stop these raids from affecting his business, Herr Schranker, the leader of the crime world, acting as “Lohmann’s *doppelganger* in the underworld”¹⁷, organizes an operation of counter-surveillance through the city. The criminals use a network of beggars to survey the streets of the city for the killer. The beggars maneuver through alleyways and underground hubs, “while the police draw concentric circles around the crime site, signifying the methodical procedures of their ever-widening investigation.”¹⁸ The effect of the criminals’ investigation moves between around the spaces of surveillance which are occupied by the Law. Schnaker’s

¹⁶ Ibid. 51

¹⁷ Gunning, Tom. *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity*, 2000. British Film Institute, 164

¹⁸ Ibid.

search suggests a surfacing of the underground, where the force of the socially abject (beggars, thieves, robbers, etc.) mobilize as an effective and organized system of surveyors and informants. While mapping his investigation out over the city, “Schranker puts his black-gloved hand over the map, suggesting force and terror.”¹⁹ Crime takes over the city through their methods of capture and surveillance, and it is their network of beggar which gets to Beckert before the police. Lohmann’s militarization of urban space becomes challenged by these criminals’ circumvention around the eye of the Law.

Criminal and Police Relations Within the Metropolis:

Despite their differentiated methods of investigation, Olga Soloviena writes that “through the murderer who moves along the dividing line between police and underworld...[these] two worlds are revealed to be mirror images or impressions of one another.”²⁰ In *M*’s pivotal scene, where the Lohmann and Schranker meet with their respective organizations to discuss the problem Beckert’s presence has created in the city, Lang visually establishes a parallel between police and crime forces through an editing technique which film analyst Robert A. Armour calls cross-cutting:

Lang uses the editing technique of crosscutting between the two groups...He will show a scene or two of the crooks and their search, then a few scenes of the police...this method establishes a direct counterbalance between the two groups...What one group does is paralleled in the next sequence by a similar action performed by the other group.²¹

Crosscutting serves to draw a visual association between both the police and criminals, implicating both parties as mirrors of one another by editing images of police and criminals next to one another. When Schranker meets with his gang to discuss the citywide search for Beckert,

¹⁹ Ibid. 164

²⁰ Soloviena, Olga. "Identifying the Subject: Lang's *M* and the Trajectories of Film Criticism." *A Companion to Fritz Lang*. John Wiley & Sons, 2015. 94. Print.

²¹ Armour, Robert A. "The Camera and the Struggle." *Fritz Lang*. 1978. Boston: Twayne, 53

Lang masterfully connects the discussion of Schranker and his criminals to Lohmann and his police department, who are having the same conversation in another building. Through paralleled gesture and speech, Lohmann and Schranker become reflections of one another, differentiated only by their separate methods of search procedure.

Schranker explains that Beckert's murders have increased legal pressure on regular criminals by the police. As a result, their businesses have suffered. Their hunt to catch Beckert becomes motivated by their own personalized sense of justice. Schranker distinguishes the difference between murder amongst police and criminals and the killing of children, saying that, "if an [officer] dies in the exercise of duty, all right. It's OK. But there is a big difference between [us felons] and the one the police searches for."²² The crime lord argues for a return to the established social dynamics between police and lawbreakers maintained prior to the murderer's arrival so that the reputation of the criminal organizations are not damaged in the eyes of the public. The police also express fears about their damaged reputation in the eyes of the public and the upsetting of order that comes from Beckert's persisting presence. Within the society of crime, Beckert is marked as a criminal 'other,' operating outside of these socially established paradigms of conflict between agents of Law and Crime.

As Beckert has disturbed this relationship through the heinousness of his crime and caused a moral panic among the citizens of the metropolis, Schranker concludes that the killer "cannot exist". When conveying this message to the rest of the city's crime lords, Der Schranker waves a gesturing hand across towards the group, asking for their ideas on how to capture the killer. Lang cuts from Schranker to The Commissioner at Police Headquarters, who issues a

²² M. Dir. Fritz Lang. *Nero-Film*, 1931. DVD.

parallel arm motion to a group of officers and completes Schranker's thought: 'I beg you to express your opinion, gentlemen.' The visual and aural continuity between the criminal organization and police department implies a doubling of both parties. Lang goes on to crosscut the conversation of the police agents with members of the crime world to strengthen this relationship.

Lang shows an image of the police commissioner, who stands up and demands more aggressive house raids and screenings of citizens. Next, Lang cuts back to the criminals, as a crime boss, The Cheater, demands for an increase in the number of "spies" placed in the police ranks. Lang cuts back and forth between parties as they share their ideas on methods of search and procedure, hoping that their system will eventually capture the killer. A motif of "surveillance" and "spying" connects both groups: Franz, the Safecracker, suggests that the criminals use the women dating policemen as spies to get information on illegal activity in the city streets; Lang then cuts back to the police lieutenant, who says that the department will begin to enter civilian homes to obtain clues about the murderer.

The intensities of each group's conversations build as the forcefulness of the groups' suggestions escalate. Lang's images and dialogue blend the criminal's and police's ideas. Cutting between the two scenarios constructs a visual symmetry between the authorities and convicts. Lohmann expresses his frustrations towards the public, which has not given any useful clues regarding the killer's whereabouts. Because of this failure to offer tangible clues as to Beckert's whereabouts, Lohmann calls for a lack of cooperation between the citizens of the metropolis and the Law, i.e. Lohmann puts the police in opposition with public's trust. This forces Lohmann to rationalize the failures of law enforcement through this negligence or lack of public cooperation. Lohmann's frustrated speech at the police headquarters articulates the strain that Beckert's

presence has made the police powerless over the city. The police official sitting next to Lohmann remarks that capturing the criminal before he murders is almost completely out of the hands of the police, being contingent on chance, rather than patterns or logic. Lohmann's desire to capture the killer emerges from an attempt to re-instate a sense of control over the city, which has fallen into disarray through Beckert's pathological unpredictability.

The criminals share the desperation of the police; this motivates them to catch the criminal themselves. Thereby, in contrast to Lohmann's formal and militarized deployment of police forces throughout the city, Schranker's criminal syndicate establishes a new investigative system which uses their knowledge of the underworld to track down Beckert. Schranker imagines a network of surveillance communicated through a system of beggars, envisioning a system of signs and information which moves through the gaps that emerge on the peripheries of the eye of law enforcement. As Schranker gives out his plan to catch the criminal, Lang cuts back to the police headquarters, where Lohmann demands that every "prison, clinic, and asylum" be checked for released patients who had been deemed harmless after being diagnosed with a pathology. Lohmann suggests a movement *back* to spaces of confinement, where the Law has already seemingly passed its judgment on the insane, the criminal, and the abject, to ferret out the whereabouts of the killer in the metropolis. Meanwhile, the criminals, cast an eye over the city from which takes over the watch of the Law. Lang inverts the positions of these parties and has them extend their searches to the spaces of the 'other.' Criminals take to the surface of the city via beggars, while police look back into underground spaces of criminal activity, seclusion and confinement.

This Langian reflective relationship between law-maker and law-breaker functions to illustrate a dichotomy within societal structure of Weimar society, placing Beckert and the

average civilian as midpoint intersections between standard institutions of order and chaos. The “race” to capture the murderer becomes a shared race to establish social control for the criminals and police. The order of the metropolis becomes inverted, as police are unable to capture the murderer, criminals appropriate city spaces (beggars corners, alleyways, underground taverns, etc.) and uses the spaces of Law to mobilize the urban underground.

Lang imagines a chaotic urban space which is turned upside down, topographically, ideologically, and socially. The displacement of the hierarchy of Law has opened doors to the influx of criminals as enforcers of Law in the environment--Lang’s portrayal of urban freneticism highlights the point of Soloviena, who references Roger Dadoun, in regarding

M as a cinematic reproduction of the dynamics of social psychopathology driven by...the murderer, the Law, [and] the Underworld...Dadoun described this madness in terms that apply to the murderer as well as to the political, historical, and ideological climate in which the film is set: sexual repression, schizophrenic occlusion, paranoid, explosion, and an archaic identification between killer and victim.²³

For Lang, the anarchic splits and inversions which occur between these societal structures accurately represent the confused “psychological dynamics at work in [his] society.”²⁴ *M* shows a symmetry between both lawful and unlawful powers as they unwillingly combine their effort to capture Beckert. In showing his audience this comparison, Lang puts partial blame for the social dysfunctions arising in Weimar society onto its most righteous and stable institution, the Law. Lang’s image of Weimar society echoes a claim made by Kaes in his analysis of *M*: “[Germany experienced] a general erosion of public trust and governmental authority after the lost war...the Weimar Republic saw violent crime as symptom of a system that seemed rotten at the core.”²⁵

²³ Soloviena, Olga. "Identifying the Subject: Lang's *M* and the Trajectories of Film Criticism." *A Companion to Fritz Lang*. 2015. John Wiley & Sons, 105. Print.

²⁴Ott, Frederick W. *The Films of Fritz Lang*. 1979. The Citadel Press. 25

²⁵ Kaes, Anton. *M*. 2011. BFI Publ., 29

Lang uses Beckert as the impetus that uproots the social problems of Weimar society, emerging in the forms of public unrest, dysfunction and decay of the balance between law enforcement and crime within the urban ecosystem, and the spatial collapse of the city environment. Blind to their own roles in the deterioration of German society, the criminals and police scapegoat Beckert's capture as key to the restoration of a lost law and order in the German metropolis.

Fate, Chance, Trial, and Hans Beckert's Capture:

Lang explores the idea of "chance," mentioned by one of the officials during the meeting at police headquarters, through his lens of Fate, and connects both motifs to Beckert's eventual capture. While the police and criminal groups are going through their respective investigations, Lang shifts the film's focus back to Beckert, whose movements through the city run counter to the



Figure 1.1: Beckert in the Criminal's Trap

expectations of both parties. Instead of through gridded investigations by the police or large networks of beggars' surveillance, Beckert's capture is initiated by a chance event which connects the death of Elsie back to her killer. The blind vendor who sells Beckert the balloon which he gives to Elise earlier in the film, identifies the killer's presence by his whistling. The beggar remembers this whistled tune from earlier and alerts a criminal spy to the killer's presence. This man follows Beckert and catches him seducing another young girl. He labels

Beckert with a chalk-white “M,” on his back, signaling him as the murderer and informing his accomplices to follow him.

Cornering Beckert, the criminals force him into a nearby office building. Contrary to the gridded movements of the beggars and police around the streets, designed to box the killer in, Schranker’s gang penetrates the city, moving *through* the urban space to direct and track Beckert’s movements. In the Figure above, Lang captures a bird-eye shot of Beckert being cornered into the office building, blocked off from escape on three sides around him. Lang’s highly contrasted lighting casts the criminals’ shadows onto the streets as if they are piercing each asphalt block. The way in which these criminals move subtly, around and beneath, the surface of the streets to guide Beckert’s direction shows how Schranker’s gang has appropriated the space from the surface world of the Law. They assert themselves over the environment and inverse the killer’s wanderings by guiding him into a controlled environment.

Under the looming presence of Beckert, civilians, criminals, and law-enforcers are compressed into a cesspool of fear and disunity, the city’s structure itself becomes Lang’s trap, as Lang’s “mise-en-scene renders perfectly the feeling of domination...[and] shadows loom large around the characters and highlight the threatening and imprisoning forms of their surrounds.”²⁶ However, when the criminals reverse the environment on Beckert, he himself becomes trapped by the chaos of his own design. Unable to navigate away from the criminals pursuing him, Beckert runs into the warehouse, where he gets locked inside of a storage room and is forced to wait for the criminals to capture him. Hiding in the back of a storage closet, he hears a night watchman from the building search for signs of anyone in the room. In the storage room, objects cluster around Beckert and congest his environment around him. Like the

²⁶ Jenkins, Stephen. "Symmetry/Excess." *Fritz Lang, the Image and the Look*. 1981. London: BFI Pub., 51

hysterical citizens who felt trapped in the metropolitan cage utilized by Beckert, this space awakens a claustrophobia which confines and produces a terror in his expression. Several hours later, the criminals mobilize their ranks and break into his building which Beckert has been locked in, capturing him and taking him to their underworld for judgment.

At this moment, the police become alerted of the break in and Lohmann receives a report of the details of the damage. As he reads the report, Lang places a sequence of dissolves over the written text, showing images of the violence and vandalism done by the criminals in their apprehension of Beckert. Lang gives the audience a visual and spoken example of police methodologies of deduction, as Lohmann goes through the clues to try and deduce a motive from the break-in. Images of the broken doors, unconscious night watchmen, destroyed door hinges, and holes in the middle of the floors and ceiling of the building circulate on the screen. The safes in the building remain intact and Lohmann states that this chase has “gone too far.”

By this point, Lohmann’s police work operates only as an accessory, rather than an asset, to the capture of Hans Beckert. Gunning claims that Lohmann’s role in the apprehension of Beckert positions him as an accessory, rather than an asset, to the killer’s arrest: “[Lohmann] only enters some twenty minutes into the film and does not appear in many key scenes (for instance, he plays no role in the apprehension of Beckert, except in the final minute of the film).”²⁷ Beckert is taken into an unknown subterranean location (later identified as an abandoned distillery), before a courtroom of criminals.

Still in the building, the police arrest a crime lord, Franz, and question him about why his gang broke into the building. To extort information from him, the police commissioner suggests

²⁷ Gunning, Tom. *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity*, 2000. British Film Institute,

to Lohmann that they set a “trap” for Franz, saying that a body of a watchman was found at the crime scene, for which he will receive a murder charge if he withholds clues about the office break-in. Lang presents a visual contradiction to the truth of this statement, showing the watchmen eating a well-prepared meal, given to him by the police for his cooperation, and drinking from an unnecessarily large goblet of beer. As Lohmann relays the information to Franz becomes terrified for his life; Friedrich Gnass’ performance of the crime boss softens his hardened, cool demeanor and garners sympathy from the audience, as well as some distain for Lohmann. Lang devalues the Word of the Law and exposes the abuse of police power through this cruel act of deception, being a violation of the ethics of interrogative procedure. Horrified by the prospect of having murdered the watchman, Franz begs for his freedom and discloses information on the killer and his whereabouts to the officers.

The metropolitan “trap,” in its inescapability and cycling violence, moves through several forms in *M*: the spatial trap Beckert creates for the city itself, the physical cage that the criminals lure Beckert, the legal trap which is set on Franz, and ends with a reference to the imprisonment Beckert feels within the confines of his own human body. The setting of these traps trigger expsotion into dormant issues exiting in social, psychological and legal life in Weimar. Beckert’s killings become an attempt to communicate his desperate mental instability. The contained city frenzy, as well as Becker’s homicidal actions, illustrate human inclination to turn to the use of violence under claustrophobic feelings of inscape and destabilization. Armour notes that while “most of this violence represents exterior struggles [accusatory assault, sexual crimes]...Lang is capable of using violence to represent the interior struggle as well.”²⁸ In *M*, violence erupts from within Beckert and projects out into the city space. His crimes then set off exposition on the

²⁸ Armour, Robert A. "The Camera and the Struggle." *Fritz Lang*. 1978, Boston: Twayne, 53

unchecked structural decays and psychological insecurities plaguing a damaged Germany during the Weimar Period. Beckert's surface, his "deceptive child-like appearance," hides a monstrous force which lurks beneath, just as apparently systemized and highly efficient modern city conceals corruption in its most righteous structures.²⁹

Exploration into what lies beyond the field of vision is a recurring theme in Lang's work. He connects deeper truths to what exists beyond visual perception. This relationship between appearance and reality extend out from Lang's character into his metaphors of law and justice and crime



Figure 1.2: The Blind Seer of Fate

and violence. Lang's blind beggar, while he cannot see Beckert, becomes the catalyst which sets off this capture sequence and triggers his demise—the old man's memory of the Grieg tune that Beckert whistles helps him identify the criminal. Beckert and this man occupy a place of liminality or mysticism in Lang's world—they move between visible and invisible worlds of perception and being. Lang portrays this through Beckert pathology, redefining its clinical meaning as the man's relationship with a 'demonic presence' existing within.

Expert of German cinema Siegfried Kracauer understands the significance of Beckert's whistling as a sign of possession. It signifies a takeover of the killer's personality by his darker impulses: "whenever the murderer is possessed by the lust for killing, he whistles a few bars of

²⁹ Kaes, Anton. *M*. 2011, BFI Publ., 29

[this] melody by Grieg...an ominous foreboding of his appearance”³⁰. This act of possession lies beyond the surface of what the viewer sees in Beckert on the screen. Moreover, it lies beyond what Beckert himself can see or understand in himself, as the killer demonstrates by the way in which he cannot recognize himself in the reflections of mirrors. The blind beggar, Lang’s oracle of divine sight in the film, identifies Beckert not by his appearance, but by this sign of otherworldly possession. First, he does this before the chalk-white M is branded onto the killer, then, at the end of the film “evoking Tiresias, the mythical blind seer, recognizes the voice and identifies [Beckert].”³¹

Kracauer relates Beckert’s pathology to several other German characters being imagined in Weimar cinema—e.g. Dr. Caligari, Cesare, Baldwin in *The Student of Prague*, etc.³² These characters are all influenced by a “devilish other self”—in Cesare’s case by the somnambulism of Caligari—which possesses them to murder without cause. Within the context of his time, Lang uses the pathological impulses in the man’s mind to convey what Kracauer sees as the “psychological situation” plaguing Germany after the First World War: “[M] anticipates what was to happen [to Germany] on a large scale unless people could free themselves from the specters pursuing them”³³. Beckert’s motivation to kill becomes attributed to voices which he identifies as haunting specters.

In the kangaroo court scene at the end of the film, Beckert explains his pathology as “shadows” that haunt him, splitting his mind and transforming him into two people with two separate consciousnesses, existing in the same body. Beckert’s transformation into his ‘other’

³⁰ Kracauer, Siegfried, and Leonardo Quaresima. *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*, Princeton Univ. Press, 2004. 220

³¹ Kaes, Anton. *M*. BFI Publ., 2011. 65

³² Kracauer, Siegfried, and Leonardo Quaresima. *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*, Princeton Univ. Press, 2004. 221

³³ *Ibid.* 222

self even as he casually strolls through the city. He sees a young girl outside of a toy shop and becomes overwhelmed by an impulse which prompts him to pursue the child. Peter Lorre's acting showcases the shift in personality which comes through this transformation, capturing minute changes in his facial details. Beckert's eyes immediately open with surprise when he first sees the child's in the reflection of a store window mirror. Lorre stares at the girl, trying to contain his lustful gaze. His face is caught in the reflection of the window, frighteningly staring at the girl as she walks down the street. The image in the window splits Lorre into two separate beings, disconnecting his spirit from his body. Beckert's expression changes from that of a frightened animal to a determined predator. His eyes lock into the distance and his actions fall from his control, as he turns to follow the young girl down the road. Just as he walks away from the window, Beckert begins to whistle Grieg's "Hall of the Mountain King."

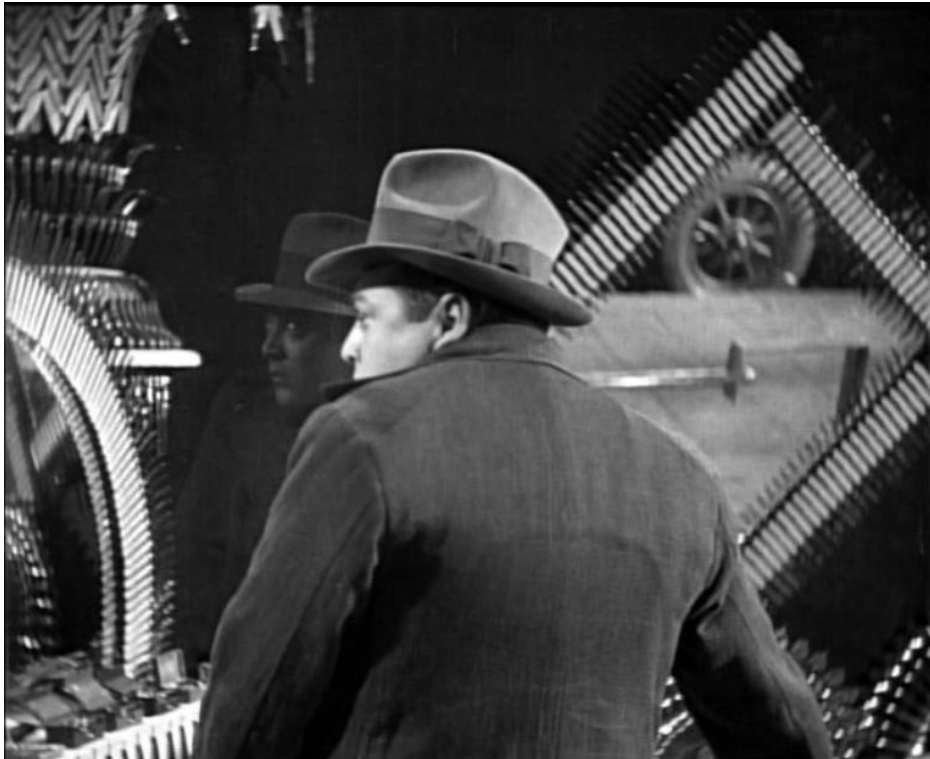


Figure 1.3: Beckert's Transformation

manifests itself through the actions of tyrants; in *Nibelungen*, through the anarchical outbursts

Kracauer's interpretations of Lang's early works, *Die Nibelungen* (1924) and *Destiny* (1921), compare the different roles that characters' Fates plays in each of his films. Kracauer states that "in *Destiny* Fate

of ungovernable instincts and passions”³⁴. In other words, Lang’s German characters’ desires or impulses are trigger powerful forces or passions beyond their immediate control, but their Fates are acted out by the decisions each character makes, showing their capacity to exercise personal agency over seemingly ungovernable instincts. Lang rewards his character who can win out against the dark struggle.

In *Destiny*, when given the chance by Death to sacrifice an infant for the revival of her dead lover, the female protagonist’s decision to save the baby ensures the Fate of the offspring and hands her own Fate over into Death’s hands. The woman and her dead lover are reunited, but not in life; they reconnect in the spiritual world. Lang’s connection between reality and truth relies on this somewhat mythical relationship between the seen versus the unseen, like in the Grieg tune, depicting surfaces of life and what lies beneath it. Beckert’s pathology is an internal struggle between ungovernable forces; his inability to control these drives pushes him deeper into these “specters” which he describes beneath. Lang uses this metaphor of surface and reality in Law, social life, and justice, facilitating the parameters of these interactions within reality while also exposing the internal contradictions of these institutions to question their legitimacy.

Lang’s final scene takes the audience into a kangaroo courtroom, which inverses the roles of the criminal and judge, placing Schranker and his cohort on the side of judgment, in opposition to Beckert on trial. As Beckert descends the stairs of the criminal hideout, he looks on to the mass of black forms and faces arresting him with their unified gaze. In one slow camera pan across the crowd before him, Beckert’s eyes connect with the entire city—criminals, mothers, and citizens—which he has terrorized. In a medium shot capturing Lorre’s hysterical

³⁴Kracauer, Siegfried, and Leonardo Quaresima. *From Caligari to Hitler: A Psychological History of the German Film*. Princeton Univ. Press, 2004. 93



Figure 1.4: Hand of Fate

performance, Beckert pleads to the courtroom and argues that there has been a mistake. The hand of Lang's mystical blind seer then enters the left of the frame and grabs a hold of Beckert's coat. The man identifies Beckert as the criminal who kidnapped Elsie Beckmann by his voice. A

balloon, like that which was purchased for Elsie, is shown to Beckert, which triggers memories of his killing and confirms his guilt for the criminal courtroom. Here, the deployment of the blind man shows the intervention of Lang's directorial "hand," which guides the Fate of his characters. The narrative comes full circle and ties Beckert and this blind oracle figure back to the killer's judgment for murder of Elsie.

Once he recognizes that the criminals are not going to let him go, Beckert confesses to his crime, but argues that his murderous impulses are motivated by another self, a voice which haunts him like a specter during his days: "I am...forced to move along the streets, and always someone is behind me...I feel I am myself behind me, and yet I cannot escape...the specters are pursuing me—unless I do it."³⁵ Lang includes an image of a criminal nodding in agreement to Beckert's claims, implying that he too shares these urges or that he affirms to the experience of these pains which the defendant describes. For philosopher Michel Foucault, the performance of

³⁵ Ibid. 221

confession serves as a “dramatic demonstration of what one is: the refusal of the self, the breaking off from one’s self...to superimpose, by an act of violent rupture, the truth about oneself and the renunciation of oneself...self-destruction.”³⁶ Beckert’s confession serves as renunciation of his crimes, as well as a reasoning behind why he committed them.

Lang’s criminals usurp the “mantle of justice” from the authorities of the Law. Their judgment, as Schranker explains to Beckert, is that the only way for the killer to be rendered harmless is to murder him. If the Law gets its hands on him, he will plead insanity and be sent to an institution—this would only delay his killings, not end them. The criminal court settles on a brand of justice which sanctifies “cold-blooded murder” for “just ends.” However, Lang’s ethics reduces murder to the same, base moral level for all circumstance. The criminal’s proceeding is illegitimate, and the court does not seek justice, but, rather, punishment. While set-up like a traditional courtroom, the defendant is pinned against a courtroom where his accuser are also his judge and jury. Schranker himself acts as both prosecutor and judge, demanding order during the court’s outbursts against Beckert and giving him his “rights” to a trial, jury, and defense. Schranker offers Beckert, as he mockingly put it, the criminals’ “expertise in law.” He gestures to the courtroom audience behind him and Lang pans across the worn and stoic faces of the criminals in the courtroom as Schranker explains these men’s experiences with Law: “6 weeks in Tegel prison. 15 years in Brandenburg.”

Schranker’s court does not seek to preserve justice with their proceedings, instead, it seeks to invert the very procedures of the Law. The weight of Beckert’s defense is nullified by the fact that his judge and his prosecutor inhabit the same chair. This is metaphorical of the criminals sentiments that judgment has been exercised on them unfairly by a judicial system that

³⁶ Foucault, Michel. *About the Beginnings of the Hermeneutics of the Self*. 2011. University of Chicago Press, 61

prevents them from making a living. The mock trial is not just a revenge act on Beckert, but on the legal system that has usurped their rights and imposed justice onto them. Anton Kaes reads this paradox as Lang trying to “subvert the very purpose of courtroom proceedings: ‘court’ and ‘jurors’ are not interested in truth or justice, but in the elimination of an outsider so that they can resume their illegal activities.”³⁷

In this trial sequence, Beckert’s confession becomes a point of contention in the courtroom through which Lang opens a discussion of whether someone should be punished with the death penalty for murder. Beckert’s defense argues that he must be sent to a hospital to receive psychological treatment for his condition, and that not force “not the state, and certainly not [these criminals]” have the right to take the life of another man. However, Schranker and the prosecution claims that incarcerating the killer will only lead to his release or escape, claiming that his death is a benefit for Law, State, society, and crime. The testimony of the enraged mother sets off violence of the court. She accuses the defense of never having lost a child, and, therefore, not understanding why Beckert must be put to murder. An uproar emerges from the crowd as they shout to “kill the beast!” and demand for Beckert to be handed over to them. Lang cycles through several close-up of the faces in the crowd, portraying them as blood lusted, hideous and mad, their eyes wide open and their expression enraged. The defense makes one last stand against the angry mob. He states that “a crime will not be committed in his presence,” that the “law will not be silenced” by criminals. But, the horde cuts off the lawyer’s last words and rushes towards the defense to grab Beckert.

Lang cuts to an aerial wide-shot from behind the defense as they rush on to Beckert; however, the crowd stops just before reaching the killer. The criminals all raise their hands in

³⁷ Kaes, Anton. *M.* 2011. BFI Publ., 67.

surrender, staring at an unseen intruder at the door atop the stairway. Lang cuts back to Beckert, who sits in a child-like position on the ground. A mysterious hand, referred to as the authorial “hand of the Law” in Gunning’s *Allegories and Visions of Modernity*, comes in and grabs Beckert, saying “In the name of the Law.”³⁸

The voice intervenes as a “deus-ex-machina” in the conflict. Having presented the case of prosecution and Beckert’s, the “hand of Law” comes down upon the killer’s shoulder and concludes the proceedings. Lang prevents the violent mob from slaughtering the defendant, reaching into his world through the hand of Lohmann, as he did through the clairvoyant blind beggar, to guide the Fate of the murderer. The hand of Law places itself on Beckert’s left-shoulder, whereas the blind mystic’s hand of Fate grabs Beckert from the right-shoulder, creating a metaphor which positions Law as an opposite to Fate, or the supernatural, in Lang’s filmic universe. Moreover, recalling back to the white-chalk ‘M’ that is placed on Beckert’s left-shoulder by the criminal surveillant, Lang aligns with the side of the Law, amalgamating the hands of the Law and Crime and distancing them from the touches of Fate. Lang dissolves from this image of Lohmann’s hand on Beckert’s shoulder to an empty courtroom. This real courtroom provides an immediate contrast to the packed and informal setting created by the criminals’ kangaroo court. However, the chairs of the judges remain empty for several seconds until after the dissolve transition is made. This vacancy of the judges can be tied to either the absence of the Law during Beckert’s capture, its recovery from the perverse mockery which the criminals put it through in their kangaroo court, or a reflection on the absence of consciousness regarding its disconnection from the public. In the criminals’ mock trial, the city sits behind the criminal prosecution, while in the official courtroom, the judges sit atop a pedestal and give their

³⁸ Gunning, Tom. *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity*, 2000. British Film Institute, 123

rulings like oligarchs, governing juridical power over the city. Before they give their sentence, the judges say, “in the name of the people.” Lang cuts to an image of 3 grieving mothers (resembling the three robed furies of Fate), dressed in black, mourning the loss of their children: “This won’t bring our children back. We should keep a closer watch on our children.”

Christian Graf von Krockow’s *The Germans in Their Century 1890-1990* argues that a disordered economic and political Weimar climate birthed a series of “German nightmares” in the early 1920s.³⁹ These German nightmares manifested as anxieties amongst the public—fear of mass murder, crime, and psychological collapse due to combined poverty and warfare. Beckert’s murders disturb landscape of the German city, changing the way the space is structured and destabilizing the relationship between institutions of good and evil (i.e. the police and their criminal counterparts). His presence, or lack thereof, turns the city into a place of ominous evil. Elsie’s murder scene shows fragmentation between children, people and parents within the city and school zone. These images showcase what in the “city dwellers [are] their [unconscious] loneliness and their fear;” spatial and class alienation within the urban environment, separating groups of people, as the crisis of Beckert’s presence creates an anxiety that brings out these feelings of fear and isolation.⁴⁰ The mothers’ final comments acknowledge the need to keep watch over their loved ones and connect themselves to the dehumanized space during this time of serious psychological crisis.

In his book, *The Art of Loving*, modern psychologist Erich Fromm argues that the disintegration of love in Western society runs concurrently with the developments in capitalist culture, which replaces pure types of love, “brotherly love, motherly love, and erotic

³⁹ Krockow, Christian von, and Reicke Schweitzer. *The Germans in Their Century, 1890-1990*. 2009. Manchester University Press, 10

⁴⁰ Gunning, Tom. *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity*. 2000, British Film Institute, 168

love...[with] forms of pseudo-love.”⁴¹ Capitalist desires, created through a commodity culture of consumption and gratification, take advantage of the fear and isolation of city inhabitants by promising them fantasies of happiness or fulfillment; these are false visions of love. Beckert’s window shopping and the economic but mechanical movements of people in the city carry over into their social relationships, as the killer consumes the lives of children with the same fetishistic hunger as he looks up at the ready-products in toy stores and knife shops. Meanwhile, as we see in the murder scene of Elsie Beckmann, the apathetic bodies which move through the city space disregard the safety of a child who maneuvers through cars and dangerous crowds. Human instincts and empathy remain absent from the city, as, “relationships are essentially those of alienated automatons, each basing his security on staying close to the herd, and not being different in thought feeling, or action.” In his or her isolation, Fromm contends that the modern person, “is alienated from himself [or herself], from his [or her] fellow man, and from nature.”⁴²

The central moral philosophy in *M* comes through the last few lines of the film, where the mothers express regret at not having been more careful of their children. The mother’s love, or the absence of it in *M*, becomes the force that Lang uses to show the emergence of a pathologized love. In a dysfunctional relationship between parents, one, “project[s] one’s own problems of existence on that of the children.”⁴³ The imbalance which Beckert creates between the worlds of Law and Crime projects itself out on to the children of the city as well. They become victims of the loveless urban space, an allegorical symbol of lost innocence which Lang also depicts in *Metropolis* (1927). Beckert stands at the center of the nexus of moral, emotional, and social corruptions within the city, manifesting this disconnect from humanity through his

⁴¹ Fromm, Erich. *The Art of Loving*. 2006. Harper Perennial, 77

⁴² Ibid. 79

⁴³ Ibid. 94

pathologized love for children and ability to move unaccounted for through this space, committing his crimes. The toleration of crime within the city has bred an apathy to legal consequence, which now affects and attacks the metropolis' most innocent inhabitants, children, and shows itself through the police's inability to track and capture the murderer.

Lang passes judgment on the society of post-war Germany and critiques its legal superstructures to bring awareness to these psychological neuroses and emotional maladies brewing within urbanity. The ethical instabilities within the loveless world of the metropolis launches Lang's saga of social critiques on Law, where he settles legal or moral ambiguities through his own divine justice, disseminated through his invention in his own films. Lang's legal critiques bridge over into his *Mabuse* films, positing arguments against the legal, social, and penal cultures of Germany which opened doors for the rise of abnormal figures of crime and chaos in the 1930s.

Chapter 2:

Das Testament Der Dr. Mabuse: An Image of the Times

Das Testament Der Dr. Mabuse (1934) comes as the second installment in Lang's *Mabuse* trilogy, which spans across the director's time in Weimer Germany and continues through into his American work. Each of these films follow the criminal career of Mabuse, a mastermind who manipulates the German stock exchange, economy and currency to propel himself to financial power in an economically disparate and politically shaken Weimar Germany. The premise of the film centers on Mabuse's attempts seeks to derail existing political powers and implement an empire of crime in the place of a currently existing system of the Law.

The character Mabuse evolves with Lang throughout the filmmaker's career, taking on new forms in the different political milieus that the director occupies and shifting with the stylistic developments that come with Lang's filmography. Lang's first *Mabuse* film, *Mabuse, Der Spieler* (1922), is a silent four-hour epic, which functions as a social critique of the volatile economic, class, and social circumstances of Weimar Germany. Lang shows images of unemployment, criminal activity, unstable currency, and class inequality in Germany following the First World War. Taking advantage of the socioeconomic climate, Mabuse sets up a money counterfeiting operation, headed by a troop of blind beggars, infiltrates the German stock exchange, and manipulates and murders aristocrats to ascend the sociopolitical ladders of society. At the end of the film, his plans crumble and the ghosts of his murdered victims come to torment him, driving him into madness. Mabuse loses his mind just as the police come to invade his hideout, arrest him, and send him to an insane asylum.

From the social landscape of modernity, Mabuse emerges as the quintessential criminal, manipulating urban topography, taking advantage of social anonymity in the city space, using disguise, and capitalizing on a climate of social anxiety to unleash chaos in Weimar society. Mabuse's ideology and rhetoric, as Lang himself claims in an interview with William Friedkin (1974), derives from Nazi slogans drafted and disseminated by Hitler and Goebbels' political party in the 1930s. In Mabuse, Lang captures the rise of an ideologically dangerous and socially destabilizing presence in Germany, paralleling that of the Nazi fascists that come into power a decade later. The stylistic structure and evolution that comes in *Testament of Dr. Mabuse* connects narrative points of its plot back to the previous Mabuse film, *Der Spieler*, and helps Lang better represent the social conditions of Weimar life. Lotte Eisner in *Fritz Lang* writes that "in *The Last Will of Dr. Mabuse*, Lang once again deals with the characters of the age, yet now in a politically and sociologically much more conscious way."⁴⁴ It acts as a retelling of the original Mabuse story but re-positions the drama on the cusp of new political movements in Weimar Germany. *Testament* begins in the same money counterfeiting lab where *Der Spieler* ended. Mabuse's scheme, this time enacted through Baum and a new criminal gang, is "cancelled out by the introduction of the counter-presence of an alternative version of 'the Law,' ...represented [in *Spieler*] by State Attorney Von Wenk," and in *Testament* and *M* by Lohmann.⁴⁵ The revival of Mabuse signifies "portents of Hitler's rise to power," an emergence of a greater imbalance to forces of good, mirroring the advance of the Nazi regime.⁴⁶

The introduction of sound in *Testament* adds another layer to Lang's presentation of the sensations of urban life, which Mabuse incorporates into his criminal activity to avoid capture.

⁴⁴ Eisner, Lotte H. *Fritz Lang*. 1986. Da Capo Press, 129

⁴⁵ Jenkins, Stephen. "Scarlet Street." *Fritz Lang, the Image and the Look*. 1981. London: BFI Pub, 67

⁴⁶ Eisner, Lotte H. *Fritz Lang*. 1986. Da Capo Press, 129

In her essay “While Not Looking,” author and film theorist Frances Guerin writes that in *Testament*, “Mabuse is hiding behind a narrative driven forward by sounds...[which functions as] a de-emphasis on the role of vision in the [sole] articulation of power” in Lang’s film.⁴⁷ The noise and aural over-stimulation of the city provides a social anonymity for the urban citizen, similar to that of the overwhelming visual congestion viewers experience when moving through the metropolis in *Der Spieler*. To show this, Lang stages crimes which are successful through the incorporation of urban sound into their design. Mabuse’s goons use urban sound to disguise the murder of Baum’s colleague, who plans to go to the police and inform them of a coincidence between a recent “gas-related” crime and a command from Mabuse’s notebook. While stuck in traffic, the assassin’s driver honks his car horn repeatedly, prompting other cars to do the same. He organizes a large clamor of horns, which deafen the surrounding drivers to the sound of a gunshot coming from the assassin’s pistol, killing Baum’s target. As the traffic changes and cars move back along the street, Lang cuts to a birds-eye point of view shot of the victim’s car, still stopped in the middle of the road. The camera angle guides the audience’s perspective, giving them omniscience over the death of the driver in the car, while other citizens simply circumvent contact with the halted vehicle.

Through the introduction of sound, *Testament* also combines the Lang’s visual critiques of law and violence in the Weimar Period with sounds of the ideological rhetoric emerging from the mouths of politicians in post-war Germany. For his overt critique of Goebbel’s Nazi propaganda, “was banned in Germany on the order of the Ministry of the Interior.”⁴⁸ Mabuse disseminates ideologies of elitism and totalitarian political ideologies espoused from the mouths

⁴⁷ Guerin, Frances. “While Not Looking,” *A Companion to Fritz Lang*, 2015. John Wiley & Sons, 46-47

⁴⁸ Eisner, Lotte H. *Fritz Lang*. 1986. Da Capo Press, 137

of fascist groups; Dr. Baum is shown as the figure example of one manipulated or taken by the power of such language.

Lang posits a critique of consumer culture of the upper class, as well as economic inequality and job displacement during the early Weimar Republic in *Der Spieler (Teil I)* and *Testament of Dr. Mabuse*. Lang's illustration of Germany in 1934 shows class separation through depictions of upper-class citizens, working class, and beggars. resulting in the development of a crime culture born out of desperation. After the traffic stop murder, Lang introduces two criminal members of Mabuse's gang, Nicolai and Karetzky, who live a lifestyle underground, disconnected from the economy of the public. Mabuse films act as social expositions, *Der Spieler* focusing on representation of the upper-class, portrayal of everyday lifestyles of the wealthy and exaggeration of their detachment from the social issues. A disinterested and negligent upper-class, who spends their time gambling, playing poker, and gossiping amongst one another about their social milieus are distanced from issues of the lower classes. Historian Matthew Stribbe writes that "at the time of the hyperinflation of 1922, infant and maternal mortality rates rose considerably, infectious diseases like tuberculosis claimed increasing numbers of victims, and the inhabitants of the bigger cities faced chronic shortages of affordable food, fuel and housing."⁴⁹

The social dimensions of Weimar society set a scene for crime to develop rampantly in cities. During the confession of his criminal history to Lilli, Kent notes that *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* deals intimately with the ethical parameters of Law and Crime. In Mabuse's notorious monologue, which takes place in the middle of the film, the crime lord gives a formal testament

⁴⁹ Krockow, Christian von, and Reicke Schweitzer. *The Germans in Their Century, 1890-1990*. 2009. Manchester University Press, 106

to his Empire of Crime, re-imagining a governing order of chaos that replaces the society of Law. Mabuse posits a theory of the “Superman,” an individual who presides over the common man through a superior intellect and understanding over conventionally accepted morals and reason. The criminal disseminates his ideas through a written manifesto of crime, which possesses the same hypnotic powers as the mastermind himself. Filmmaker and author, Nicole Brenez, in her essay, “Symptom, Exhibition, Fear,” claims that these writings function as a “figure of Evil...dispersed...no longer to be assigned to a body but...an idea that is transmitted.”⁵⁰ This incorporeal representation of lingering Evil operates outside of human capacities; its plans are carried out by individuals (Baum and his gang), but the possessive power of the language is an ephemeral force which lives beyond all of Lang’s characters, even Mabuse himself. Nonetheless, Inspector Karl Lohmann, in the film serves as Lang’s formal representation of Law and Order, acting contra to Mabuse’s plans for domination. The relationship between law enforcement and crime, shown through Lohmann’s investigation into the resurgent force of Mabuse, is explored as a reawakening of both a dormant criminal Evil and a re-mobilization of the Law against this force.

Lohmann comes into the film as he is about to depart from his professional duties. The Inspector is about to leave his office and go to an opera performance of Wagner’s *Die Valkyrie*, when he receives a mysterious call from an ex-police detective, Hofmeister. Lohmann tells his secretary to hang up the phone and say, “tell them I am dead.” He insists that “murder will have to take a night off” and goes to put the Law, and himself, to rest for the night. However, Lohmann’s relationship as a former mentor to the ex-detective pulls him reluctantly back to the office and into a conversation with Hofmeister. The two engage in a back-and-forth exchange of

⁵⁰ Brenez, Nicole. "Symptom, Exhibition, Fear" *A Companion to Fritz Lang*, 2015. John Wiley & Sons, 68.

miscommunication over the phone. This conversation eventually ends on the image of a frantic Hofmeister, trying to give the Inspector the name of the criminal in charge of a new forgery operation. Just before he can utter the name, the lights in his room are cut. Hofmeister fires two gunshots into the blackness and then silence comes on the other end of Lohmann's receiver. Gunning interprets this scene in conjunction with his reading of the following sequence, where Professor Baum, the heir to Mabuse's criminal legacy, is introduced giving a university lecture, where he praises the genius of his criminal patient. During this lecture, Baum explains that Mabuse keeps a daily journal of illegible notes, which the professor collects and keeps in his office for study.

Lang establishes a juxtaposition between the mentor-student relationships of the Law—Lohmann and Hofmeister—and of crime—Mabuse and Baum. Gunning extends this hierarchal pedagogy to the parallel relationship Lang forms between messages and their receivers: “Lohmann does not hear Hofmeister's information initially, therefore Hofmeister's message remains suspended. Mabuse remains silent and his reams of automatic writing seem to be addressed to no-one.”⁵¹ Lohmann's investigation is prompted by his desire to uncover the name Hofmeister failed to tell him over the phone, just as Baum's professional motive is to decode the messages in Mabuse's notebook. These messages orient the actions of their receivers, sending them on missions to interpret or discover missing information. Both messages center around Mabuse himself; thereby, the criminal becomes the initiator of action for both the Law and the criminals within the film. Lohmann is pulled into a criminal investigation by the enigmatic clue which Hofmeister leaves him before losing his mind, while the audience is pulled into another criminal narrative of Mabuse. Lang shows the viewer how Mabuse's “writings have this force,

⁵¹ Gunning, Tom. *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity*, 2000, British Film Institute, 143.

even after [his] death...Disembodied, homeless messages seem to prowl through the film in search of someone to receive them, decode them (in Lohmann's case), enact and embody them (in Baum's case)."⁵²

Lang sets up the antagonist of his film to be the incorporeal entity of language, as Mabuse himself is physically shown as incapacitated and manic, "withdrawn into his own ego." Baum concludes his university lecture by saying that, from Mabuse's writings, one discovers "a perfect guide for the commission of crimes. Worked out to the minutest detail." As he finishes this sentence, an image of the criminal gang leading the forgery operation cuts to screen. The leader of the gang steps into the frame and says, "No. Nothing can happen to us if we follow the doctor's methods." The audience is unsure if this speaker is referring to the methods of Dr. Baum, or Mabuse; however, this distinction becomes insignificant as the connection that Lang establishes between them suggests a unification of the two minds. Mabuse/Baum is positioned as the initiator of all action thus far, guiding the operations of both their criminals and law enforcement.

The gang discusses how they are to deal with an escaped Hofmeister, before he goes to the police with information about their operation, awaiting instructions from their unidentified boss. In the next scene, where Baum enters Mabuse's room, he observes the criminal as he writes in his notebook. As Baum hovers over the pages, the doctor becomes transfixed by a force that pulls him towards the text itself. When he picks up his head, an apparition of Mabuse appears in the corner of the room, seizing Baum's attention, momentarily, with his gaze.

⁵² Ibid.

Gunning remarks on Lang's staging in this sequence (Figure below) as significant to



Figure 2.0: Projection of Baum into Mabuse

understanding the role lighting plays in constructing the tone of the image. He claims that the distribution of light sources creates a visual illusion of juxtaposition between Baum and Mabuse: backlighting hits Baum from behind the camera, silhouetting his form and casting a shadow of Mabuse into the darkened half of the

frame. The position of Baum's body sets himself opposite to the apparition, establishing contrasts between the physical forms of Mabuse and the lighted figure of the doctor. Gunning writes that "the progression from the light source (the window), to the shadow, to the wall before which the figure appears...[stages this image so that it]would seem that Baum himself projects this vision on the wall, like an interior movie."⁵³ The connection between the gaze and cinema relates to the mirror identification process undergone by the spectator when watching a film. Like the modern cinema-goer, Baum projects himself into the fiction of the film screen.

Anton Kaes' book *Shell Shock Cinema* writes that, "the mesmerizing power of film allows for a temporary double identity."⁵⁴ Kaes exemplifies this claim through the early German silent film, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, where the viewer undergoes an act of identification with the somnambulist antagonist, Dr. Caligari: "by identifying with the protagonist, one splits

⁵³ Ibid. 148

⁵⁴ Kaes, Anton. *Shell Shock Cinema: Weimar Culture and the Wounds of War*. 2011. Princeton University Press, 68

one's personality and could indeed become Caligari."⁵⁵ Thinking of the screen as a mirror contextualizes the hypnotic illusion that the film creates for the spectator. Film theorist Christian Metz, in *The Imaginary Signifier*, stresses that in the cinema spectator's relationship of mirror identification with the screen, he or she becomes physically lost in the image signifier: "film is like the mirror. But it differs from the primordial mirror in one essential point:

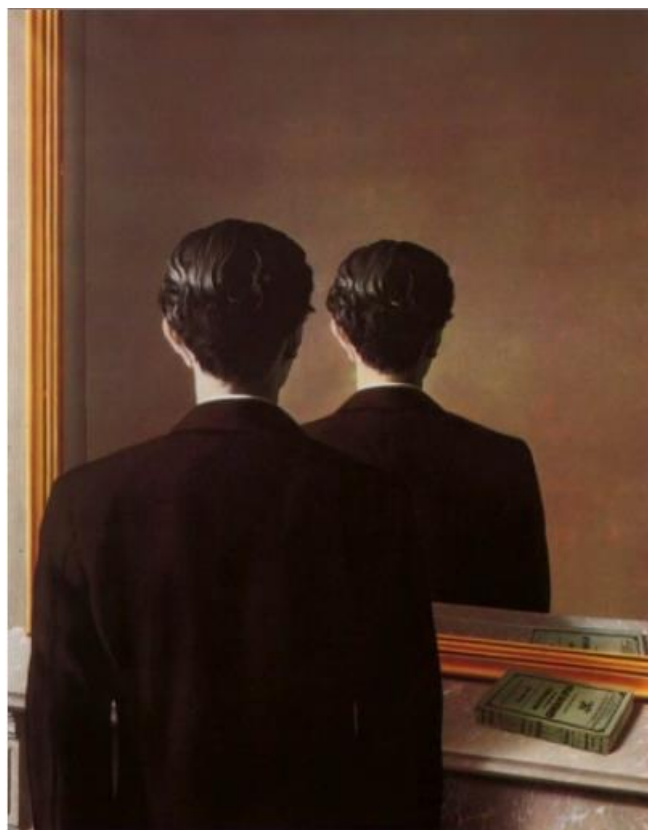


Figure 2.1: *Not To Be Reproduced*, René Magritte

Mabuse's hospital room and the spectator in the cinema, searches for an identity in the reflection of the mirror. The spectator seeks to identify fully with the projected image; but, instead, they are launched into an abyss. The spectator becomes lost in a fiction, where a self is misrepresented through the form they identify with.

although...everything may come to be projected, there is one thing and one thing only that is never reflected in it: the spectator's own body."⁵⁶ Hence, the identity of the viewer is lost in his perception of the projected image on screen. These mirror relationships suggest a loss of the self in the reflected image. Surrealist painter René Magritte's piece *Not to be Reproduced* (1937) captures the inertia one experiences when gazing into one's reflection. The figure in Magritte's painting, like Baum in

⁵⁵ Ibid. 68

⁵⁶ "Identification, Mirror." *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: The Imaginary Signifier*, by Christian Metz, 2001. Palgrave, 696

In Foucault's analysis of delirium in the case of insane patients, he distinguishes between the faculty of visual perception in the cases of reason and madness. The influence that madness can have over the visual field, i.e. the image of Mabuse that Baum identifies as a reality, blinds the seer by its semblance to absolute truth. Foucault writes that "the reasonable man who, rightly or wrongly, judges an image to be true or false, is beyond this image, transcends and measures it as not what is not itself; the act of the madman never oversteps the image presented, but surrenders to its immediacy, and affirms it only insofar as it is enveloped by it."⁵⁷ Thus, in the madman's perception of an image of identification, he or she "becomes incapable of escaping it."⁵⁸ The possession of Baum by Mabuse is done through a reflection, which superimposes the identity of the genius criminal onto the doctor, whose sycophancy and obsession puts him into an imaginary relationship of identification with the criminal. Mabuse pulls the psychiatrist into his gaze through his obfuscated language, which Baum reads like a mirror, projecting himself onto the words. In madness, Baum becomes a mirror of Mabuse, an agent of chaos in *Testament*, assuming the imaginary form of what he represents.

Lang opposes this supernatural and psychopathological force of crime with his own agent of reason, Inspector Lohmann. We see in the first opening sequences, that Mabuse's revitalized influence guides the action of criminals but also forces the hand of the Law to respond to his activities as well. Lang cuts from the schemes of the criminals in the forgery lab to Lohmann's investigation of Hofmeister's apartment, looking for clues as to the reasoning for his psychological breakdown. In Hofmeister's office, Lohmann is active and involved in his investigative proceedings. His analytical faculties are highlighted, as he employs logical

⁵⁷ Foucault, Michel. *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason.*, 1994. Vintage Books, 94.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

reasoning to trace the unseen movements of Hofmeister, step-by-step, through his office. Lohmann's tracking of Hofmeister's leads him to an engraving scrawled into the window glass—an ominous clue which the audience later learns to be the name of 'Mabuse'. The mystery of this engraving drives a criminological investigation into identifying the script, where Lohmann uses methods of handwriting analysis and forensic technology to decipher the code.

The forensics officer studying the engraving discovers it to be a reverse of 'Mabuse's' name, captured in a window. Lohmann's police's analytical work allows them to decipher the code left by Hofmeister, but, just as the identity of the criminal is discovered, Mabuse dies in the mental hospital. Lang establishes two paradigms of action, casting archetypes for Law and crime through the representational models of Lohmann and Baum/Mabuse. Lohmann uses deduction, technology, and logic, forms of reason, to break down the opacity of clandestine messages being left by the criminals. Baum counters Lohmann's deductions with the instructions of Mabuse, taking from the "incontrovertible logic" which the criminal's messages possess. But, as Baum functions the conduit for Mabuse's Empire of Crime and chaos in *Testament*, Mabuse himself takes on a different role in Lang's narrative.

In the film's climax, a ghastly apparition of Mabuse steps into the body position of Baum in his office, signifying an act of possession which triggers Baum to enact Mabuse's will and set fire to chemical plants in the city. Lang precedes the appearance of Mabuse's ghost with a montage sequence of African masks, captured from multiple angles in the room. Faces and Mabuse connect back to the first shot of *Der Spieler*, which shows Mabuse shuffling a deck of cards that are then revealed to be images of several disguises that Mabuse uses later in the film. After showing the cards, Lang dissolves from a close-up image of these cards to a medium shot of Mabuse's upper body and head. These cards represent the disguises which Mabuse himself

adopts over the course of the film, using them as separate extensions of himself. Lang's intertwining of people, fates, and relationships open his characters up to the connecting strings of Fate. This superimposition function as "an image of control and power," where Mabuse demonstrates an agency in the social setting of urbanity through his ability to, as Gunning puts it, "counterfeit identity."⁵⁹These masks make Mabuse both the director and orchestrator of plots in the film world.

These masks are the faces of Mabuse, harkening back to the criminal's original use of disguises in *Der Spieler* to navigate through the city environment. Lang edits this sequence so that the masks appear as if they are the eyes of Mabuse, watching Baum as he reads the manic notes of the criminal. In this context, the masks also serve as a symbolic links between Baum and Dr. Mabuse; Baum functions as the new mask of Mabuse, persisting as the criminal's disguise from the afterlife. Through the sound, editing, and disturbing mise-en-scene of this sequence, the audiences experience a strange breakage of the barrier between reality and the mystical. The presence of Mabuse slowly filters into the space through the unsettling score, as the dramatic camera angles of Lang's shots make each the images of each mask seem horrible and vivid. Lang's shots are off-centered, while focal points of his images appear in corners, edges, and sharp angles of the frame. Stark lighting contrast give each mask or image a surreal quality, elongating their faces, animating their personalities, and distorting their expressions into ghastly countenances.

⁵⁹ Gunning, Tom. *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity.*, 100, British Film Institute, 2000.



Figure 2.2: The Eye of Mabuse

depressed postures, solemn gazes, and miserable expressions suggest torment, formed from their imprisonment by the influence of Mabuse’s eye. These damned souls are representations of the repressed souls of victims, trapped by the hypnotic possession of Mabuse. Lang concludes this segment with an image of Baum opening Mabuse’s last will and testament, titled “Empire of Crime,” thereby becoming the bridge through which Mabuse’s metaphysical spirit can re-enter the human world.

Lang’s trajectory of German filmmaking, moving from *Die Niebelungen* to *M*, hints at this gradual integration of the fantastic into the material world. However, in this *Mabuse* film, there is the explicit reification of the imaginary into reality. The hypnotic influence Mabuse is suggested to hold becomes physically illustrated through his criminal’s ghost, appearing as a ghastly, cerebral figure, moving in an ethereal form. Gunning writes that Mabuse’s distorted

In Figure 2.2, the final image of Lang’s montage, the omniscient eye of Mabuse is featured in a painting hung on the wall of Baum’s office. The light cast up onto the image illuminates the eye, drawing the attention of the viewer to its gaze; the persons surrounding the eye seem trapped by the power of the look. Their

countenance adopts “the stylized features of the primitive masks,” participating in the collective gaze cast down on Baum from the room. These features hauntingly possess the doctor with Mabuse’s wide-eyed gaze, as Lang juxtaposes the hypnotized face of Baum with this reverse-shot image of



Figure 2.3: Moment of Fusion

the ghost of the criminal. Through Mabuse’s gaze, he channels his spirit into Baum and controls him through the language he utters. Baum becomes the host of Mabuse, who enters the doctor’s mind through their held gaze. Mabuse holds Baum’s control with his arresting stare, while the words of the criminal’s testament filter take hold of the doctor’s thoughts.

Visual and aural presentation of Mabuse create an image of Evil which is tangible, fearful, and real for viewers. Stephen Jenkins writes that “Lang’s German crime films (Dr. Mabuse der Spieler, Spione, and Testament of Dr. Mabuse) contain characters (Mabuse himself, and Haighi in *Spione*) who *are* equivalent, to a degree, to the figure of Death.”⁶⁰ In this supernatural image, combining the visual world of realism with the non-visual world of the mystical, Lang portrays the abstract agency of Evil from his films. Just as the ghostly apparitions and voices in *Scarlet Street* and *Fury* work to disseminate a positive justice in Lang’s cinematic world, Mabuse haunts Lang’s characters as a counter force to the director’s ethical agents. Tom

⁶⁰ Jenkins, Stephen. "Scarlet Street." *Fritz Lang, the Image and the Look*. 1981. London: BFI Pub, 66.

Gunning reads Mabuse as “not only [Lang’s] ultimate figure of urban crime, but his most complex enunciator figure, the author of crimes who aspires to be a demi-urge in control of [his] own creation, Lang’s own *doppelgänger* as director and author who will haunt Lang for nearly the full extent of his career (from 1922 to his last film in 1960).”⁶¹ As such, one will read Mabuse as an opposition to Lang himself, taking on an agency in his films to change circumstances, control character, and events taking place in the narrative.

Gunning’s proclamation of Mabuse’s authorial intent over Lang’s stories recalls moments of mystical intervention, both of good and evil, in many of the other German and American films. In *M*, these forces enter as the demonic temptations which Beckert confesses about and return as the authorial “hand” of justice at the end of the kangaroo court proceedings. In *Fury*, this enunciatory power is repeated in the unified gaze of mob, marching over the jailhouse; in *Scarlet Street*, these are the voices that haunt Chris Cross after the deaths of Kitty and Johnny; in *The Big Heat*, it is Fate, or circumstance, that guides Bannion’s destiny to instill new ethical order in the metropolis. If Lang is the ethical force of justice in his films, then Mabuse, who resurfaces again and again throughout the director’s career, is the lingering force of opposition that runs counter to order in Lang’s universe.

At the end of *Der Spieler*, the ghosts of Mabuse’s victims drive the mastermind into insanity, allowing for the police to corner him in his counterfeiting lab. These apparitions emerge as manifestations of Lang’s internal world of guilt, ethics, and conscience. However, if the internal “judge, courtroom, and jury,” which the lawyer explains to Cross of at the end of *Scarlet Street*, govern the effective power of these deployed agents of justice, how are they able to

⁶¹ Gunning, Tom. *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity*, 2000, British Film Institute, 57

rupture the conscience of Mabuse? The criminal master does not feel guilty in the conventionally ethical or legal sense. We see that deployed forces of Law, like Lohmann in *Testament*, remain one step behind him. Mabuse evades capture through supernatural methods of control. Lohmann acknowledges the limits of the Law, in the final scene of *Testament*, after seeing Baum lose his sanity and destroy all evidence of Mabuse's notebook. He turns to Kent and says, "Come on, boy. This is a matter too great for a mere police commissioner."

In his essay "Fate and Character," Benjamin questions the capacities of Law to maintain order in the past and present, repositioning Fate as a higher enforcer of justice. Fate acts as a supernatural force of justice which supersedes the Law's potential to create guilt and mediate Evil through the enforcement of penal codes. For Benjamin, and Lang himself, Law deludes itself with its capacity to achieve a social balance between "guilt and atonement." He writes, "through confusing itself with the realm of justice, the order of the law, which is only a residue of the demonic stage of human existence when legal statutes determined not only men's relationships but also their relation to the gods, has preserved itself long past the time of the victory over the demons."⁶² Instead, in the context of Benjamin, a Fate-Infused Law enforces universalized moral justice; for Lang, it propels Destiny in his cinema. Justice, in the form of Fate, acts as divine violence, "pure violence which is the domain sovereignty, the domain within which killing is neither an expression of personal pathology, nor a crime (or its punishment)."⁶³ In this quote, philosopher Slavoj Zizek argues that divine authorities of justice find themselves exempt from pathological or moral dimensions of violence or punishment. The inherent

⁶² "Fate and Character." *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, by Walter Benjamin, 1973. Mariner Books 307

⁶³ Zizek, Slavoj. *Violence*. 2009. Picador, 198

vindication that this violence experiences allows for it so function beyond the moral ambiguities of legal punishment or judgment that Benjamin establishes for the Law.

Foucault's *Madness and Civilizations* speaks of how the delusion of the madman "exceeds the juridical limits of the individual, ignores the moral limits fixed for him, and tends to an apotheosis of the self."⁶⁴ Much like the madman, Law finds itself in a similar position of self-fulfillment, seeking an apotheosis, or culmination, of the self through the eradication of crime. However, crime, like Mabuse, is not ephemeral; it does not die with the criminal, but recycles, re-invests, and revives itself endlessly through new cycles and forms (i.e. Baum versus Mabuse).

Lohmann and the police do not discover the resurgence of Mabuse in *Testament*, rather Lang steps in to make the Law aware of Mabuse's presence. Mabuse uses Baum to carry out his work after his mind and body are deceased, while Lang deploys Hofmeister, an agent emerging from outside of the Law, to inform Lohmann of the criminal's return. Lang and Mabuse interact as opposing forces of good and chaos, colliding with one another through coordinated circumstances that trigger interactions between characters within the film's plot. These interactions set forces into motion which play out as conflicts between ethical and non-ethical agents. As *Testament* begins with Lang's deployment of Hofmeister's discovery of Mabuse's counterfeiting crime operation and information of the crime lord's return, Mabuse's plot begins before the audience engages with the screen, when Baum begins to read his journals. From these beginnings emerge contentious battles where order and chaos bounce off one another through social institutions designed to mediate interactions between good and evil.

⁶⁴ Foucault, Michel. *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, 1994. Vintage Books, 265.

Relationships, Love, and the Will of Mabuse in *Testament*

Testament explores various types of relationship between its characters, connecting traditional ideas of romantic love to archetypes of redemption, edification, and metamorphosis. On the other hand, the film also shows aberrations of love through forms of infatuation and obsession. The trajectories of these relationships correlate to the Fates of characters and influence the overall outcome of individual narratives, all of which pertain to the fall of Mabuse at the end of the film. In this section I will analyze and compare the relationships between Kent and Lilli, as well as Mabuse and Baum. Each of these character dynamics will be related back to their affiliation with the narrative arc of Law and Mabuse in the film.

Perhaps the most important character conflict in *Testament* is waged between the wills of Mabuse and Lang over Kent, who works in Baum's criminal gang, but feels morally conflicted about his lawbreaking activity. Lang's character trajectory depicts Kent's venture into crime as a financial necessity. His inability to obtain a job from the employment office pushes him to join Mabuse's counterfeiting operation, which he claims is the only way for "an engineer who was an ex-con" to get a job. The shortage of working-class jobs correlated with the rise of small-time criminals in Weimar Germany. German historian Matthew Stibbe writes that food and housing shortages contextualized the economic "plight of tens of thousands of impoverished Germans (and their dependents) who were sentenced to prison for minor acts of theft and other crimes of poverty during this period."⁶⁵ Lang's characterization of criminals during this period portrays them as citizens of an underground society, existing, like Nicolai and Karetzky, on the outskirts

⁶⁵ Stibbe, Matthew. *Germany, 1914-1933: Politics, Society and Culture*. 2014. Routledge, 106-107

of Weimar civilization. Kent's character reflects this same marginality, which is dually intensified by his conflicted feelings about being a criminal under the order of Mabuse.

While sitting in a café with his girlfriend Lilli, Kent reminisces on the same time last year when they first met in the city employment office. Lang cuts to a flash back of this memory, set in the interior of a packed and understaffed office room. Inside the employment office, a long line of men filters through to four desks, while Kent stands at the front. The space is congested and shares the same claustrophobic and confusing administrative atmosphere as the city outside. Lines and metal dividers attempt to order and contain the men waiting on the employment line, but the quantity of unemployed citizens overpowers both the staff and the environment. Impatiently, a clerk asks Kent why he has come to the office every day asking for work after he has been repeatedly told that there are no jobs available. Kent responds with outrage, saying that he has received the same dismissal from employers for three months. He argues that the financial pressures of unemployment have put him under serious stress, finally losing his temper and shouting that the constant failure to receive a job is enough to, "force [him] into becoming a criminal." The clerk's apathy towards Kent's pleas are reflective of a bureaucratic indifference to the major unemployment crisis in the Weimar Republic. As Kent is escorted out of the room for by security, other men in the employment line shout that he has "lost his mind," encouraging him to be removed so the next person can be helped.

Mabuse capitalizes on unemployed working-class citizens, like Kent, by transforming them into criminals who are made susceptible by their financial constrictions. Tom Gunning's theory of the destiny-machine argues for the struggle which Lang's characters face against the systematic and social orders of modernity, which seek to impose control over the courses of these individuals' lives. The institutional, social, economic, and technological barriers of modern

life limit the agency of Lang's characters and place them into contact "with a system that operates separately from their desires and according to its own mechanical logic."⁶⁶ Gunning's exploration of the destiny-machine at work in these films constructs a relationship of Lang as author of events in his own text, implementing allegorical objects and events into his narrative "in which characters must read reality in a different manner in a different manner than they did previously."⁶⁷ To visualize and participate in their own Fates, characters must interpret symbols of Lang's destiny-machine at work.

From the perspective of Gunning's mechanized destiny-machine, Kent's turn to criminality is imposed upon him by the institutions of modernity, putting him in a position where he has no control of his financial agency. He is "forced" into a life of crime by the pressures of the economy. The modern city, apathetic to Kent's individual problems, sets up a series of bureaucratic and administrative barriers which prevent him from finding another job, even though he wants to work and is educated as an engineer. The urban trap consumes Kent and pushes him to lawbreaking as his only option for economic survival. Thereby, his villainy becomes a Fate designed by misfortune and circumstance, rather than any internal sense of greed or avarice.

Lang also offers Kent the possibility for a different future. He introduces him to the character of Lilli at the same time as Kent decides to return to the world of crime. Her circumstances of arrival position her as an allegorical signifier of moral savior or female redemption—like Mrs. Bannion and Katherine Grant in *The Big Heat* and *Fury*. As Kent storms out of the employment office, Lilli, who witnessed his outburst from her desk nearby, follows

⁶⁶ Gunning, Tom. *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity*, 2000, British Film Institute, 16.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

him outside and offers him 20 marks. At first, Kent rejects the money, claiming that he would rather work than receive charity. However, Lilli tells him that she is giving the money to him as a personal loan, holding him to the promise that he will get a job and pay her back. Kent accepts the money; Gustav Diessl's performance captures the emotional change of the character—he grasps Lilli's hand and softens his expression while, in the background, a romantic score plays along with the image on-screen. Lang fades out of the flash back and back in to the present, where Kent and Lilli are sitting across from one another in a café. The act of giving Kent the 20 marks offers him a glimpse of the humanity which he has lost sight of in the fast paced and high-pressured climate of modernity. Functioning as a symbol of Lang's intervention into the coldness of modern life, Lilli's innocent act of giving reminds Kent of the human empathy which exists outside of the depressed and violent Weimar society.

Kent initial perception of the gift as charity reflects itself as a defense mechanism that he learns from the competitive job market and greedy economic culture around him. Lang shows the domination of the economic competition over the humanity of people in the unemployment office: Kent's consistent pleas for employment are apathetically dismissed by the employment officers and his peers reject him from the building so the next person can be helped by the clerk. For Lang, the selfish attitude of urban life is constructed by the cycling of money and material gain. In an interview with Jean Domarchi and Jacques Rivette, Lang says that, "My personality refuses me the personal satisfaction of being a man. Because each of us, these days, is looking for position, power, money, but never anything inside."⁶⁸ Here, Lang articulates the recurring motif of the Mabuse films: money governs every aspect of modern life. Devoid of emotional depth and human love, the modern city functions like a machine powered by the exchange of

⁶⁸ Lang, Fritz, and Barry Keith Grant. *Fritz Lang: Interviews*. 2003. University Press of Mississippi, 17

money. Mabuse himself seeks to penetrate the social order of the city by infiltrating the circulation of its currency. He counterfeits money to destabilize the economic order of the city and unleash his criminal empire. Once the economy fails, he knows that people will naturally be forced to turn to crime, as is shown in the case of Kent himself.

Individual investment in the power of money or acquisition of material goods, as Erich Fromm writes in his theory of love, devalues humanity and proving that, “envy, jealousy, ambition, any kind of greed are passions; love is an action, the practice of a human power, which can be practiced only in freedom and never as the result of a compulsion.”⁶⁹In Lilli’s act of loaning Kent the 20 marks, Lang counters the apathy of the city with an act of wholesome giving and sacrifice, free from compulsive passion and utilitarian gains. As she gives Kent the money, Lilli says, “This is all I have, but take it.” In this selfless act, Lilli expresses a genuine desire to see Kent succeed, get a job, and survive—she gives him what she has without desiring anything back in return. Emerging from the world of crime, which motivates its work and passion around material profit and lives in opposition to the society of Law, Kent is not accustomed to this behavior. In the city, he has been trained to live according to the power of institutions which govern his lifestyle and decisions. As such, we read Kent’s outburst in the employment office as a signification of outrage against his enslavement to a government institution that seeks to replace his humanity with an economic hierarchy.

Kent’s feelings for Lilli conflict with his utilitarian needs, putting economic barriers between his happiness and their love. Unlike the other criminals, such as Hardy, Nicolai, and Karetzky, who are kept satisfied by the profits they make or are too scared to disobey Baum’s

⁶⁹ Ibid. 20

orders, Kents finds himself deeply conflicted each time he receives a message from Mabuse. Lang shows this internal conflict build throughout the film, beginning when Kent, in his home, receives a note from Mabuse telling him to “MEET TONIGHT AT 1:00 AM.” Before Kent goes to answer the door, Lang pans across his desk, showing a picture of Lilli, a vase of flowers, and a half-finished love letter. Lang’s high-contrast lighting in this scene illustrates the duality of Kent’s mental state—a lamp illuminates his desk while the rest of the room bathes in darkness. Kent stands on the dark side of the room while our eyes are drawn to the lit table top. Lilli sits in the light, while Kent stands in the darkness. Kent’s internal conflict is illustrated in this visual dichotomy of light, where there is ambiguity in the visual setting just as there is a sense of incompleteness or shades of darkness in their relationship. Kent is unable to finish the letter he for Lilli because he has not yet told her that he is still a criminal. Lang leaves the camera on the empty desk while Kent answers the door. When he returns to the desk with Mabuse’s note, Kent picks up the letter for Lilli and rips it in half, denying himself her love and abiding by doctor’s



Figure 2.4: Trapped Between Two Doorways

will.

Lang builds on these internal conflicts within Kent throughout the film, leading up to his redemption and severance from the doctor’s authority. Later, Kent receives another note from Dr. Mabuse, ordering him to “MEET TONIGHT AT 12:00 AM” in the

counterfeiting lab. Upon receiving the message, Lang pins Kent between two door hinges; the claustrophobic setting visualizes the internal feeling of entrapment that Kent experiences through the double life that he is living as a criminal and a lover. He stands in the light of the image but remains entrapped by the constricted space. Because he cannot choose between his love for Lilli and life of crime, Kent sits in a between doors which lead to two different destinies for his life.

As Kent sits, conflicted about his current position, Hardy, the organizer of the criminal syndicate, walks into the room. Hardy notices Kent's distressed attitude and slouched posture but reassures him of his duty to Mabuse. He reminds Kent that disobedience is "no use...the doctor is more powerful than you." From this scene, Lang cuts to an image of the deceased body of Dr. Mabuse in the insane asylum. From the message that Kent has just received, the audience knows that the will of Dr. Mabuse has survived his physical death. Through his supernatural powers, Mabuse can still send messages into the world after death and control characters in Lang's story. Lang himself claims this enigmatic power and supernatural influence is the reason for his career-long interest in Mabuse: "He is evil incarnate, a drive for power that ends by destroying itself."⁷⁰ For the preservation of his plan, Mabuse resorts to destroying his own body, carrying out the remainder of his will through the surrogate form of Baum. From a Freudian perspective, Mabuse is a manifestation of the human death drive: an organism with a fatal desire to destroy itself and everything around it.⁷¹ Benjamin defines the destructive character as "always blithely at work.... [and which] nature dictates his tempo... for he must forestall her...No vision inspires the destructive character.... least of them is to know what will replace what has been

⁷⁰ Lang, Fritz, and Barry Keith Grant. *Fritz Lang: Interviews*. 2003. University Press of Mississippi, 25.

⁷¹ "Beyond the Pleasure Principle." *The Freud Reader*, by Sigmund Freud and Peter Gay, 1999. Norton, 655.

destroyed.”⁷² In both cases, Mabuse can be understood as a destructive force unto himself, his environment, and those he inhabits. The natural force of death does not forestall the destructive power of Mabuse. His body is destroyed and then “replaced” through a psycho-physical fusion with Dr. Baum.

Erich Fromm regards love as an act which requires that of psycho-physical fusion with another person. In a very literal sense, we can interpret Mabuse’s relationship with Baum as an example of this fusion, conjoining two entities into a machine of villainy that seeks to purport destruction and perpetuate crime. According to Fromm, Baum’s love for Mabuse is an obsessive form of love, which acts counter to Lilli’s love which frees Kent from the doctor’s influence. While Lilli and Kent reflect mutual growth through their fusion, the relationship between Baum and Mabuse illustrates the destructive dynamics between sadistic and masochistic persons.

While it seems difficult to compare the romantic love between Kent and Lilli to the neurotic obsession Baum has for Mabuse, doing so anyway provides interesting insights into the way Lang represents relationships, crime, and Evil come about in his films. In the case of Baum, Fromm writes that, “the sadistic person is as dependent on the submissive person as the latter is on the former; neither can live without the other. The difference is only that the sadistic person commands, exploits, hurts, humiliates, and that the masochistic person is commanded, exploited, hurt, humiliated.”⁷³ These mutual acts of subordination and humiliation preserve the psychological hierarchies that each person in the relationship negatively reinforces for the other.

⁷² Benjamin, Walter. “The Destructive Character,” *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*. 1978. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 301

⁷³ Fromm, Erich. *The Art of Loving*. 2006. Harper Perennial, 19

Baum handles the deceased body of Mabuse in the asylum, pulling back the sheets we see draped over the doctor's face. In this scene, Lang stages a showdown between Baum and Lohmann, who talk over the body of Mabuse and show how the criminal still controls both of their plots from beyond the grave. Lohmann praises Mabuse's death as the elimination of one more "insane criminal" from the world while Baum argues that the Inspector does not realize the "phenomenal, superhuman mind that has come to an end with Dr. Mabuse's death." Baum rants on about the destructive potentials that such a mind had for the Earth: "his mind would have laid to waste our whole rotten world, which is overdue for destruction. This godless world, devoid of justice and compassion, consisting only of selfishness, cruelty, and hatred." Baum's tirade is so impassioned that he almost gets too carried away and tells Lohmann about Mabuse's last will and testament.

The perverted love that Baum has for Mabuse's genius puts him in a: "masochistic submission to fate, to sickness, to rhythmic music, to the orgiastic state produced in drugs or under hypnotic trance...[where] the person renounces his integrity, makes himself the instrument of somebody or something outside of himself."⁷⁴ Mabuse's hypnotic power imposes an authoritative will onto Baum's consciousnesses. Through this linkage, Baum fuses with the criminal. In this state of submission, "the power of the one who submits is inflated, may he be a person or a god; he is everything...insomuch as he is part of [the idol]."⁷⁵ Through a union with his idolized mentor, Mabuse, Baum engages in a relationship coursed on the same destructive path as the entity itself.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid. 18

In the final scene of the film, during a car chase between Lohmann, Kent, and Baum, the ghostly figure points Baum to his doom, motioning for him to go in the direction of the asylum



Figure 2.5: The Doctor and the Will of Mabuse

cell where Hofmeister resides and Mabuse himself was confined. During the chase, Baum completely submits his thoughts to the voice of Mabuse inside of his head. He hears Mabuse repeat again and again: “Empire of Crime, Empire of Crime.” When Baum finally reaches

Mabuse’s old room, the doctor loses his mind, destroying all evidence of the criminal’s last will and testament. Mabuse control over Baum’s mind and the doctor’s psychopathic worship of the criminal motivate him to destroy himself in the fulfillment of a death drive. The vision of the criminal empire collapses at the end of the film, and Lang shows the destiny-machine come full circle. Baum’s obsessive love for Mabuse forces him on a destructive path that traps his will under the sadistic authority of the doctor.

On the contrary, Lang allows Kent to redeem himself from the criminal cycle of violence, thereby escaping his destructive Fate, through Lilli. When Kent receives orders from Baum/Mabuse to break into a bank, place counterfeit bills into the safes, and kill the guards so that there are no witnesses to the attack, he finally decides to leave the crime world. Kent sees a note under his door that reads: Ich liebe dich (“I love you”). He quickly grabs his hat to go

outside and find Lilli. As he opens the door, Lilli stands there in front of him. At this moment, Kent confesses his criminal past to Lilli—his murder of his ex-girlfriend and his best friend, who it is suggested were lovers behind his back. Lilli tells him that she is still in love with him. So, Kent tries to drive her away again by



Figure 2.6: Fate Drawn from Behind the Curtain

admitting that he has been working for Mabuse's for the past six months. At this statement, Kent buries his face in his fists and says, "If only I had known what I know now." As seen in Figure 2.6, superimposition of the curtain from which the figure of Baum/Mabuse gives out its orders dissolves over the body of Kent. Lang has the curtain descend upon the protagonist to show his entrapment under the will of Mabuse.

Gunning claims that Kent breaks from Mabuse's will in the final act of the film, redeeming himself, by confronting "the man behind the curtain."⁷⁶ The scene ends with Lilli confirming her love again and Kent embracing Lilli, followed by a shot of Hardy reading a watch which signifies that Kent is late for the bank heist. He reports this to Mabuse, as Kent and Lilli leave the apartment to go find Lohmann and give him information. While walking down the street, the couple is confronted by a wood-legged beggar who asks for money. Just as Kent is about to give him some bills from his wallet, the beggar reveals himself to be one of Mabuse's

⁷⁶ Gunning, Tom. *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity*, 2000, British Film Institute, 152

henchmen. The urban trap ensnares the couple and Kent's reinstated humanity is welcomed once again by the violent crime culture of the city (deception, murderous threat, and kidnapping being the response to his charity). Kent's disobedience to the will of Dr. Mabuse forces him and Lilli into a room which is to become their death trap.



Figure 2.7: The Man Behind the Curtain

Gunning reads this next scene as the climatic “revelation of what lies behind the curtain... [as well as] the film’s rather saccharine and tiresome romantic subplot of the reform of the gangster, Kent, through his love for the office worker Lilli.”⁷⁷ Aside from Gunning’s cynical reading of

Kent and Lilli’s romance as cliché, the theorist points to the ways in which their relationship is a vehicle through which larger themes of violence and entrapment are addressed. The voice which speaks to Lilli and Kent from ‘behind the curtain’ is revealed to be a silhouetted cutout of Baum, hooked up to a voice recording device. Baum’s silhouetted form hollows out his own identity and reassigns him a role as the voice of Mabuse. Through the act of possession, Baum loses the identity of the man he is beneath his submission to the will of Mabuse; this silhouetted image resembles the unidentified figure of Beckert in the beginning of *M*, whose shadow acts as a representation of the demonic form which takes hold of his personality before he murders Elsie

⁷⁷ Ibid.

Beckmann. Interchanging between physical forms, Gunning explains that “neither Baum nor Mabuse need a body to convey their will to underlings; all they need is a voice and an apparatus to carry it.”⁷⁸

To break from the authority of Mabuse is to break from the controlling influence of his voice. Over the loudspeaker, Mabuse decrees that Kent and Lilli “will never leave this room alive.” Then, a bomb begins ticking and a timer is set for three hours until its detonation. Kent and Lilli attempt to find and dismantle the bomb before it destroys the room, with them in it. Gunning refers to this implanted bomb and prison-like room as Mabuse’s “death trap,” which he sets for the couple to set into motion Lang’s destiny-machine. Mabuse orders the deaths of Kent and Lilli and takes control over time and space within the room. The ticking of the clock signifies a countdown until the couple’s doom, as well as Mabuse usurpation of authority over time itself. Kent puts faith of his and Lilli’s survival in their ability to outsmart the will of Mabuse together.

⁷⁸ Ibid. 154

Kent's Escape, Lang's Trap and Mabuse's End:

While Kent and Lilli deal with the bomb, Lang sets a counter trap for Mabuse's criminals through Lohmann and his police force, cornering Nicolai, Hardy, and the rest of the gang in an

Figure 2.8 & 2.9: Baum and Lohmann's Traps



apartment across town. The ticking of the bomb clock is used as a sound transition, moving the listener from the clicks of the explosion to Nicolai tapping a spoon against the surface of a hard-boiled egg. If Gunning describes the bomb's ticking as a signifier of Mabuse's appropriation of the destiny-machine and the assertion of mastery over time itself, then this aural transition marks Lang's reintervention into the plot as the editor of action. The tapping of the spoon on the egg shell triggers the collapse of the criminals' operation and sets off Lang's trap.

When the Law closes in on Nicolai and the criminal gang,

Mabuse's death drive manifests in Hardy, who spearheads the shootout against Lohmann's police force. The criminals' violence against the Law encourages retaliation from the police;

Lohmann threatens to throw grenades into the apartment unless the thugs surrender. Facing certain destruction, most of the criminals agree to Lohmann's demands, except Hardy, who submits himself to Mabuse's will by means of suicide. Hardy's fear of the doctor's power pushes him to take his own life rather than experience punishment. In a close-up of the gun, lying on the floor next to the dead criminal, Lohmann's hand reaches in to the frame and picks up Hardy's Dreyser pistol. Lang's hand moves through Lohmann back into the narrative, appropriating the power of Mabuse's influence over the criminals to sabotage the Fate of his plans.

At police headquarters, Lohmann questions the criminals about the Dr. Kramm at the traffic stop and Hardy's suicide. Through an analysis match of the bullets at each crime scene, Lohmann deduces that Hardy's Dreyser pistol killed both Kramm and himself. Lohmann pursues this hunch through a line of logical analysis which leads him back to the original suspicion that Baum has something to do with these crimes. He calls Baum to the station and tries to trick him into uncovering his knowledge of the detained criminals. Baum claims not to recognize the criminal who Lohmann has showed him; Lohmann accepts his answer and asks the doctor to wait in his office while he asks the detainees if they recognize this man. As Baum leaves the office, he runs into Kent who is coming in to tell Lohmann about Mabuse's operation. Baum mistakenly discloses his knowledge of Kent's identity to the Inspector; this supports Lohmann's suspicions of Baum as the head of the counterfeiting operation.

Seeing his plans fall to failure, Baum returns to his office and carries out the rest of Mabuse's will without the help of the other criminals. Following Mabuse's will, Baum goes to the chemical plant by himself and sets fire to the reactors, in accordance with Mabuse's orders. However, Lohmann catches Baum at the site of the fire and follows him as he tries to make an escape. Mabuse back tracks on his plan and orders Baum to return to his office. After their high-

speed chase on the road, Baum's car reaches the asylum, with Lohmann following close behind. Mabuse's ghost guides Baum through the building, back into his office, and hands him the only copy of his testament of crime. Baum is overwhelmed sheer quantity of orders that Mabuse is



Figure 2.10: The Last Will of Dr. Mabuse
the sadistic authority of Mabuse.

giving him. Without any knowledge of the end goal of Mabuse's plan, Baum blindly submits himself to carrying out whatever the criminal's demands are. Through Baum's obsession and addiction to Mabuse, his will becomes the only one that exists. Baum submits both mind and body to

Realizing that Lohmann has foiled his plan, Mabuse leads Baum into Hofmeister's cell. The apparition points inside of the cell, instructing Baum to enter it—in the background the audience can hear Hofmeister singing the children's song that overtook his sanity. This gesture indicates that Baum is just as insignificant as Hofmeister for Mabuse, another mind to be manipulated, exploited, and then dispensed. For Lang, both characters are merely instruments through which Mabuse and the director conduct their discourse on the endlessly perpetuating cycles of good and evil. Gunning owes Mabuse's original failure in *Der Spieler* to "the way the master criminal identified himself with the apparatus of the Destiny-machine and then

discovered his hubristic mistake.”⁷⁹This time, Mabuse acknowledges that he is not the sole controller of destiny. Mabuse accepts Lohmann’s foil of his plan and plays his role in the game of the Fates, where God-like forces attempt to control the lives of men and women.

While Gunning calls the romantic plot of Kent’s redemption “tiresome,” it is essential to the ethos of Lang’s film. When Lilli first professes her love to Kent, she reinvigorates a spirit which has been dampened by the pressures of modern life. This rejuvenation enforces in him the drive to defy Mabuse’s sadistic will and reorients his ethical compass through his identification with her as a signifier of goodness and humanity. Through her love, as Fromm writes, Lilli gives of Kent her “joy, understanding, knowledge, humor, sadness—of all expressions and manifestations of that which is alive in her.”⁸⁰ By doing so, she plays a role in Lang’s redemptive story of justice, enacted through Kent, who turns away from his life of crime to return to the service of the Law.

⁷⁹ Ibid. 154

⁸⁰ Fromm, Erich. *The Art of Loving*. 2006. Harper Perennial, 17

Chapter 3:

Lang's American Period: Social Critiques of Law, the Individual, and Society

Fury:

Following Lang's immigration to America in 1934, Tom Gunning writes that "politics play a greater role in Lang's American films, supporting Lang's claim of a political awakening after shooting *M*."⁸¹ Social criticism follows Lang as he moves to Los Angeles in June 1934, amid the Great Depression. Economic instability and gaps in employment led to the growth of an American underground and fostered a highly active crime world. Lang represents his vision of America through the images and characters of his films through the 1930s to 50s. Mob violence, loss of penal control, and collusion between police and gang organizations drive the plots of Lang's major pictures during this time. From *Fury* (1936) to *The Big Heat* (1954), Lang's protagonists are shown to operate on the fringes, against, or in opposition to Law.

The themes of Lang's early American work function as social critique. They display this through a stylistic and conceptual evolution, continuing from *Fury* through to *The Big Heat*. This awareness is a reflection on Lang's new environment, showcasing his evolving impressions of the American legal system and its relationships with the public sphere. Lang captures an American idealism in his characters, which contextualizes his entrance into the nation. In an interview with Jean Domarchi and Jacques Rivette, Lang says that his American films "are all...based on a social critique...of laws and conventions"⁸². Beginning with *Fury*, Lang examines life in America through the lens of Law and its governance of individuals and social

⁸¹ Gunning, Tom. *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity*. 2000. British Film Institute, 213

⁸² Lang, Fritz, and Barry Keith Grant. *Fritz Lang: Interviews*. 2003. University Press of Mississippi, 17

groups. In opposition to conventional Law, Lang explores the cultural phenomenon of Lynch Law, after encountering many “reports of Southern lynchings and vigilante justice...in American newspapers”⁸³.

In an interview with Peter Bogdanovich, Lang says that he was inspired to make *Fury* by a collection of newspaper clippings that he had acquired over his years spent in America. He had found a “lynching case that had happened in San Jose, California” where bus drivers had rounded up citizens to perform a public lynching on a black man in prison; he used this scenario as a model for the film’s plot⁸⁴. Building from the social tensions which appear in *M*, Lang portrays America through a representation of Lynch Law, framing it as a reactionary and potentially destabilizing force of violence in American culture. *Fury* explores Lynch Law’s relationship as a public justice to formal institutions and authorities of the Law. Through the capture, persecution, and attempted murder of the film’s protagonist, Joe Wilson, *Fury* shows the interplay between unlawful and lawful forms of violence. Conflict between unregulated and sanctioned forms of the Law lead to larger issues of ethics, human nature, and character through their representations of power, punishment, and justice in Lang’s American films.

I will use Walter Benjamin’s “Critique of Violence” to distinguish between the roles of “so-called sanctioned violence, and unsanctioned violence.”⁸⁵ Lang incorporates these distinctions into his films, distinguishing acts of hanging, electrocution, and torture from murders, kidnapping, and extortions—i.e. acts of lawbreaking. Through these applications of violence rests a hierarchy of power. Any usage of violence by lawmakers to re-enforce the Law

⁸³ Soloviena, Olga. "Identifying the Subject: Lang's *M* and the Trajectories of Film Criticism." *A Companion to Fritz Lang*. 2015. John Wiley & Sons, 94

⁸⁴ Bogdanovich, Peter. *Who the Devil Made It: on Directing Pictures*. 1997, Alfred A. Knopf, 182

⁸⁵ Benjamin, Walter. *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*. 1978, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 294

becomes an exercise of justice, whereas violence outside of the law becomes injustice. On this premise, Lang illustrates that “lawmaking [in itself] is power making, and, to that extent, an immediate manifestation of violence”⁸⁶ and inherent in maintenance of social order. In this case, Law is not most threatened by violence itself, but by unregulated violence, like in *M*, emerging from the public sphere. In *Fury*, Lang shows us public “violence, when taken out of the hands of the law, threatens not only by the ends [that it may pursue], but by its mere existence outside the law.”⁸⁷ In sum, the mob violence shown in *Fury* illustrates a destabilization of social order through the removal of the authority of the Law. This shift in power dynamics in the town of Strand, where the film takes place, is a microcosmic example of the potentially violent revolutions that arise from the failure of the police to assuage public fears through investigative procedures. When the police fail to keep the public safe and catch dangerous criminals, the public loses faith in the system and resorts to vigilante forms of justice.

Lang’s analysis of the American justice system in 1936 moves between the traditional court system, Common Law, and mob justice, Lynch Law. The film follows the soon-to-be-married couple Katherine Grant and Joe Wilson. While traveling to see Katherine, Joe becomes a suspect for a local kidnapping, framing him as a criminal in the eyes of the public and police. The townspeople of Strand, where Wilson is arrested and jailed, begin to spread rumors of his incarceration and demand punishment for the accused kidnapper. The town Sheriff acts an arbiter between the people of Strand and Wilson, weighing his judgment on the accused through series of questioning and police procedures. However, the investigation takes longer than anticipated and gossip spreads around town that a suspected kidnapper is being withheld in the jailhouse

⁸⁶ Ibid. 279

⁸⁷ Ibid.

without punishment. The evidence against Wilson is circumstantial, but rumors move through the town that say the police have found ransom money stashed in his car.

In Strand, Lang shows how this information about the kidnapping moves through the town. Talk of Wilson's jailing begins with Bugsy, the Sheriff's right-hand man, in a barber shop, and develops into a full-blown accusation of guilt once it reaches the general market. Lang has the rumor both begin and end with Bugsy, who reveals information on Wilson's jailing to suspend a citizen's complaint that public servants have been too busy "playing cards all day" to make headway on the Peabody kidnapping case. Once Bugsy refutes this by saying that he has a man confined in the jailhouse who knows something about the kidnapping, the message moves from venue to venue in town, becoming distorted and given addition details as it moves through people. The barber passes the message to his wife, who then tells her neighbor, who tells a friend, who tells her two other friends in the grocery store, that the police have caught the real kidnapper. Lang dissolves an image of these three women chatting about the case in the local market to chickens clucking rapidly and strutting aimlessly around a chicken pen. This transition creates a metaphor for the gossip of the townspeople, in this case, the women in the supermarket,



which resemble the clucking of chickens in a small pen.

Moreover, this image suggests that, like the poultry confined to their cramped quarters, everyone in the contained space of Strand clamors over one another,

Figure 3.0: Gossip Around Town

blasting misinformation that they have heard, due to the frustrating limitations of their small-town environment.

These rumors escalate violently when they pass through the men of town, making their way through the town's social spaces: store fronts, cutlery shops, and the main tavern. Here, the frustration that the patron in the barber shop initially expresses, about the police's inability to properly serve the public and bring the Peabody kidnapper to justice is repeated and intensified. Outside of a storefront, Lang stages three men conversing about how their wives have said the kidnapper has not only been found, but that he "acted cocky" during his arrest, immediately asking to phone his lawyer. Another man in the group complains that "that's always the racket with big time attorneys, helping "skunks" beat the Law." Angered by this comment, another man, previously fondling a whip, cracks it loudly in the center of the frame, saying, "well, they won't beat it with any jury I'm ever on, sure. And if us people had the courage of our convictions; these vermin would vanish like spit on a hot stove."

Gunning describes this man as "Lang's sketch of a grotesque type," enflamed by an ignorant strain of American populist ideology.⁸⁸ However, here, more clearly, Lang shows how the informal circulation of information among the townspeople has awakened a flurry of angst in the public. The gap between lawmaker and citizen is opened through the appropriation and evolution of this misinformation. First, police knowledge comes from the mouth of Lang's caricature of the Law, Bugsy, and moves informally through citizens of Strand, who distort his language to fulfill their own desire for mobilization against a dangerous kidnapper. Lang

⁸⁸ Gunning, Tom. *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity*, 2000, British Film Institute, 220.

illustrates a shift in power relations between privileged agents of the Law, like Bugsy, who is depicted as inept and incapable of preserving public peace, and those governed by it.

Social thinker, Michel Foucault speaks of the linkages between circulations of knowledge within the public and power dynamics between government and its subjects, in his book of lectures, *On the Government of the Living*. Foucault writes that, within the domains of government and the concealment of knowledge, “if a number of individuals appear as specialists of the truth that is to be imposed on politics [this case being, localized politics of the town], this is...because they have something to hide.”⁸⁹ In the oral circulation of rumors regarding Wilson’s capture, Lang shows us barriers of communication which separate the knowledge of the public from that of the Law. Foucault goes on in this same lecture to say that “if...all the individuals living in a society knew the truth and actually knew...what is happening, and what the apparent competence of others seeks only to hide...the government would no longer be able to govern and the revolution would take place immediately.”⁹⁰ The absence of trust between the police and the people—stemming from the Sheriff’s inability to convict a felon for the Peabody kidnapping—leads to a distortion of the truth about Wilson’s guilt.

Evidence of ransom notes matching dollar bills found on Wilson’s person become a factor of condemnation in the eyes of the public; these clues fulfill the public’s most immediate desires to suspend their own fears about a kidnapper still on the loose. Lang uses the cracking whip as a punctuating mark for the violent tensions that are building up in the town; it cues the townspeople to mobilize in their frustrations against Sheriff Hummel and his law enforcement for not catching the criminal. Consequently, Lang introduces a Foucauldian nexus where, “there

⁸⁹ Foucault, Michel, et al. *On the Government of the Living: Lectures at the College De France, 1979-1980*. 2014. Palgrave Macmillan, 15

⁹⁰ Ibid.

is an incompatibility...between the finally acquired evidence of what is really taking place [the truth held by law enforcement], between the evidence acquired by all [the information circulating amongst the people], and the exercise of government by a few [the Law's authority over the case]."⁹¹

Lang sets up the assemblage of the mob in tavern scenes, beginning with a camera pan over a newspaper, with a headline that reads, "KIDNAP RANSOM PAID." Lang's inclusion of this newspaper connects the public to the information that the authorities have given in to the kidnapper's demands for a ransom. This serves as a symbolic failure of the Law. The ransom payment implies that the police could not catch the criminal through their investigation, which no doubt adds to public angst and frustration towards the incompetence of law enforcement. Gunning writes that Lang's editing of scenes here acts as a "cutting between...characters as they form themselves into a mob."⁹²With the news of Wilson's pending trial, a group of men discuss the reputation that Strand will receive upon capturing the Chicago kidnapper. A sleazy, small time criminal in town, Kirby Dawson, eggs on the impatience of the men speaking next to him, throwing garbage in their way and pushing one man out of the bar. When the two men mention that the people of Strand must confer with the Sheriff about bringing this kidnapper to justice, Dawson insists that they go directly to the jailhouse now to speak with Hummel about the case.

Dawson functions as a catalyst for the assemblage of the mob, as well as a motivator for the people of Strand to transgress the Law. At the jailhouse, Dawson calls the Sheriff out on his obligation to the people's right to know about the kidnapper. Hummel disregards Dawson's current efforts to speak up for law and order in Strand, as his activities have directly threatened

⁹¹ Ibid. 15

⁹² Gunning, Tom. *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity.*, 2000. British Film Institute, 220

the Law in the past. Dawson capitalizes on the nervousness and hysteria circulating in the town to guide the people towards the transgression of the Law. Under Dawson's influence, the townspeople begin to turn against the Sheriff, shown in a scene where a glass bottle is thrown at the jailhouse building and Hummel phones the governor to warn him to prepare the National Guard. Because the police are unable to convict Wilson, Dawson can enter as a representative of the town's criminal culture and convince the public to distrust the word of the Law. Instead, he encourages them to enact their own form of judgment on the accused. In a Foucauldian sense, Dawson acts, albeit falsely, as a herald of truth, an initiator of revolution among the people, and a voice of anarchy against the government of Strand. In the final scene before the mob riot begins, Dawson not only inspires the emotional outburst that leads to a charge on the jailhouse, but he does so, masterfully, by manipulating Bugsy's language to convince the people of Strand that the Sheriff is withholding evidence from them about Wilson. Thereby, he destroys the trust relationship between the government, the Law, and the governed

Lang sets the bar scene before the riot as a boiling pot of commotion, accusations, and anxiety, where the townspeople are all clamoring about the cash supposedly found in Wilson's car. Lang cuts between groups of excited citizens as they speculate the amount of money that was found. Lang scores the background with a string accompaniment that increases in volume and speed as the rumors in the bar build up. The camera revisits characters as they rehash concerns from earlier in the film (the whip owner scorns big city lawyers who help to get criminals off charges; Dawson plants accusations in the minds of people around him ("why else would they tear up that car if not to find the rest of that ransom dough?")); others speculate towards the amount the police found stashed in the car). The room is ready to explode with fury and emotion once a citizen turns to the door and calls in Bugsy, who is standing outside. Once

again operating as an informal voice of the Law, Bugsy is steered into disclosing more police information about the investigation. He tells the drinkers that the department found a \$5 bill on Wilson, which had an ID number matching the ransom money of the kidnapper.

Gunning writes that this statement becomes used by “Kirby Dawson, and a man who identifies himself as a strikebreaker, to stir up anger against the sheriff.”⁹³ Kirby turns this around to the crowd, saying that the Sheriff has been withholding evidence of Wilson’s guilt from the public. The strikebreaker then taunts the bar crowd, asking them if they’re too “soft-boiled to stick up for a kidnapped girl.”⁹⁴ After issuing the question, the mob begins to rile up—at this moment, Kirby and the strikebreaker step in front of Jaret and take over the screen. Dawson ushers a rallying call to the people and they respond with an uproar of agreement; the camera pans slowly to the left, crossing each face in the crowd. Their heads appear large and close-up in the screen, nodding in agreement, expressing frustration and gesturing violently at the camera. Just as the tavern seems like it is about to explode into a large brawl, the pan stops on an image of a table and the uproar is broken up by a man who stands up and shouts, “Come on! Let’s have some fun!” The mob cheers and marches out of the bar to go storm the jailhouse.

As the horde exits, Lang cuts to a wide shot of the exterior of the bar. A black man, a shoe shiner, who has been listening to the commotion of the bar from outside of the door, retreats into the corner of the store front as the marching group makes its way outside. As one of the mob members passes the Black man, we see a return of the devilish crack of a whip, and the man from the storefront projects a fiendish laugh into the air before walking off-screen. The black man lingers passively against the wall, as the rest of the procession passes. Coming down

⁹³ Ibid. 221

⁹⁴ Lang, Fritz, *Fury*. 1936. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer

through the BAR lettering, a piece of window frame aligns with the shoe shiner's head, resembling the rope of a noose; the man's outstretched arms, dropped head, and dangling legs mimic the body position of someone who has just been hanged.



Figure 3.1: BAR Lynching

Lang's imagery of the mob moving through the town bears resemblance to that of common "American lynchings...[which were] not only communal rituals of sadism and hatred, but forms of mass entertainment and spectator

sport."⁹⁵ The lynch mob, performing as a public spectacle, pulls more people in with their "carnavalesque" display of joyful violence.⁹⁶ The performance relies on other members of the public to join in. Men in work suits abandon their daily routines to join the parade, while women in business attire are magnetically attracted into the crowd, tucking themselves into the arms of passing men. What Lang shows us is a slippage of law and order into madness and chaos, putting on display a structured performance of primitive violence.

In Foucault's book *Madness and Civilization*, he speaks of the historical perceptions of madness throughout civilization. In context of pre-modernity, a break from disciplinary conventions that restricted the individual behaviors of citizens was seen as an embrace of a primal nature that resided beneath structures of society. Foucault writes that "from this animality

⁹⁵ Gunning, Tom. *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity*, 2000, British Film Institute, 221.

⁹⁶ Ibid. 221

of madness, would be deduced the idea of a mechanistic psychology, and the notion that the forms of madness can be referred to the great structures of animal life.”⁹⁷The philosopher speaks of madness as a doorway into animalistic showings of human nature, “*area[s] of unforeseeable freedom* where frenzy is unchained.”⁹⁸In the primitive display of the mob parade, members of the town eagerly release their social pressures and expectations and allow themselves to revel in the absurdity of their chaos. The gaiety and jubilation of the scene is contrasted by the violent undertones of the mob’s intentions: they are going to the jailhouse to hang Wilson themselves. Wilson becomes the scapegoat for the people, who use him as a sacrifice to overthrow the social conditions of their community and participate in a ritualized and tribal practice of violence.

Lang’s large display of public violence reads as an image of full-blown revolution, a complete usurpation of power over Strand from the police by the people. Gunning recognizes the significance of this shift and sees Lang capture the mob’s unified strength in one shot:

The camera tracks along the street at above human height, moving towards the jail’s front steps and stops as it confronts the sheriff and his deputies. This is no one person’s point of view; rather, the smooth forward thrust of the camera out in front and somewhat above the mob expresses its force, its grabbing of the enunciatory function, its taking control of the story. Joe is only a spectator now... watching from his jail cell window as his fate is being decided.

Lang’s mob adopts the perspective of a unified, hive mind, captured in this point of view shot that Gunning describes. Citizens looking at the camera in the streets wear expressions of horror on their faces; they move to the side as the mob passes and look upon the mass in awe. The mob moves towards the Sheriff and his police force, unintimidated. Hummel stands outside of the jail house with only seven armed guards, awaiting the lynch mob. Lang contrasts the power and size of the mob with the small group of officers representing the Law. The Sheriff and

⁹⁷ Foucault, Michel. *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, 1994. Vintage Books, 76.

⁹⁸ Ibid

his guards are armed with weapons, tear gas and loaded guns, prepared, with a plan, to defend the jailhouse and combat the lynch mob. Lang establishes a contrast between the wild, raw power of lynch mob and the meager, but sanctioned, violence of the Law. Standing at the doors of the jailhouse, Hummel and his men appear as guardians of the Law, defending the final bastion of legal order in the town, which is, ironically, the inside of the jailhouse. The size and terror of the mob is captured through the weight of this dolly in to the jailhouse. The townspeople, in their madness, mobilize into a force of fear and chaos, a physical manifestation of a primitive consciousness that acts in opposition to order and control.

Through the fall into madness, social philosopher Michel Foucault talks of a reification of an abstract evil or bestial force, which, during medieval times in history, was symbolized through images of horned demons and fantastic creatures in Christian iconography. In the modern age, symbols of evil were reassigned to images of insane, deranged, criminals within the city space. Foucault claims that asylums and prisons became sanctioned spaces for individuals whom society identified as mad. However, within all of us, Foucault claims, there exists potential for this bestiality to arise. He writes, in madness, “evil no longer assumed its fantastic body; here we apprehend only its most extreme form, the truth of the beast...the secret danger of an animality that lies in wait and, all at once, undoes reason in violence and truth in the madman’s frenzy.”⁹⁹

This type of human duality is addressed earlier in *Fury*, when the barber talks about the “funny impulses” which he sometimes gets to cut his clients’ throats when shaving them. The people in the mob have succumbed to primal impulses; therefore, the citizens of Strand have removed themselves from human society. Their transition from reason to madness occurs as they

⁹⁹ Foucault, Michel. *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason.*, 76-77. Vintage Books, 1994.

are taken in by the mob. The town itself becomes an asylum, and the jailhouse becomes a bastion of sanity. The shot that Gunning describes takes the viewer into the eyes of the beast, the Devil himself. The mob of individuals becomes possessed by a greater force, which unifies them only to disseminate evil through an animal madness that infects and possesses the town of Strand. In their delirium, they rupture the institution of the Law which is designed to contain “the violence of the insane and the explosion of their fury.”¹⁰⁰

Lang stages the final encounter between Hummel’s guards and the mob as a castration of the Law, a stripping down of its power and authority by a reactionary violence. The mob’s demeanor towards the guards becomes one of degradation, rather than intimidation. Hummel’s troops try to dissuade the mob at the jailhouse doors by telling them that they stand in for law and order in Strand, but this only encourages ridicule from the crowd. The traditional hierarchy between the Law and the public, where the power of the Law exerts control over the people, is not acknowledged. In this standoff, Gunning claims that while the audience “expects from [Hummel] something of the almost thaumaturgic power the name of the law exerts at the end of *M*’s trial scene, its ability to stop the mob in its tracks and silence it. Lang...deconstructs the power of the law in a manner he didn’t undertake in *M* and which typifies the increased awareness of politics in his American films.”¹⁰¹ Not only is Hummel unable to disband the crowd, but the beast of the mob responds to his threats by mocking him as “Popeye the Sheriff Man.” Lang undercuts the authority of the Sheriff by setting up visual contradictions to his threats against the mob. When he warns them that the National Guard is coming to break up the mob, Lang cuts to an image of a soldier relaying a message to his commander to not send troops

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 73

¹⁰¹ Gunning, Tom. *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity*, 2000, British Film Institute, 222.

to Strand. When the commander asks why he must withdraw his troops, Lang cuts to a state politician, who tells the governor that sending troops in to break up the mob might hurt his approval ratings in the upcoming election.

The contradictions that Lang establishes between the Sheriff and his statements reflect a breakage of the word of the Law. Philosopher Slavoj Žižek writes that, from a Hegelian perspective, a dissociation between the word and its signified reference in real life recognizes a collapse of the symbolic bond between the word and reality.¹⁰² While Žižek applies this to the fictional relationship of power that is created through the legitimization of the Word of God, this can apply to the authority stamped onto the Word of the Law. By cutting Hummel's threatening words off from their real references (i.e. the actual intervention of the National Guard; the authority of his threats on the crowd; the visual weakness of the Law in comparison to the mob) Lang delegitimizes the Word of the Law. The Sheriff is shown as blind to the reality of his own position by the film itself and unaware of the outside politics that go into his implementation and enforcement of Law. Hummel operates through the word of the governor, who, in turn, answers to higher political authorities, who, in turn, enforce the Law in accordance with the demands of the public.

Lang explores this relationship between bureaucracy and Law more closely in *The Big Heat*, but this scene in *Fury* shows an early interest in the power structures which determine when, and under whose authority, the Law exerts its influence. Here, Lang shows us that the Law is at the mercy of the public. Benjamin speaks of these limitations of Law when confronted by the public's right to strike. He writes that "the right to strike constitutes in the view of labor,

¹⁰² Žižek Slavoj. *Absolute Recoil: towards a New Foundation of Dialectical Materialism*. 2015, Verso, 253.

which is opposed to that of the state, the right to use force in attaining certain ends.”¹⁰³ This implies an underlying right to violence, or attack on the infrastructure of the state, embedded in the general strike. Benjamin claims that the state cannot outlaw the citizen’s right to strike as a political mobilization against the conditions that they are governed by; therefore, the strike “is able to found and modify legal conditions, however offended the sense of justice may find itself thereby.”¹⁰⁴

Lang’s mob mobilizes against the Law in a way that mimics the labor movements of “revolutionary general strike...[which] exercises a right to overthrow the legal system that has conferred it;” to capture this, Lang has an out-of-town strikebreaker mobilize the mob into action and lead the people to the jailhouse.¹⁰⁵ Hummel cannot exercise the power of the Law over the power of the striker, so he turns to “a consideration of military violence,” which Benjamin identifies as the only legitimate opposition to the revolutionary violence of the strike, or, in this case, the mob.¹⁰⁶ When the military force, the National Guard, is unable to confront the mob violence, ridicule and mockery of the Law are free to escalate into violence against the institutional powers of the Law. The invasion commences when a young man launches a piece of fruit at the Sheriff’s head. As the tomato explodes on Hummel’s face, the mob storms the jailhouse, forcing the police back into the prison. The people push their way in from outside, battering the jailhouse door with a large wooden trunk. The savagery of this scene is intensified through the severity of the mob’s violence towards the police. Moreover, the disturbing cruelty that the mob displays in their facial expressions and gestures during the riot illustrates the

¹⁰³ BENJAMIN, WALTER. *REFLECTIONS: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*. 1978. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 282

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid 283

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

collapse of reason or humanity in the assailants. Before running away from the riot scene, two mob members throw dynamite into the jailhouse, exacerbating the existing fire and leaving Wilson to burn alive in the wake of the flames. Lang shows a disturbing montage of close-up faces from the mob crowd, spread into maniacal grins as they look upon Wilson trapped in his jail cell. The disturbing apathy that these townspeople express towards Wilson's life reflects a dehumanization, a release of social and moral consciousness through the loss of reason and embrace of madness. These people revel in their insanity. As Wilson is engulfed in flames, Katherine arrives at the jailhouse, only to be physically paralyzed and faint from the horror of seeing her fiancé burning alive.

The mob defaces the jailhouse structure and symbolically destroys the legitimacy of Law in Strand. The Sheriff tries to hold back the mob with tear gas and riflery, but outside pressures push their way into the jailhouse. The mob brings madness and chaos into the penitentiary. Brilliantly, Lang juxtaposes relationships between society of law and order and the jailhouse, a containment space for criminals and the insane. Lang argues against the security of the prison, as the mob reflects that the jail cannot contain or hold all lawbreakers. As we see through Kirby Dawson's own existence as a repeat offender of the Law, a frequent visitor of Stand County Jail, crime recycles and multiples itself endlessly in the public sphere. In the final images of the burning jailhouse, Lang shows the complete collapse of sanity and order. A sequence of close-up shots captures a series deranged and savage faces from the mob, gazing at Joe from his cell windows as he burns with the building. Amidst the fury of the flames, one woman falls on her knees and begins to recite a combination of biblical passages from Christ's death on the cross: "I am the resurrection and the life...hear my prayer lord, for I am a stranger with thee and a sojourner as all my fathers were." The voice plays on and Lang cuts between images of the mob

taunting, laughing, mocking Joe. One spectator of the blaze is eating a hotdog as she watches Joe struggle to escape. The final image at the end of this segment is Katherine's horror-stricken face, gazing into the flames. Mob members begin to pick up stones and throw them at Wilson's jailhouse window; through this brutal display of violence, Lang alludes to the stoning and crucifixion of Christ. However, rather than have Wilson forgive these lawbreakers for their blinded madness, Lang deploys an anonymous female figure to voice the director's personal views of justice and forgiveness on their behalf.

The juxtaposition of roles and authorities in this mob scene of *Fury* are inversed in the court room battle later, between the district attorney and defendants, the 22 mob members accused of Wilson's murder (by arson). In this sequence, Lang continues his criticism against the veracity of legal procedure and, as Joe Wilson says in his ending monologue of the film, against the sanctity of justice and civility under the Law. Wilson's resurrection from the flames of the jailhouse sets him on a mission to appropriate the power of the Law to pursue revenge against the mob that has "murdered" him. Rather than scorn it, Wilson decides to champion the Law that failed to protect him from the violence of the mob. Wilson chooses to feign his death and use the authority of the Law, found in the American courtroom, to condemn judgment on the 22 lawbreakers.

Through injustice, both for the kidnapped girl and mob violence done onto Wilson, Lang shows how further cycles of violence emerge that repeat through acts of revenge. Wilson decides to pursue revenge against the lynch mob that burned him in the jail house, countering Lynch Law with the official Law of the court. In the beginning of the Trial of the Mob, much like in Hummel's initial arrest of Joe in *Strand*, the Law relies on hearsay and individual testimonies to convict the twenty-two mob members. By the end, however, Lang shows how the Law obtains

truth through film documentation; the mob riot, which is caught on a film reel by a nearby news reporter, is played back for the courtroom to convict the rioters. The footage plays back for the guilty defendants, who, in their moment of madness, lacked the sanity to acknowledge their heinous crime. Lang's *Fury* serves as a parallel to the courtroom footage of the mob's violence, revealing for American viewers an image of the problems of violence in their culture and the potentially destabilizing consequences of this violence.

Having a foreign perspective on American society, Lang's status as an immigrant allowed him to step back from the violent lynching practice which had become deeply integrated into culture. Lang saw the violent potential of the Law's lenience towards lynching and mob culture. From these acts, Lang saw a force waiting to be mobilized, an egregious display of social control which rested in the hands of the people, rather than in the "hand" of the Law.

The Mob on Trial:

Fury's trial sequence exposes the hypocrisy of the court through its penal structure, which, through the sanctioning of its own violence, adds to the social cycle of violence by seeking to hang the Mob for the murder of Joe Wilson. Moreover, Lang exposes the malleability of the Law and its capacity to be used, misinterpreted, and manipulated by everyone inside and outside of the courtroom (namely Joe himself) to advance their personal agendas. The defense council who defends the mob for their violent actions, and Joe's family on the side of the prosecution, who conduct their proceedings with full knowledge of Wilson's survival, are both operating outside the moral foundations of the Law. Despite his knowledge of Wilson's survival, the district prosecutor tries to sentence all 22 members of the lynch mob to hang for Wilson's murder. Throughout the trial, the ethics of the prosecution are contradicted by Joe's outside intervention in the court's proceedings. Exploring the motif of revenge, Lang shows how the

Law can be exploited by outside influences to push personal agendas. To counter the malleability of the Law, Lang steps in as an arbiter of justice, planting information and arranging circumstances in the courtroom to guide the outcomes of the trial and influence the decisions of his characters.

The trial of the lynch mob is triggered by a conversation between the district attorney and political official who called off the National Guard before the riot. The District Attorney vows to take all 22 rioters to trial and prove their guilt for murder in the first degree. The politician claims that the district attorney cannot take 22 “John Does” to trial and that he simply wants to punish these victims to propel himself “to the high heavens on this case.” In response, the district attorney claims it is his “oath of office” to take this lynching case and re-instill authority to the word of the Law. The framing of the District Attorney in this scene positions him as a crusader of justice, a family man (communicated through the picture of his son which is tilted to the camera), and an ambassadorial agent of Law. The District Attorney takes on the active role of Lohmann in *M* and the *Testament of Dr. Mabuse*, seeking to usurp power of action back over the violent public force which has destabilized order and authority in the city of Strand.

Lang establishes moral and philosophical contradictions between both the prosecutor and defense council in the opening shots of the court scene. In his opening statement, the District Attorney gives a passionate speech citing how the foundations of the American justice system are at stake in this trial. He claims that the Law’s clemency towards jail lynching in the past has gone unchecked due to its victims being criminals—murderers, thugs, arsonists, and thieves. However, he notes, this mob has committed murder against an innocent man. Therefore, to relieve the defendants of punishment for their crimes would be an affront to juridical procedure and, on a national scale, ideals of “American democracy” itself. The defense attorney counters

this accusation against his clients by pinning the death of Wilson on the negligence of the state, refuting the agency of the Law.

Through both opening statements, Lang establishes two poles of contention between the authorities of Common Law and Lynch Law. These forces seek to subvert the power of one another: they engage in a struggle of control between public and police spheres of influence. Lang shows that both parties consciously dismiss the sovereignty of Law to advance their own agendas. The district attorney's crusade for judicial truth appears morally superior to the defense's attempts to exonerate the rioters for their murder. However, Lang shows us that these high-minded ideals are based on a fiction. Wilson is listening to a radio broadcast of the trial during the district attorney's opening statement. Lang weaves Wilson's appearance into a sequence of images capturing several other groups of people listening to the radio broadcast of the trial. Gunning writes that, in this sequence, Lang illustrates the national significance of the trial as well as the broadcast's wide socio-economic range: "listened to by a variety of people of different classes and in different social situations: from a rural country store to a white-collar office to the boudoir of a well-kept mistress."¹⁰⁷

The district attorney highlights the national significance of the trial, saying "every decent person in this country feels the importance of this case." His success in the conviction of the mob effects the Fate of Law outside of Strand. The importance of Wilson's murder is grounded in its symbolic relationship to American liberty, positioning the mob's crime and the victim's death as more significant to the legal conscience of America than that of Strand.

¹⁰⁷ Gunning, Tom. *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity.*, 225, British Film Institute, 2000.

The radio becomes the device of communication with which Lang disseminates this legal consciousness to all Americans. In Gunning's notation of the "well-kept mistress," we are led to an image of a woman staring at her radio device, listening to the broadcasted trial. Her husband, or lover, is getting dressed in the reflection of the radio set. The indentures on the side of the radio console lay atop the husband's body like prison cell bars. Lang designs the box of the



Figure 3.2: The Trial Broadcast

transceiver to resemble the jail cell that contained Wilson in Strand. An empathetic connection is implied between this woman and Katherine, both the female characters impose images of their partners trapped behind the same prison bars as Joe. The woman in this

shot projects her imagination onto her radio transceiver; the pathetic drama that is introduced by district attorney's opening statements and then reinforced throughout the trial is captured by this notion of a lost America. Wilson's unjust death and Katherine's loss of marriage weave themselves a narrative of a lost American dream. The listeners outside of the court attach themselves to this dramatic story and Lang reshapes the individual threat Lynch Law as a danger to not just criminals or minorities, but American idealism itself. Beneath these legal proceedings, the District Attorney crafts an emotional drama, which plays against the legal truth that Wilson's body was not discovered at the remains of the site.

Throughout the trial, the fact of Wilson's survival, and the prosecution's knowledge of this, becomes contradictory to the district attorney's sworn allegiance to the Law. The prosecution, and Joe himself, seeks to avenge his death through an appropriation of institutional power of the Law. In their misuse of the Law for personal revenge, these agents participate in a form of authoritarian struggle between the court and the people. Within hierarchy, between any governing force and its people, Foucault claims that "there is something like a kernel of violence behind all relations of power and that if one were to strip power of its shadowy garb one would find the naked game of life and death."¹⁰⁸ In his game played with the lives of these 22 defendants, Wilson imagines a reassertion of power through the same violent act that was attempted on him.

The trial shows the dialectic of truth that plays out through the courtroom's pursuit of justice on the Fate of the defendants. As the trial begins, the district attorney pulls witnesses to testify against mob members sitting in the courtroom. Sheriff Hummel is asked if he recognizes members of the lynch mob in the defense corner. He denies recognizing any faces from the mob that night. Audience memory recalls that, the day of the riot event, Hummel referred directly to three men in the mob by name, Mr. Lopez, Johnson, and Durkin, asking them to go home. Under the oath of the court, The Sheriff's lies about his knowledge of the defendants. He claims not to know anyone in the mob crowd and says that the riot "must have been [started by] folks from out of town." Through Lang's hand of authorship, the audience knows the truth that Hummel is lying. Thereby, in committing this act of perjury, Hummel discredits his own allegiance to the Law, denying its authority in the same way as the mob discredited his warnings against them

¹⁰⁸ Foucault, Michel, et al. *On the Government of the Living: Lectures at the College De France, 1979-1980*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. 17

before the riot. The next witness is a dressmaker, Edna Hooper, who is asked about the whereabouts of a defendant, Fred Garret, on the evening of the riot. Edna provides a false alibi, claiming that Garret was home on that night. These testimonies continue to purport lie after lie, revealing the public's nonadherence to the word of the Law, committed by both officials *of* Law enforcement and servants of the Law.

Lang exposes the malleability of the Law through the witnesses' navigations around the oath of the court; consequently, he shows how chaos grows in the courtroom because of the informality of these proceedings. During the testimonies, Fred Garret and Durkin act informally with audience members in the courtroom. Garret sighs in relief once Ms. Hooper provides him with an alibi. Durkin looks back at his wife to reassure her that the hostess—claiming that he spent the night with her at the Green Light Inn—is not speaking truthfully. Lang shows a disregard for the dignity of the Law by the people of Strand. The credibility of the courtroom breaks down with each false testimony while its formality seems to continually loosen as the proceeding go on.

Lang transitions these false testimonies into a blatant defamation of the courtroom, shown through the relationship Lang depicts between the defense committee and prosecution. With each witness, the defense issues increasingly aggressive objections to the District Attorney's questions. Uncle Billy, a burly-looking, elderly court observer, loudly jeers at the judge when he dismisses the defense's objections. Immediately, the judge evicts him from the courtroom and another man gets up to dispute the ruling. The judge calls this second violator to the front of the court to administer jail time and a fine. Lang speaks through the judge, re-administering order back into the court before it, too, breaks down to chaos imposed by the

public. Meanwhile, through the mockery and uproar of the audience, Lang touches on the way courtroom proceedings are also attacked by the reactionary outbursts of the people.

What reaffirms the truth, power, and authority of the courtroom over the mob is the visual evidence that the District Attorney shows of their riot. The language, and the word of the Law, are shown to have interpretive flexibility through the witnesses' false testimonies. However, the film reels that the district attorney shows the court room provide physical evidence of the mob attacking the jail house building. Distinctions between truth and lie, reality and fiction, objectivity and subjectivity become revealed through these films.



Figure 3.3: Sally Humphrey's Mob Violence

Dawson and Sally Humphrey—back to their shocked faces of horror as they watch in the courtroom. The films show the reality of the mob's actions against the defense testimonies fictional construction of their innocence. In doing so, Lang draws lines between the subjective perception of reality and interpretive depth provided by the perspective of cinema.

The footage shows the defendants in the courtroom, tearing down the doors of the jail house with battering rams and tossing flaming rags into the building. Lang cuts from graphic images of mob members vandalizing the prison—Kirby

Through the apparatus of film, Lang exposes the gap between fictional retellings of reality and visual truth—what lies beneath words and their presentation. In this scene, the cinema reveals to the jury the hideous reality of the mob’s violence. The commentary of the



Figure 3.4: Sally Humphrey’s Reaction in Court

District Attorney over these graphic images weaves an irony into the scene which intensifies the visceral horror of images against plain and factual descriptions of their events. Lang juxtaposes the apparent factuality of images on screen with the description of their events. Individual defendants, such as Fredrich Garret, and other mob members are shown cutting fire hoses and assaulting fire fights prevent them from putting out the flames of the building. The absurd rapture with which the criminals conduct their violence is so jarring that audiences in the court faint at the sight of the footage. From a meta-cinematic perspective, Lang’s own ability to provide American audiences with an image of the realities of their culture functions symbolically to mimic this filmic exposition done in the courtroom. The shock that Mrs. Humphreys experiences when seeing herself set the jail house on fire is the effect that *Fury* should have on the American viewer. Lang’s cinema functions as a social document, reflecting the cultural reality of American violence for the viewer.

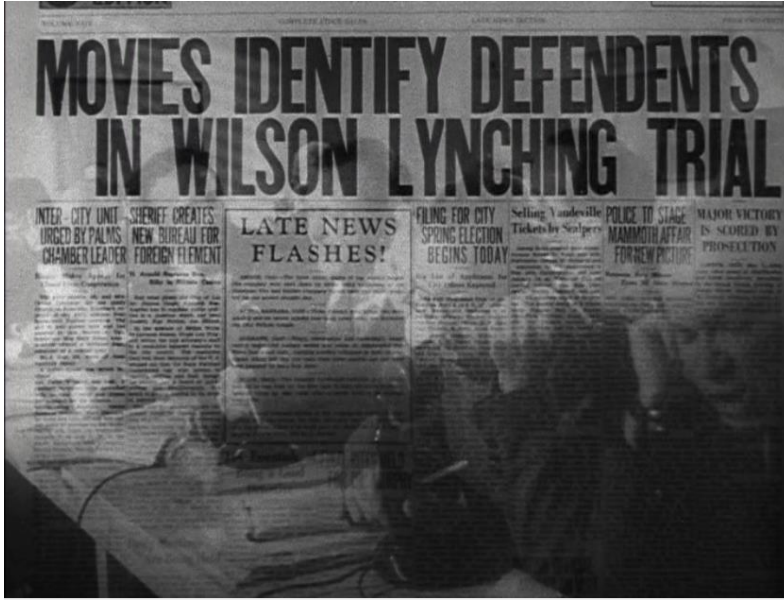


Figure 3.5: News of Defendants on Trial as Guilty

As soon as the films are played for the courtroom, information of the mob’s guilt circulates through the media and newspapers. The sensation of the scandal puts the public in the favor of the Law—news headlines condemning the Fates of the rioters circulate through a

series of dissolves: “22 Face Death! Judge Hopkins Clears Courtroom.” Moving with the dramatic narrative of the case, Lang shows how the media immediately repositions itself on to the side of the Law once the news footage is shown to the court. Wilson becomes the orchestrator of this change in public perception, inverting his former role as a passive observer who watched himself burn alive from his jail house window. Wilson coordinates the progression of the trial from afar, taking an omniscient role over the outcome of the proceedings.

As the maestro of this operation, Wilson assumes a God-like role over the Fates of the twenty-two accused, operating from outside of the courtroom. He plans for the district attorney to call witnesses to the stand, knowing full well that they will provide false alibis for their friends and neighbors. He coordinates the presentation of the news reel footage of the townspeople, burning down the jailhouse, to contradict their alibis and violate the credibility of their defense testimonies. Gunning describes Wilson’s plan to convict the mob as a “masterful narrative,” which only doesn’t fully succeed due to “the absence of the *corpus delicti*”, the deceased’s body of Wilson himself. The apparent power of cinematic presentation of reality comes into contact

with the Law, which prevents the public from condemning the mob until the body of Wilson, or a memento of his death, has been provided. Here, Lang steps in to his authorial position as director of Fate in his own films; thereby disseminating justice to his characters according to his own design.

The complications between the legal reality of the mob's crime and the images which seem to confirm their guilt imposes a meta-critique on the relationship between visual truth and the word of the Law. Film theorist Colin McCabe, postulates that the relationship between film and reality is not ever equivalent. Events on screen are symbols for truth and depict how "film is constituted by a set of discourses which (in the positions allowed to subject and object) [can] produce [the illusion of] a certain reality."¹⁰⁹The contradiction of realism is that it implies a certain reality within the film, instead of acknowledging that reality that is being imagined and constructed through the film diegesis itself. The truth value that is automatically established between the realistic image and the viewer's engagement with such imagery works to associate picture with truth in the mind of the audience. However, MacCabe argues, beneath the film text, lie "different elements in the discourses which...have certain political effects." The legal conflict of these news images comes from the fact that Wilson is alive. There is no doubt that the mob has committed a crime by vandalizing the jailhouse, but the footage creates the lie that Wilson is dead.

Lang introduces a political conflict, where the film evidence functions to punish the mob for a crime that they did not actually commit. The judge in the courtroom speaks for Law, saying

109. Colin MacCabe; Theory and Film: Principles of Realism and Pleasure, *Screen*, Volume 17, 1 October 1976, Issue 3, 12, <https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/17.3.7>

that no sentence can be issued until proof of the victim's body is produced. In response to this ruling, Joe, from his apartment, seeks to tamper with the trial and provide a fake memento of his own death. Wilson sends an engagement ring to the courtroom and forges a note from a citizen who says to have found it while cleaning the wreckage of the jailhouse. In crafting this letter, Gunning argues that Joe "he is not simply dominating [the accused] , but crafting and deciding their fate."¹¹⁰ Wilson circumvents the word of the Law in his own proceedings and effectively decides to play God with these people's lives.

Lang, in the form of Joe's unconscious, steps in to stop Wilson from exercising the violent power of the Law on these defendants. Katherine Grant hears the District Attorney read this forged note and notices Joe's idiosyncratic misspelling of the word memento: "mementum." From this detail and her observation that Joe's brother is wearing his old trench coat, Katherine puts together that Joe is still alive. She confronts him in his apartment, asking him to forgive the mob and reveal himself in court before they are hanged the next day. Joe's blind vengeance and anger drives him to isolate himself from Katherine and pursue the mob's conviction. In the apartment, we see him lose his mind to his rage, threatening to shoot one of his brothers if they turn him in and physically pushing Kathy away from him. Katherine tells Joe that if he allows those people to die in court tomorrow, "then Joe Wilson dies, too."

The following scene focuses on Joe as he roams around the city by himself. Throughout this sequence, Lang visually and aurally projects the interior of Joe's conflicted moral psychology on screen. The voices that Joe hears in his head—Kathy and the mob members—show us the moral conflict within him. Kathy's voice appears when Joe stops at a window

¹¹⁰ Gunning, Tom. *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity*, 2000, British Film Institute, 230.

display of a bedroom with two beds and a sign on the glass that reads, “For the Newlyweds.” The display returns the audience back to the first shot of film, where Kathy and Joe see a fantasy “dream home” set up in the same window and talk of purchasing a house after their wedding. This time, Kathy’s absence is felt by Joe’s grim expression. Kathy’s voice appears as non-diegetic on the screen, coming into Joe’s head and saying, “You plan to do a lot of running around in this room?” Kathy’s voice stresses the isolation that Joe has put on himself. In this new context, the fantasy of the display is broken, it becomes a space of loneliness for Joe who feels that this future has been taken from him by the unfairness of the Law and lynch mob’s attempted murder. However, Joe has taken this happy life away from himself.

Dates with Destiny: Chris Cross and Joe Wilson

As the God-like orchestrator of events in his narratives, Lang authorizes what Walter Benjamin calls a god-like “mythical violence.” This is not a branch of physical punishment or legal violence, rather it is a force which operates to weaken the systematic orders which use violence as a power-making mechanism or method of control. Wilson’s application of the Law to fuel his own revenge is an example of how the Law is a power-making institution that uses violence to impose a standardized definition of justice. However, Lang shows us that justice itself is never standardized—it operates comes with many forms that prompt careful analysis and objective judgment. Lang’s opposition to these social institutions which seek to impose destinies onto people is, in fact, a psychological or mystical mechanism. This comes in the form of Joe’s unconscious. Wilson’s misspelling of “memento,” which leads Katherine to the knowledge of his survival, is one instance of Lang’s hand at work in his own narratives. These types of chance occurrences and slippages between the cracks of bureaucracy and put characters back in control of their destinies, escaping the modern trap which has pre-destined their doom.

The build-up of this mythical violence is observed when Wilson returns to the city after having told Katherine that is going to allow these 22 rioters to die. This window front display of the “Newlywed Dream” is a symbol of the idealized happiness which his vendetta has cost him. From this display, Wilson’s attention moves to local bar called the Business Men’s Bar. The bar is empty; Wilson is alone with its bartender. Lang brings an awareness of his own reality to Wilson, who sits at the bar, orders a drink, and looks up at a calendar on the wall as the clock hits midnight. The bartender changes the date and it reads November 22, which is the day on the sentencing of the 22 mob murderers. The bartender comments, saying that he must’ve accidentally torn off an extra page. Joe leaves the bar and wanders the streets, becoming consumed by the voices of the lynch mob which float inside his head and torment him. The image of 22 floating heads, chattering in Wilson’s ear, is superimposed over his face. This is only a glimpse into the psychological torture that awaits Joe if he goes through with the killing. Lang illustrates the interior psychology of his protagonist to articulate the “voices” of the victims attacking his thoughts.

The image of these talking heads recalls back to the voices which torment Hans Beckert in his confessional plea at the end of *M*. In his case, these voices plague his thoughts and drive him to murder. Beckert claims that the voices are of his past victims—Elsie Beckmann—which build as he commits more crime and do not silence until he kills again. Joe’s voices are also of his potential victims, foreshadowing his grim Fate as a murderer in the same way as Beckert. This premonition is psychological but emerges from the same vein of divinity or mysticism as the coincidental events and circumstances which Wilson runs in to on his isolated walk through the city. These signs end up saving Wilson from his Fate and prompt him to go back to the court in the morning and reveal his survival to the judge before the mob’s sentence. This flash of

mythical violence, in the form of conscience and psychology, is only a glimpse into the powers of mythically imposed justice that Lang imposes in his other films.

In *Scarlet Street* (1945), this mythical violence becomes the downfall of Lang's protagonist, acting as an entrance into madness, rather than redemption. Lang's Christopher Cross exposes the torments experienced from divine judgment. In this film, the protagonist "is more typical, more average, than the central figures of Lang's other major films...Middle-aged, shy, frustrated, Chris is like many of us: his problems are those that are understandable."¹¹¹ This relatability plays on the viewer's empathy in the film, making the audience connect to Cross's disappointment about life, society, and injustice. Therefore, Chris' transition into madness becomes much more real and understandable for the viewer.

Through Chris Cross, we are shown an individual who experiences pathological drives more akin to those that plagued Hans Beckert in *M*. Expert of Lang's cinema, Stephen Jenkins, writes in his book *Fritz Lang: The Image and the Look*, that *Scarlet Street* functions as a film "where the Law is largely repressed," allowing its characters to act freely and receive judgment only at the convergence or fall of their narratives.¹¹² Through this narrative method, Jenkins writes that "the investigative core of the previous films becomes all the more apparent...here in a purer form, or rather with a different cover."¹¹³ *Scarlet Street*, more intimately than *Fury*, shows the individual's decline into madness as well as the bureaucratic failures of the Law, which operates on the outskirts of the film's narrative.

¹¹¹ Armour, Robert A. "The Criminal Struggle." *Fritz Lang*. 1978 Boston: Twayne, 155

¹¹² Jenkins, Stephen. "Scarlet Street." *Fritz Lang, the Image and the Look*. 1981. London: BFI Pub. 98.

¹¹³ Ibid

The film follows the protagonist, a banker, Chris Cross, and “traces the trajectory of Chris’s desire, in terms of the wish to fix the image of the woman...a desire which causes his decent into madness.”¹¹⁴ Cross runs into a damsel in distress on his way home from his boss’s party. The woman, Kitty, is being beaten by her abusive pimp, Johnny, when Cross, wielding an umbrella, comes to her rescue. This interaction sets Chris’ obsession with Kitty, prompting him to send her letters, paint for her, buy her an apartment, and allow her to steal his artwork under her own name. All this while, Kitty has been scheming Chris out of his money and giving the profits to Johnny.

At the end of the film, when heading over to Kitty’s apartment to ask her to marry, Cross sees Johnny’s hat on a night stand by the door. Lang frames the hat on the nightstand before Cross enters the apartment. In the background, Tommy Edwards’ “My Melancholy Baby” plays from a record player. Just as Cross opens the door, the record skips over itself and gets stuck at a line that reads “=You know, dear that I’m in love—in love—in love—in love....” Cross opens the door, looks at Johnny’s hat, and the camera cuts to a medium shot from Chris’ point of view. Johnny and Kitty embracing on the other side of the glass door which Chris is looking through in the apartment. The stopping of the record signifies a fracturing of Cross’ illusionary romance, revealing their love to be only an unhealthy infatuation.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 98.

When Cross storms out of the apartment, we see him go to the downstairs bar to order drinks. All he can think of is Kitty's voice repeating over again in his head "I love you, Johnny." Lang reinforces this repetition by scoring the background of this sequence



Figure 3.6: Chris Cross in Bar

with the same Tommy Edwards song as before, having the track skip again as Cross hears Kitty tell Johnny she loves him again and again. The dissolve transitions us from the physical space of Kitty's apartment to the interior of a downstairs bar, positioning Cross in the center. Like the bar Wilson sits in *Fury*, Cross is isolated and introspective; Lang communicates Chris' thoughts through music and non-diegetic sound: Kitty's voice, the Edward's track, and so on.

Steven Rybin reads Cross in this scene as having achieved "something like perspective, or a truthful position, from which he now might understand the performance Kitty has been giving him throughout the film."¹¹⁵ This issue with 'perspective' is something that even Cross admits that he struggles with. Earlier in the film, when Johnny is looking at Chris' paintings, he says to Chris what an art salesman told him earlier: "It's a remarkable painting, [but] you have a little problem with perspective don't ya?" Cross replies to this by saying, "That's something I never could master, perspective."

¹¹⁵ Rybin, Stephen. "Joan Bennett, Fritz Lang, and the Frame of Performance." *A Companion to Fritz Lang*. 2015. John Wiley & Sons, 350.

Cross decides to go up to the apartment and confront Kitty about her deception. At first, she feigns tears over the situation. However, she then shrugs off her act and disregards Cross' disbelief, admitting to him that she is in love with Johnny and would never marry Chris. Lang captures Kitty's face through a mirror as her emotional tears change into a devilish grin. This transformation is the removal of her "mask" (supporting her earlier claims as an actress, despite her lying). At this moment, Chris has a psychological breakdown and kills her: "his desire no longer in possession of painting as a means for its effective sublimation" he cannot control his passions and stabs her.¹¹⁶His idealized image of Kitty collapses and Chris' imagination slams up against the harshness of his reality. His feelings for Kitty "around which he has painted his pictures are as fraudulent as his painting's perspectives are ambiguous."¹¹⁷

At the conclusion of the film, the legal system comes back and fails to enforce justice on Cross: "Johnny is wrongly convicted by the legal system... [for Kitty's murder] and Hogarth [Cross's boss] does not have him arrested for stealing from the firm and thus dissociates [Chris] from the Law."¹¹⁸Lang removes the justice system from the film's narrative, only to bring it back at the end of the film and show its failure to punish the real killer. The police officers are fooled by eye witness testimonies against Johnny's on the night of Kitty's murder and prior reports of him abusing her. The police officers who question Johnny assume that his motive for murder was to steal her expensive jewelry and sell it. Their investigation of the crime pins Johnny as the most likely suspect in Kitty's murder. In the eyes of the Law, he is a scummy pimp who beats on women and exploits them, therefore, he is the most likely suspect for her murder.

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 351

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 351

¹¹⁸ Ibid 103.

The police's conclusions are drawn from fragments of information, pieces of the film's narrative: testimonies of secondary characters, interview snippets, and circumstantial evidence. The Law, which has remained absent from the narrative, is removed from the information that the audience has received from watching the film. Thereby, the Law fails to convict Chris Cross for his crime; instead, Johnny gets executed while Cross loses his job. From the inside of the film, Cross is clearly the murderer. However, drawing from subjective testimonies, circumstantial evidence and pure speculation, the Law makes Johnny the target of judgment. Here, Lang's authorial hands activate the destiny-machine, putting its rendition of justice in the place of the Law and calling upon Destiny to set the courses of divine punishment into motion.

While escaping legal persecution, Cross remains imprisoned by his conscience, having to replay his crimes over in his own mind years after Kitty's death. In the train sequence following Johnny's conviction, Cross sits with three lawyers and discusses the distinctions between court punishment and internal punishment. One lawyer claims that no one can escape murder, as we all have a judge, defense, and jury built in our mind. The implication is that "you can't get away



Figure 3.7: Johnny's Execution

with it, ever", a theory which Cross initially dismisses, but then, asks the man for the time of Johnny's execution. Lang cuts to an image of Johnny in his jail cell, awaiting his electrocution, demonstrating the way in which the Law exercises its violence

through the hands of police authority. Johnny accepts his Fate, walking into the electrocution chamber as the doors of the execution room shut back him on the viewer.

Lang imposes a mythical violence on Cross as punishment; the film flashes forward to Cross's arrival into a hotel, where he begins to imagine the voices of Johnny and Kitty replaying in his head. A blinking neon sign outside flashes bright light on and off, visually representing the protagonist's growing insanity as the voices exchange dialogue between one another. Lang deploys the non-diegetic voices of the deceased Johnny and Kitty onto Cross' psyche, mocking him and repeating, "Johnny, oh Johnny...Jeepers, I love you...Here, lazy legs...Oh, Johnny, now we're together...He killed me, too...Oh now we're together...He brought us together...See Chris? She loves me." These voices repeat in Cross' head, prompting him to attempt to hang himself in the hotel room. He is saved by two passersby and cut down, as Johnny and Kitty's voices continue to mock from the beyond.

When asked by Bogdanovich why Cross was never physically punished by the court for his murder, Lang remarks that "[Cross] *was* punished—a great punishment...he became a man driven (to use the old term) by the furies. He even tries to, but cannot, [even] hang himself."¹¹⁹ Lang's mythical violence deploys a psychological punishment onto Cross, denying him the comfort of suicide or legal punishment for his crimes: he becomes a bum, consumed by self-hate, begging authorities to imprison him. Within the context of Lang's filmography, these "voices" call back to Hans Beckert's cries of hysteria in *M*. The torture of these uncontrollable voices suggest that Cross' punishment is given to him by a non-institutional sense of justice, subjecting him to supernatural torments outside of legal punishment.

¹¹⁹ Bogdanovich, Peter. "Scarlet Street." Fritz Lang in America. New York: Praeger, 1969. 68-69. Print.

Benjamin writes of this as type of transcendental violence upon one's soul, calling it a "fate-imposed violence" that is "mythical violence in its archetypal form... a mere manifestation



Figure 3.8: Kitty Self-Portrait

of the gods."¹²⁰ Lang acts as the form of a God-like mythical figure, imposing a violence on Cross that supersedes Johnny and Kitty, who have served their punishments in life. In the afterlife, these two characters take on roles as

Furies of Fate, guiding Cross's destiny through the torture of conscience that damages his psyche. While stumbling about the city in an isolated frenzy, Cross comes across a nearby Pawn Shop where a Self-Portrait he painted for Kitty is being moved outside. Cross looks at the image and it gazes back at him with a lingering stare. Kitty appears immortalized in her idealized, god-like form, casting a gaze which haunts Cross through the grave.

The justice enforced onto Johnny, Kitty and Cross is disseminated completely outside, around, or through the parameters of the legal system. Unjust violence, done onto Johnny for a crime he did not commit, is conducted by the Law, while Lang exercises his own judgment through pacifying forms of punishment. Cross is psychologically paralyzed, but never physically injured. Benjamin writes that the act of lawmaking violence to counter violence is weakening to

¹²⁰ Benjamin, Walter. *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*. 1978. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 294

a system of government. Thereby, mythical violence, aspiring to a universal ethical form of punishment introduce “new forces or those earlier suppressed triumph over the hitherto lawmaking violence and found a new law, destined in its turn to decay.”¹²¹ Benjamin speaks of mythic violence as an abstract and hitherto undefined force, waiting for some agency or figure to enforce its judgment. Lang develops these principles into a natural, Fate-imposed destiny which threads through all his films.

Lang traps Cross in the conscience of his own mind, imprisoning him to the natural confinements of his own human condition. As the film ends, we see Chris walk into a larger crowd of people, fading away into the mass as an example of the psychopathic everyman that lives quietly among us. Such criminals occupy urban environments as a byproduct of modernity, like Beckert, or because of systematic pressures which limit agency and breed pathological behavior. Lang’s destiny-machine lays out the mechanisms by which these traps occur; his imposition of mythic violence onto those who succumb to pressures of destiny implement a system of judgment that should be cast down upon them. The insecurity or weakness of the Law is answered by Lang’s ethical violence, deploying an overarching and internalized mechanism of human justice that all transgressions the malleability institution of Law.

At the end of *Fury*, Joe is spared from the Fate of Cross, ending his cycle of violence by informing the court of his survival. Joe is redeemed for his return and his life returns to normal: he and Katherine go to get married and their story continues as it was before the couple got separated.

¹²¹ Ibid. 300

However, before the film ends, Lang allows Joe to reflect on his experiences for the judge, jury, and defendants. He demonizes the institutions of the Law, justice system, and the court. Wilson's rebirth from the dead suggests a relationship between his life in the past and symbolic resurrection in the present. There are two different Joe Wilson's at play by the conclusion of Lang's film: one that is enmeshed in the American illusions of justice, marriage and freedom, and another who has gained perspective on the social injustice which lurks beneath the surface of this façade. Anton Kaes' essay "A Stranger in the House," discusses the significance of Lang's status as a German exile brought a new outlook to his Hollywood filmmaking. Kaes writes that Lang sends Joe on a "journey that transforms him from a naïve "child," as his fiancée calls him in the beginning, to a vindictive avenger."¹²²In his return, Joe offers explains the loss of faith in justice which he experienced on the night of the jail house raid.

Wilson describes the realization which he comes to—America is not the bastion of legal freedoms and liberties that he once thought it was. Joe describes his loss of faith in the Law as an arbiter of justice. Through his own manipulation of the legal system, his arrest in the beginning of the film, and as well as his final role as the victim, Joe uses his perspective to offer a reflection on the events from all sides of the legal institution: the accuser, the accused, and the victim. Lang's perception of America's violent and chaotic social life reflected an intuition of the legal inconsistencies found within American Law. Lenience towards criminals, misplaced punishment, and a culture of legitimized racial violence bred seeds of chaos and revolution into the public sphere. Similarly, the public paranoia Lang imaged in Weimar Germany seemed to be a lingering ethical issue within American Law and social psychology.

¹²² Kaes, Anton. "A Stranger in the House." *A Companion to Fritz Lang*. 2015. John Wiley & Sons, 350

The Big Heat:

Fate, Character, and David Bannion

Thomas Elsaesser recognizes the collusion which occurs between agents of the Law and criminal organizations in Lang's later American works: "in many of Lang's subsequent films, especially *The Blue Gardenia*, *The Big Heat*, *While the City Sleeps*, *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*, it is the mass media, the legal profession, local government, organized crime and corporate business that are shown colluding with each other, representing a threat to individual liberty."¹²³ While *Fury* and *Scarlet Street* examine the relationship of the individual to outside crime, violence, and persecutions of the Law, *The Big Heat* examines these relationships from within the institution itself.

The individual which Lang pins against the institution of Law is Dave Bannion, a renegade cop who spearheads an independent investigation into the suicide of a fellow officer, Tom Duncan. *The Big Heat* sets itself up as a suspenseful thriller. The opening scene features Duncan's suicide, done with a .38 caliber pistol with which he shoots a bullet into his own head. As his hand falls with the gun back onto his office desk, Lang captures a close-up shot of the murder weapon, a suicide note addressed to a District Attorney, and the officer's police badge. These objects function symbolically as the narrative nexus of the film's plot. Stephen Jenkins notes how Lang's films introduce objects early in the plot that foreshadow the development of his stories. In the example of *Siegfried* (1924), Lang focuses on a single leaf which falls on the hero Siegfried's body while he is bathing in a pool of dragon's blood which will immunize him from injury. Taking from the Greek myth of Achilles, the leaf leaves one area of Siegfried's

¹²³ Elsaesser, Thomas. *Weimar Cinema and after: Germany's Historical Imaginary*. 2009. Routledge, 148

body vulnerable to damage, which leads to his death later in the film. Jenkins writes that Lang's camera focus on this leaf "becomes the first of a series of objects in Lang's films which play a vital part in Fate's plan to bring about a character's downfall."¹²⁴ The object triad which Lang introduces in the beginning of *The Big Heat* establishes the narrative for the rest of the film. The gun, the letter, and the badge (functioning as a symbol for the police department in *The Big*

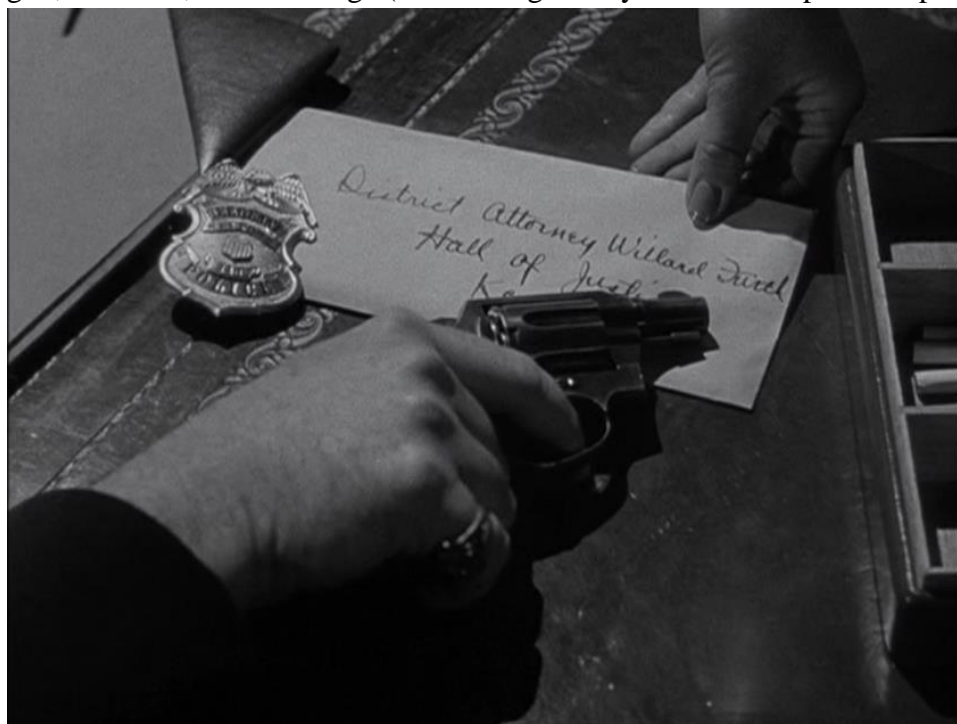


Figure 3.9: Tom Duncan's Suicide

pursues this investigation. Mrs. Duncan, the victim's wife, is shown entering the film as her husband's gun goes off—her expression is one of solemn expectation, rather than terror.

The audience is suspicious of her reaction and becomes alerted to her risk in the plot when her hand slyly enters the frame to reach for the suicide note which her husband left behind (See Figure 3.7). Mrs. Duncan removes an object from the established triad and goes to phone a man named, Mike Lagana, the head boss of the city's crime world. Her taking of the note

Heat) are components of a scandal which leads to the surfacing of corruption within the police department, as well as the Fate of the film's main protagonist who

¹²⁴ Jenkins, Stephen. "Scarlet Street." *Fritz Lang, the Image and the Look*. 1981. London: BFI Pub, 53

disrupts this triad and prevents the corruption in the police department from surfacing, a Fate which Lang orchestrates through Tom Duncan's suicide.

Thereby, to realign the path of this Fate, Lang employs David Bannion to discover this mysterious criminal relationship with the police force. Using Bannion as an instrument of agency, operating on the outskirts of the organizations of criminals and law enforcement, Lang exposes the malpractices of American Law from within the institution. Unlike Chris Cross from *Scarlet Street*, or Joe Wilson of *Fury*, Dave Bannion exemplifies "the Lang character who struggles against his fate, is wounded in the struggle, changed by it, but not always defeated by it."¹²⁵ *The Big Heat* compares his individual character struggle with larger issues of ethics in the legal sphere: Bannion wrestles with violent urges, personal vendetta, hate, and revenge through his investigation into corruption within the police force, but never succumbs to darker impulses or uses unlawful violence against his enemies.

Lang establishes Mike Lagana, the city's crime boss, as the governing power of the city. A phone call between him and Mrs. Duncan leads to a series of communications between other members of the crime world. Lagana receives news of Tom's death and instructs the underworld on how to clean up the scandal. The police investigation of Duncan's home begins after the criminals receive information about his death. Sergeant Bannion, the reporting officer at the scene, walks about the crime scene tired and disheveled while evidence is collect by police forensics around Duncan's desk. An officer tells Bannion that Tom Duncan's death is "a suicide, no question," and the sergeant believes him. Bannion goes upstairs to question Bertha Duncan about her husband.

¹²⁵ Armour, Robert A. "The Dark Struggle as a Basic Theme." *Fritz Lang*. 1978. Boston: Twayne, 29

Gunning's analysis of this scene remarks on how Bannion's rose-tinted vision and naïve trust in the validity of police procedure makes him unable to read between the presentation of the evidence on Duncan's desk. He blindly accepts Duncan's death as suicide. This nativity later leads him to be fooled by Bertha Duncan's phony bedroom performance:

Bannion enters the room under her power; he will only see what she wants him to see, his vision has been curtailed. Bertha sobs, struts across the room, explains her husband was in poor health, and Bannion...seems moved and convinced by her performance. He leaves satisfied."¹²⁶

Bannion raises some suspicion as to the reason for Tom's death and Bertha misdirects the sergeant's inquiry, telling him that Tom was stressed, but "everything he did was clean and wholesome, that's the kind of guy he was."

Bannion sets himself on a path that intersects with themes of Fate, which he explores in his films. In his essay "Fate and Character," from *Reflections*, Walter Benjamin writes on the relationship between individual character and Fate, linking personal choices to larger outcomes which determine the trajectory of one's life based on the integrity of his or her character. Benjamin claims that the relationship "between the active man and the external world all is interaction, their spheres of action interpenetrate...the external world in which an active man encounters can also in principle be reduced, to any desired degree, to his inner world and his inner world similarly to his outer world...as one in the same thing"¹²⁷ He is saying that the events in one's outer world are not predetermined by cosmic ordering, rather, that an individual's

¹²⁶ Gunning, Tom. *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity*, 2000, British Film Institute, 413

¹²⁷ Benjamin, Walter. *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*. 1978. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 305-306

disposition motivates him or her to act a certain way in the outside world. Actions inevitably lead to series of events, which have subsequent reactions and larger consequences for the future. Fate, defined by Benjamin as the course of outcomes which determine the life an individual, puts an individual into an active relationship with the external world. Depending on one's character or ability to withstand pressures emerging from their external environment, an individual will be prone to commit acts of good, evil, horror, justice, valor, cruelty, desperation or violence, etc.

Bannion—idealistic and headstrong—follows clues deeper into the investigation. These circumstances, however, are all designed through Lang's construction of Bannion's character. Contextualized through his behavior in his idyllic home, Bannion talks with his wife about becoming Police Commissioner so that one day so that they will be able to afford to live comfortably once their daughter Joyce goes off to college. The phone rings in the middle of dinner and Bannion receives a tip from the Police Station about a Lucy Chapman, who says that Tom Duncan didn't kill himself. He writes down the name and address of the girl and heads to an upscale bar, *The Retreat*, to speak with her. Bannion's ambition and ethical agency foreshadows his destiny. Lang shows the audience an early glimpse of the idealized reality that Bannion has created for his family in their home; this contextualizes the attitude with which Bannion approaches his work—he holds an idealistic perception of how life should be lived.

Following this clue, Bannion heads to *The Retreat* and Lucy Chapman leads to her death, which leads Bannion to interrogate the bartender of the *Retreat* for more information on the girl, a decision which then leads him to question and threaten Mr. Lagana, a leader of a large crime syndicate within the city. These clues result in death of his wife, which is also by circumstance, as she just happens to enter a car triggered with explosives which was meant for Bannion himself.

The anger of losing his family breaks down Bannion's connection with the Law. He holds animosity against his fellow officers for allowing his wife to be murdered and points out the department's corrupt relationship with Mike Lagana himself as the chief motivation for their fear to convict him. These claims fuel Bannion's decision to quit to the police force, but his ambition pushes him to pursue the investigation alone, stalking Lagana's crooks throughout the town until they lead him to the truth about Mr./Mrs. Duncan, the Police Commissioner, and Lagana's relationship.

Lang structures his character relationships so that Bannion becomes the primary initiator of plot. His individual struggle pushes him to conflate barriers between the legal and criminal worlds. The death of his wife anchors Bannion's character down to the pursuit of Lagana, which motivates him to unrelentingly investigate Tom Duncan's and his wife's cases no matter the consequence. Lagana's goons react to Bannion whenever he gains a foothold on his investigation by murdering one another when they become a threat to the crime syndicate. Bannion's exposure of criminal collusion with forces of the Law comes as a massive surfacing of a moral problem that has existed within the character of the police force for years. Lagana's gang empire has become a conglomerate of judges, police commissioners, and politicians. The scope of Lagana's criminal project extends through to the manipulation of opposing superstructures, which allows him to maneuver and protect himself through surveillance networks of cops and court rooms and bureaucracies within the urban space. Lang's American city is a place where, on the surface, Law appears to be condemning criminals, putting "bad guys" away to prison or the electric chair and preserving order. Under the illusion of this justice, the Commissioner informs us that Bannion himself has been responsible for sending many criminals to be executed. However,

beneath this manufactured surface is a festering underbelly of corruption and deception, kept away from the public to prevent anarchy and the destabilization of the urban machine.

‘The Big Heat’ is initiated by Dave Bannion, whose knowledge and ethical outlook exists above of the corrupted police structure and, therefore, creates a new reality for urban Law. Bannion topples the criminal empire and exposes fraud within the police force. His penetration into Lagana’s crime world and subsequent usurpation of authority from both him and the police commissioner become significant for the arrival of a new order that comes about at the film’s conclusion, when the protagonist returns to the police force. Lang shows us glimpses of Bannion’s utopia through his home, which Colin MacArthur, in his book *The Big Heat*, sees as a counterpoint to the gritty outside world of the metropolitan underworld. MacArthur claims that “the Bannion home counterpoints both the dark world of the Duncan and Lagana milieu (and the brash milieu of Vince Stone) on the one side and the bleak world of ‘The Retreat’ on the other”¹²⁸. The utopic, domestic home reflects the purity of Bannion’s inner world, the reality that he wants to project into his urban environment. The Police Commissioner and Lieutenant praise and acclaim for Bannion has instilled a relationship of trust between the protagonist and these higher authorities of the Law. Thereby, despite the use of violence inherent to the Law, i.e. executions, Bannion acts in the Police Department as a preserver of justice and author of morality.

Once this illusion of trust is broken, and its ability to keep both Bannion and his family safe comes into question, Bannion’s instincts push him to separate from the intuition. In Benjamin’s terms, Fate, being a construct of interactions between a character its environment,

¹²⁸ MacArthur, Colin. *The Big Heat*. 2000. British Film Institute, 58

drives Bannion's out of his domestic reality and challenges him to project his idealism into the external reality of the city. After the murder of his wife, Bannion relinquishes his position as an officer, seeking to operate *outside* of law enforcement to track down his wife's murderers. From this point on, Bannion "becomes allied with the outcasts of society, the marginal and abject, in his fight against Lagana...he will have to invade the domestic spaces shown in the film's first sequence, Bertha Duncan's house, Lagana's mansion, Vince Stone's apartment...to bring down 'the big heat.'"¹²⁹

Separation between the domestic and urban space in *The Big Heat* is desired by criminals as well. When Bannion enters his mansion asks about the murder of Lucy Chapman, Lagana demands that he leave the topic out of his home: "I have an office for that sort of thing. This is my home and I don't like dirt tracked into it." The entry of violence into the home becomes a clashing of realities, playing to Lang's idea of surfaces versus what lies beneath them, i.e. truth. Realities and appearances connect criminals to police, as well as their relationships with authority, which work inversely in *The Big Heat*. After the death of his wife, the Police Lieutenant and Commissioner attempt to console Bannion with a severance package and condolences, asking him to take time off before returning to work. Refusing to overlook the injustice, Bannion quits the police force and calls out its corruption, claiming that the Commissioner acts only "as soon as he gets his orders from Mike Lagana."

In Lang's modern metropolis, criminals regulate action in the city, establishing networks of communication to connects them to events happening within the streets, similarly to the beggars' union established by Schranker in *M*. The relationship between criminals and the urban

¹²⁹ Gunning, Tom. *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity*, 2011, British Film Institute, 415.

environment is much more interactive than that of the police that regulate the city. A criminal underground allows for networks of control to be established, which Lang shows through the bartender of the *Retreat* and the detectives and senator who plays cards at Vince Stone's apartment. When the owner of the bar *Retreat* gets questioned by Bannion for information on Lucy Chapman, he claims to know very little about the girl. However, once Bannion leaves, he phones Lagana to tell of the detective's arrival. Bannion forces his way into these criminally controlled spaces to drag out the corruption from underneath. Once the Bannion home is attacked, and the corruption is imposed onto his inner reality, the protagonist's idealism loses itself to the violence of the city. The image that Lang gives of the Bannion home after Katie's death is one of lifelessness, carrying an underlying nihilism that "shows this house...stripped bare...[with] almost geometrical emptiness."¹³⁰ Through Mrs. Bannion's death, Lang illustrates the loss of "the dream of the suburban home"¹³¹ and an American dream of social utopia—one that is preserved by agents of the Law (in this case, Bannion, who works as enforcement of the Law). This realization of powerlessness drives Bannion to seek justice outside of his domestic and professional milieus. His mission becomes to expose evil as a vigilante, a role which acknowledges moral aspirations that lie outside of the limitations of Law.

The advantages and difficulties of the vigilante status that Bannion adopts are, as Gunning describes, vast. By operating "outside of the law...[Bannion] affirms an ideal justice untrammelled by official corruption or incompetence, but also risks becoming indistinguishable from the gangsters he fights"¹³². Lang presents Bannion with moral tests, offering the protagonist the opportunity to succumb to his plan of revenge through violence. However, the protagonist's

¹³⁰ Gunning, Tom. *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity*, 2011, British Film Institute, 422

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² *Ibid.* 423

resolve prevents him from yielding to his impulses, as we see happen in other characters like Hans Beckert and Chris Cross. The dualities that permeate Lang's narrative (law/crime, justice/violence, façade/truth) seem to find balance Bannion, who remains steadfast in his morals. Upon finding the location of Larry Gordon, his wife's killer and a henchman of Lagana and Vince Stone, Bannion refrains from shooting him. Instead, after a heated fight between the two, he extracts information about Vince Stone and Bertha Duncan from Gordon and vows to the crime world that he "talked." Larry is taken care of by Vince and Lagana, who kill him on the way to an airport.

Bannion's refusal to kill Larry, Vince Stone, or Mrs. Duncan during his confrontations makes him an ethical agent in Lang's world, whose strong-minded attitude constructs his Fate through an idealized interpretation of Law. Here, Bannion's reluctance to kill positions him in the role of the "just-vigilante," which Lang portrays with more moral credibility than members of the police department. The difference between Bannion and the criminals around him is addressed by Debby after the protagonist admits to not being able to kill Mrs. Duncan. Bannion returns to Debby disappointed, upon which she gratifies the protagonist's inability to murder, claiming: 'You couldn't if you could, there wouldn't be much difference between you and Vince Stone.'¹³³

Debby's own existence in the film portrays Langian themes of duality. She exists as a passive agent between the criminal and legal worlds. Debby does not participate in Vince's schemes, but acquiesces to his demands, thereby participating in the act of crime. She bears resemblance in ways to Kitty in *Scarlet Street*, where her love for her violent and abusive

¹³³ Ibid.

boyfriend and his money submits her to his demands. Debby, Vince Stone's girlfriend, is consoled by her appearance. To cope with the crime world around her, Debby's obsession becomes her beauty, appearance and presentation; it consumes her ability to think actively about what she is doing. She even says herself, hiding in Bannion's apartment after being attacked by Vince, that 'thinking feels hard after not having had to do it for so long.'¹³⁴ When Vince burns half of Debby's face with hot coffee for flirting with Bannion outside of the Retreat, Debby becomes awoken to the corruption of the place surrounding her. Once the violence of the crime world poisons the one thing that she values most, her beauty, Debby seeks to punish it. This distinction becomes much clearer later in the film when all of Lang's characters which have operated outside of justified means receive punishment. The conclusion of the film involves resolution through the means of an equalized justice—the gangsters are arrested, Mrs. Duncan is killed for her deception, Debby is murdered the shooting of Mrs. Duncan, but Bannion lives on, receiving a renewed position as an agent of law enforcement.

Bannion himself not succumb to unlawful violence in the name of personal justice but orchestrates violence through characters who are active in the murder and crime around him. Bannion spreads word against Larry, leading Vince Stone to murder him, Debby kills Mrs. Duncan, releasing Tom Duncan's confession note, and the police arrest Vince Stone. Lagana's gangsters use murder as a means self-preservation, giving them no ethical anchor or deeper relationship beyond the self. For Lang, Bannion represents "those characters of his that survive and emerge from [the dark struggle] without surrendering to it...those [are] in whom there is

¹³⁴ The Big Heat. Dir. Fritz Lang. 1953.

enough decency to keep out of the pits of degeneracy.”¹³⁵Bannion’s relationship with the dead, the memory of his dead wife, and his surviving child ground his morals within the city.

Reappointed as a sergeant in the police department, Bannion sits down at his desk and orders his colleague beside him to, “Keep the coffee hot, Hugo.” Bannion keeps the coffee warm so that he can go out and continue another case, implying that he has a lot of work to do now that he is back in the department. While the police department has been purged of corruption, Gunning reads this ending note cynically, claiming that the idea of coffee still holds the same violent undertones by the film’s conclusion as it did when Vince used it as a weapon to burn Debby’s face. Lang leaves the viewer’s hopes for an ethically cleared American metropolis unresolved: there is confusion as to “whether the mob has been defeated or not, whether Bannion has completed the work of mourning or not.”¹³⁶ Debby is dead, Mrs. Bannion has been murdered, and Bannion is forced to return to his mechanical routine of catching criminals while cycles of violence filter in and out of the city. However, despite this grim reality, Lang’s imposition of Bannion onto the face of the Law concludes with a hopeful vision for future. The memory of his dead wife anchors his morals in her memory. Thereby, for Lang, Bannion’s Fate becomes that of the redeemed hero, projecting a strong ethical code into an outer world surrounded by violence and murder.

German psychologist Erich Fromm, in his book, *The Art of Loving*, explains a theory of love where agape, idealized love, acts as an existential and moral idealism in humanity:

The unity achieved in productive work is not interpersonal; the unity achieved in orgasmic fusion is transitory; the unity achieved by conformity is only pseudo-unity.

¹³⁵ Armour, Robert A. "The Criminal Struggle." *Fritz Lang*. 1978. Boston: Twayne, 161

¹³⁶ Gunning, Tom. *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity*, 2000, British Film Institute, 433

Hence, they are only partial answers to the problem of existence. The full answer lies in the achievement of interpersonal union, of fusion with another person, in *love*.¹³⁷

For Lang's characters who do not experience this genuine sense of love, "failure to achieve it means insanity or self-destruction or destruction of others."¹³⁸ Bannion's character obtains such a love becomes a higher ethical model through his marriage. In his wife, this identity is confirmed, in his daughter, his identity is survived. The memory of Bannion's wife serves as his moral and spiritual compass, providing him with the motivation to purge the city of crime and corruption so that Bannion's idyllic home is never disturbed again. *The Big Heat* offers a vision of a more righteous future for Law, orchestrated by Lang's characterization of Bannion.

¹³⁷ Fromm, Erich. *The Art of Loving*. 2006. Harper Perennial, 17

¹³⁸ Ibid

Conclusion:

In an interview with Jacques Rivette, when asked if the director designs his films as social critiques against human systems or civilizations, Lang responds, “one cannot really differentiate.” Rather, Lang claims to making pictures which depict “modern man as he is:

he has forgotten the meaning of life, he only works for things, for money, not to enrich his soul, but to gain material advantages. And because he has forgotten the meaning of life, he is already dead. He is afraid of love...he only wants to satisfy his desire.”¹³⁹

Lang’s films all explore the effects of modern anxiety, coming in forms of loneliness, desire, greed, jealousy, and fear. My thesis seeks to show how these anxieties manifest themselves in the reality of his films through violence—violence done against others, or against the self. Lang models his films after metaphysical or God-like battles between omniscient forces of Fate.

Lang’s ethics are enacted through crime and punishment, carried out in his cinematic universe by lawbreakers and enforcers. From *M* to *Fury*, we see an evolution in his critique of cultures—from the dysfunction embedded deeply into the Weimar state and an American violence interwoven into the nation’s society and racial history. Lang explores both worlds. He casts judgment as a director, passing between nations with a stalwart composure that assembles together a unique, principled world from two separate places. Lang is a nomad, who carries a consistent morality across cultures to connect objective truth with subjective fiction. Behind the legal surface of our laws and conventions, Lang reveals an underlying Evil which combats the sanctity of the form of Law through opposition to it. Crime is a byproduct of modern violence, stemming from these anxieties which Lang brings out of his characters.

¹³⁹ Grant, Domarchi, Jean and Rivette, Jacques. “Fritz Lang on M: An Interview.” *Fritz Lang: Interviews*, 2003. University Press of Mississippi, 17

However, Lang extends these principles past the conflicts of criminals and law enforcers to reflect on abstract archetypes of good and evil, waging war through the fates of men. Higher forces descend upon society in disguise—their masks become the way in which these demons enter, unnoticed into Lang's world. In *M*, Beckert gazes into his mirror, unable to identify with the face he sees. He pulls and distorts the surface of his skin, searching for recognition beneath the visage which appears different to the character he feels inside himself. Behind his mask, lies a dark persona, a voice that orders his child-like form to disguise Evil through appearance. In *Cross*, another demon takes the appearance of an innocent man. These voices grip Lang's characters and channel thoughts into actions; psychologies are shaped into characters, which then perform out choices that determine Fates.

Lang's narratives attempt to balance this chaos through authorship; the director writes justice into all his films through internal guilt, the unconscious, or female figures of ethical guidance. However, he also writes in a figure to represent this chaos. In *Dr. Mabuse*, we find Lang's double, an oppositional will who influences his characters. Langian character archetypes, shaping into forms of good and evil, are played out on smaller scales by criminals and lawmakers, but, individual instances of coincidence, circumstance, and randomness orchestrate larger ethical change through the intertwining of destinies, in which the affairs of everyday reality spill into the supernatural. In *Cross*' killing of Kitty, we see an individual's confusion, loneliness, and passion turn to crime; here, Law disseminates its justice unfairly and cannot prevent death from happening. Similarly, in *Fury*, mob violence mistakes retribution for murder, letting in primal desires which blind people to their own madness. Lang's *Testament of Dr. Mabuse* shows us the face of chaos. Mabuse's presence welcomes an Empire of Crime, designed to exist eternally, performing its objectives through the disguises of men. From the bleakness of

Lang's films, the viewer sees that Law cannot govern or permanently subdue these forces through political forms, people, or language. From violence cycles of violence emerge, which give birth to new masks for chaos to wear as disguise. Criminal archetypes can come in the conventional forms of Johnny, Vince Stone, or Kirby Dawson, from *Scarlet Street*, *Fury*, and *The Big Heat*; or, they can come in more seductive and deceiving packages, such as Kitty, Bertha Duncan, or, to a degree, Debby. Moreover, Lang's films show that chaos can breed, most dangerously, with society's structures of order: the courtroom, police department, clinical hospital, or social membrane of an entire city. To identify these shifting forms, Law requires a higher perception of justice, distinguishing between Evils that change shape and appearance by the different masks they wear.

Lang, as director of Fates in his films, combats injustice with circumstances and events that expose surfaces to their supernatural counterparts. In this essay, I have shown the links he creates between the physical and incorporeal worlds of his films. Lang's cinema presents objects as symbols, people as signifiers, and messages as enigmas, which function to introduce, expose, or decode ethical solutions to problems in society. Characters, such as Hofmeister and Bannion, or unreceived messages, such as Tom Duncan's suicide note or the name Hofmeister fails to give Lohmann, come at great sacrifices, so that crime and chaos can be brought to attention of formal forces of justice: Law. Lang inscribes a lexicon of symbols into his films, which are meant to be decoded, presenting visions of justice and hope from images of the real world.

Where we discover a powerful impetus of ethical change in Lang's films is in love, just as we find openings for Evil in the absence of love, or its opposite: desire. Erich Fromm speaks on the death of love in Western Civilization, claiming that modern man has failed to take faith in the value of love as an "irrational phenomenon." Through a Freudian lens, love is mistaken for

“blindness to reality, compulsiveness, and...a transference from love objects of childhood...or, rather that it is the *same* as sexual satisfaction.”¹⁴⁰ Many times, modern love is mistaken as respite from aloneness, but Fromm exposes this as a disguised form of pseudo-love: “a person [who] has not reached the level where he has a sense of identity...rooted in in the productive unfolding of his own powers...is alienated from his own powers and projects them into the loved person, who is worshipped as the *summum bonum*, the bearer of all love, all light, all bliss.”¹⁴¹ This “idolatrous love” is a fiction, relying on the fantasy of “close-ness” with another being based on obsession. One can reframe this as a definition of desire, which Lang shows the potentially dangerous effects of in his characters: Chris Cross’ obsession with Kitty, Debby’s pseudo-love for Vince Stone, and Hans Beckert’s sexual obsession with children. As Fromm notes, “in this process [one] deprives [oneself] of all sense of strength, loses himself in the loved one instead of finding himself.”¹⁴²

Feeling trapped by a loveless and lonely marriage, Cross’ obsession with Kitty not only prevents him from finding himself but pushes him to give his own identity away to his worshipped idol. She takes his name and his art, leaving him nothing but a fantasy of their love, which “as soon as it comes down to the reality of the relationship between the two real people— [leaves him] frozen.”¹⁴³ Lang repeats this formula in Beckert’s pathological and deranged obsession, as well as Debby’s perverse and shallow love for Vince’s money and status. These loves do not constitute a character, rather they leave a gap in the fulfillment in these individuals’ senses of fulfillment. A lack of genuine love for themselves leads these people to impair their

¹⁴⁰ Fromm, Erich. *The Art of Loving*. 2006. Harper Perennial, 84.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.* 92

¹⁴² *Ibid.* 93

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

identities and cripple their characters to pursue fantasies—oftentimes leading them to break down their constitutions when the walls of these fictions fall.

Beneath Lang's cynicism against society and structures, which layers the surface of his films, resides a deeper link through which a moral ideal appears for his characters. The beatific female signifiers in Lang's films stand in as points of ethical grounding, enforcing humility in their male counterparts, supporting their professional lives, and giving them direction during moments of indecision. Katherine Grant and Mrs. Bannion perform this beatific female role for their fiancé and husband, reminding them of who they are in moments of uncertainty and ensuring the strength of their characters. This practice of love involves a process of acquiring emotional discipline. The work of love comes not through the satisfaction of individual desire (sexual, emotional, social, or so on), but is, as Fromm writes, "dependent on the relative absence of narcissism, it requires the development of humility, objectivity, and reason. One's whole life must be devoted to this aim. Humility and objectivity are indivisible, just as love is."¹⁴⁴

The emotional work involved in love is committed by two people who seek to solidify and nurture each other's characters. Through this type of serious cultivation, one learns an art of loving that extends from one's family and out to the individual stranger. Lang shows the effects of love on David Bannion and Joe Wilson; the naïve innocence with which they experience and interact with other around them is shaped by their idealized marriages are held by strong female figures who express themselves as generous and deeply empathic characters. In contrast, Lang also shows the effects of the loss of Katherine's love, which Joe feels while standing by himself outside of the window display for newlyweds, and Bannion's wife, which he feels after her death. After having lost it, a return to this love becomes the only goal of both protagonists,

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. 111

pushing them to set their egos aside for another chance at marriage or the preservation of their lover's memory. Joe's desire to hang the mob for their attempted lynching at the jailhouse leaves from his mind, as Bannion's desire find out the truth behind his wife's murder bridges into his perennial mission to combat crime in the city, implied by the final line of the film.

In Lang's films, Law and crime are kept in check through a karmic cycle of actions of good and evil, while imbalances in this system introduce possibilities for greater forces of Evil to enter Lang's universe—in Beckert, Chris Cross, Lagana, Baum. However, when we read these films through Lang's own romantic idealism, his cinema posits a vision of hope for a greater good. Fromm writes that "to analyze the nature of love is to discover its general absence today and to criticize the social conditions which are responsible for this absence."¹⁴⁵ Lang's films are social critiques of institutions, but, from this perspective, function also as analyses of love—critiques of modern love and appraisals of an idealized, moralized love.

Through this moralized love, an ethical code emerges for how to conduct oneself against forces of good and evil, violence and crime, and injustice. Fromm describes the practice of love as productive, serving an active role in social relationships as well as everyday moral conduct. Through love, one learns how to become human and how to live life. For Fromm, this idealized love is interwoven into the mythology of religion, taking the form of faith:

To have faith requires *courage*, the ability to take a risk, the readiness even to accept pain and disappointment. Whoever insists on safety and security as primary conditions of life cannot have faith; whoever shuts himself off in a system of defense, where distance and possession are his means of security, makes himself a prisoner. To be loved, and to love, need courage, the courage to judge certain values as of ultimate concern—and to take the jump and stake everything on those values.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. 123

¹⁴⁶ Ibid 117

Joe speaks at the end of *Fury* to the court, claiming that he has lost his faith in the justice system and American democracy, discounting the credibility of the institutions of Law and government, which he at one time held as the epitomes of ethical truth. In accepting the untrustworthiness of Law, Joe redirects all his faith to another place, his love for Katherine. Katherine presents Joe a vision of justice from outside of the violence, rage, crime, and murder that the word of the Law would offer him. She shows him love, which is truer than the system which seeks to supply his character with false senses of satisfaction and fulfillment. Bannion, too, loses faith in the system of Law which he once valued over the sanctity of his own home. For this misplacement of value, Bannion brings the violence of his work into his idyllic home and loses his family. With the death of his wife, Bannion channels his faith in the ethics of Law into a faith for the memory of his wife, a memory of love which he preserves through a disciplined adherence to his own moral code.

Through these characters, Lang poses a new vision of morality for man and woman—in faith of love, one will break away from pains of the self. Mabuse's egomaniacal ideologies voices rhetoric which can blind the reality of characters which he manipulates, such as Baum. However, Bannion's determination and resolve comes from a supernatural force which reaffirms its own truth, not through an interpretation of language, manipulation, or satisfaction of desire, but through the strength it builds in the character it inhabits. Law cannot rid itself from violence, but man may distance himself from the world of power and crime by devoting himself to a cause that is above human desire. Bannion carries this devotion into his work, showing the courage to rise above the institution that seeks to drag him down to the base and immoral plane of his contemporaries. In his wife's memory, Bannion finds the strength to go on, while in love, Lang finds a future for Law.

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