

## CONCEPTS AND CONSTELLATIONS CYNICISM, FINANCE, VIOLENCE



*“There is no love, — there is only desire!—There is no happiness (Glück), —there is only will to power.”*

*Dr. Mabuse der Spieler, Lang (1922)*

*“The psychological logic is this: When a man is suddenly and overwhelmingly suffused with the feeling of power—and this is what happens with all great affects—it raises in him a doubt about his own person: he does not dare to think himself the cause of this astonishing feeling—and so he posits a stronger person, a divinity to account for it.*

*Friedrich Nietzsche, The Will to Power (#135)*

***In a 1964 interview Fritz Lang says:***

“The period after World War I was for Germany a time of deep despair, hysteria, cynicism, unrestrained vices. Horrible poverty was juxtaposed with new wealth and Berlin coined a new word: “Raffke” (Snatchers), from the greedy accumulation of money. ‘Raffke’ is what we called the new wealthy. Dr. Mabuse is a prototype of his time.”

Siegfried Kracauer agrees in the *Vorwort* for the program brochure: “This Dr. Mabuse... was not possible in 1910 and, perhaps, will not be possible any more in 1930—let us hope so, one should like to say. But with regard to the year 1920 he is a bigger-than-life portrait...”

“Cynicism,” notes Peter Sloterdijk – commenting on the Weimar Symptom (Bloch) –, “as has been shown, forms a basic figure of the revocation of values in the historical process of combatant consciousnesses. In it, the ‘ideologies’ awaken to themselves. Ostentatiously, they scintillate in malevolent ineluctability. In the course of history, periods that are especially prone to cynicism emerge, said Marxistically, periods of declining class domination—epochs of an ideology that has become reflexive in which the norms and dogmas of culture, buffered by self-irony, begin to play with their inner contradictions.”

– Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 384





## Technology, Commerce and Networks of Power





## Expressionism and Play

Dr. Mabuse: “*Expressionism is a gimmick (Spielerei)...But why not? – Everything today is a gimmick (Spielerei)*”

*Dr. Mabuse der Spieler*, Lang (1922)





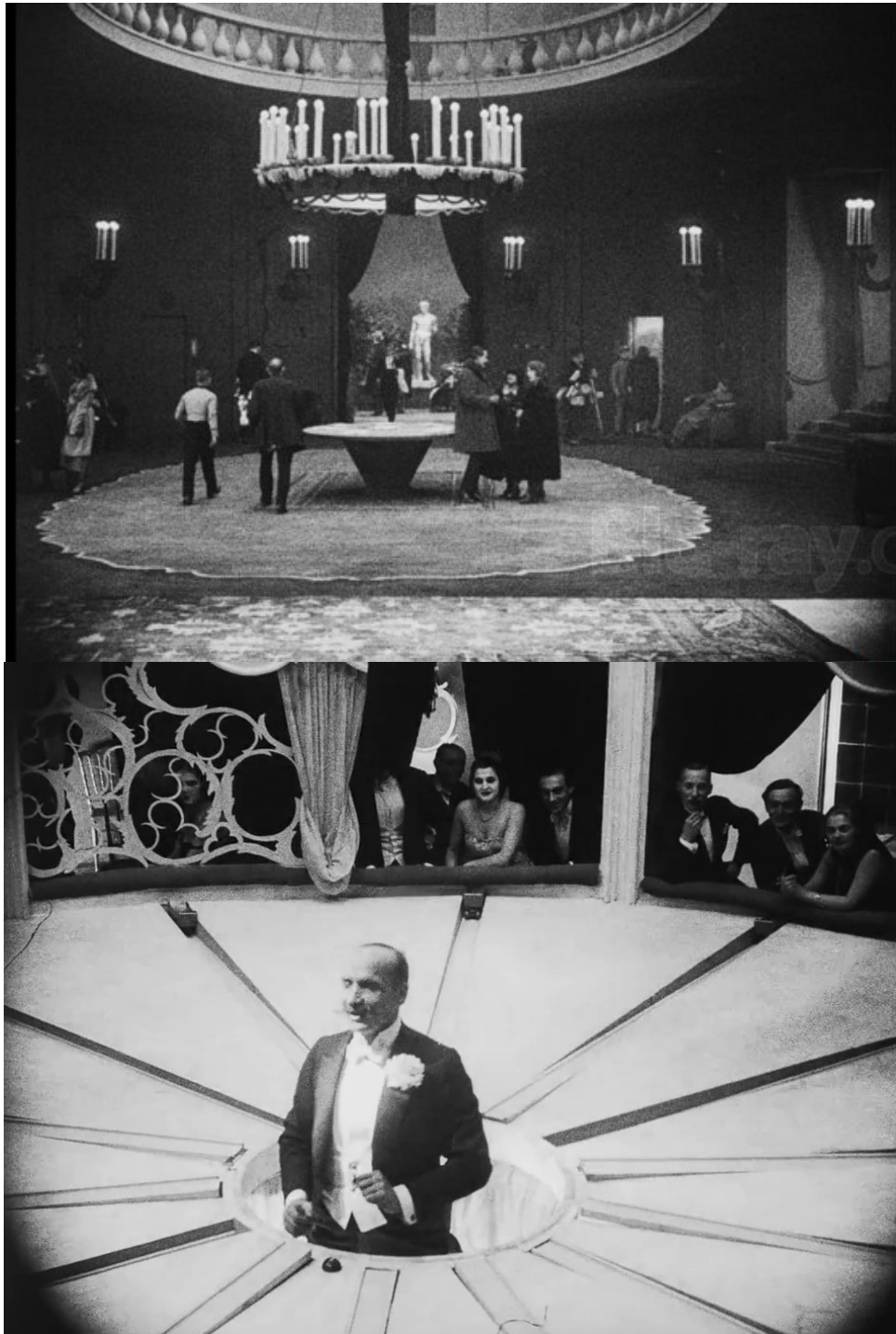


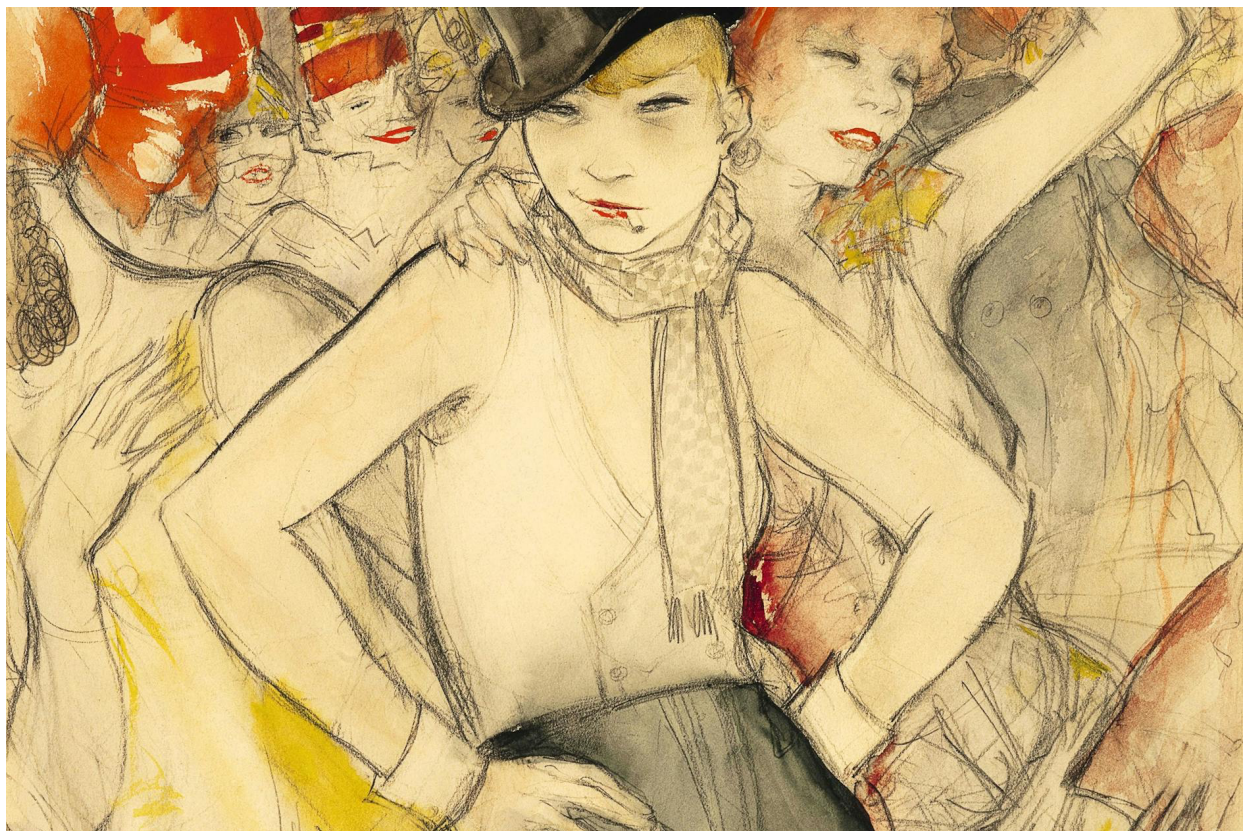


Max Beckmann, *Straße bei Nacht*, (1913)



## A Picture of Our Time: 'Objectivity is in the Air'





Jeanne Mammen, *She Represents*, 1928





August Sander, *Der Maler Anton Räderscheidt*, Köln, 1927



Above: Arno Henschel, *Dame mit Maske* (1928). Kunsthalle Mannheim



Above: Georg Grosz, *Drinnen und Draussen*, 1926





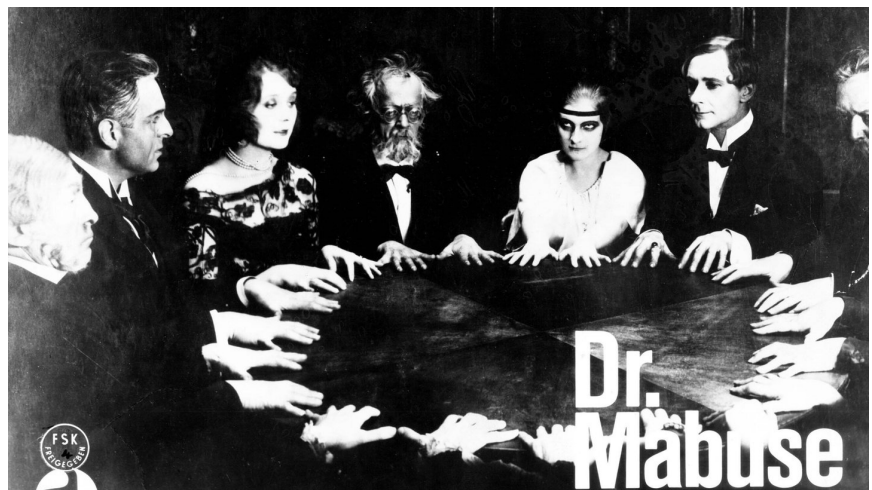
“In human history to date, the becoming-reflective of false and malevolent states of consciousness was always a culturally pathological symptom—an expression of the fact that the ruling strata had entered into a morbid stage tending to decadence and indiscriminate disinhibition. ... Cynically disposed, therefore, are the times of hollow gestures and artfully prearranged phraseology where, under very official word, private reservations, opposed worlds, and ironies are hidden and where, under public announcements, mute submonologues flow, about which only the initiated, the cocorrupted, codecadent, coironist knows something. The smile of the augurs is also the smile of declining ruling classes.”

— Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 384



## Player and Played: Currency, Persona, Deception





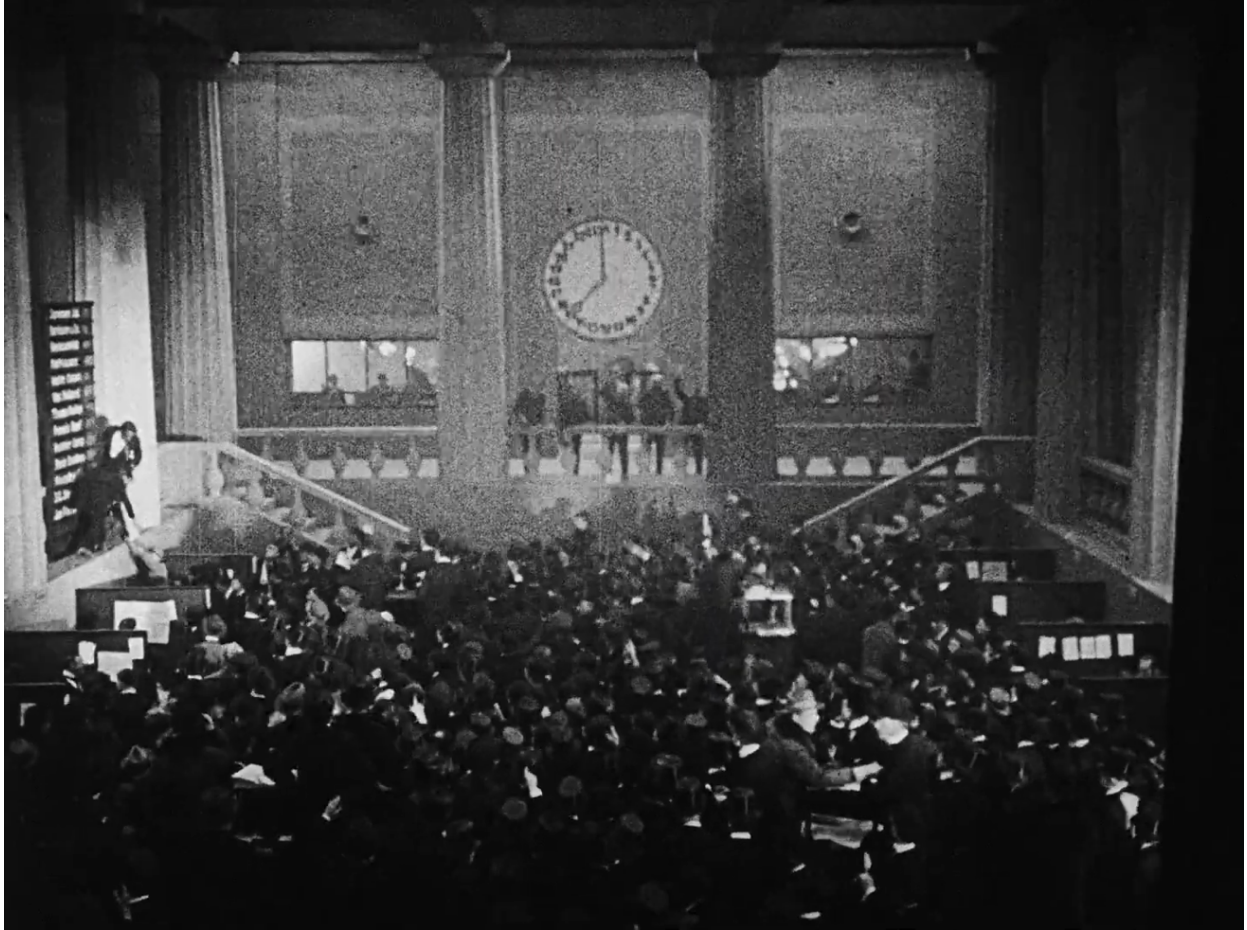
## Gambling, Forging, Speculating



Through the figure of Mabuse the film captures the cynical will to power within the context of early Weimar trembling. The theme of counterfeiting and the manipulation of the stock-market anticipated the conditions of hyperinflation resulting from the overproduction of currency in order to satisfy the demands of the economic warfare implemented by the Treaty of Versailles. (HC)

*"If one can simply say in the vernacular, that someone is 'fünf Millionen Mark schwer' then the national populace currently feels as if it weighs some hundreds of billions. It empathizes with those hundreds of billions. If I formulate the matter thus, I will perhaps arrive at the general principle underlying this form of behavior. I'm thinking of the games of chance. The gambler empathizes directly with the sums with which he challenges the bank or his partner. Gambling, in the form of stock-market speculation, has played the same pioneering role for empathy with exchange value as have world exhibitions. (The latter were training schools in which the masses, excluded from consumption, learned empathy with exchange value."*

Walter Benjamin in *Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin, Briefwechsel, 1928-1940* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1994), p 385, Trans. By Edmund Jephcott and Michael Jennings.



"Trading on the stock exchange displaces the forms of gambling handed down from feudal society. The phantasmagorias of space to which the flaneur devotes himself find a counterpart in the phantasmagorias of time to which the gambler is addicted. Gambling converts time into a narcotic. <Paul> Lafargue explains gambling as an imitation in miniature of the mysteries of economic fluctuation. The expropriations carried out under Haussmann call forth a wave of fraudulent speculation. The rulings of the Court of Cassation, which are inspired by the bourgeois and Orleanist opposition, increase the financial risks of Haussmannization."

- Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, 12



“The nurseries of cynicism are therefore those places with huge turnovers, exemplified in stock exchange dealings, where money is available in huge quantities and changes owners easily. The more money becomes the sole centre of interest, the more one discovers that honour and conviction, talent and virtue, beauty and salvation of the soul, are exchanged against money and so the more a mocking and frivolous attitude will develop in relation to these higher values that are for sale for the same kind of value as groceries, and that also command a ‘market price’. The concept of a market price for values which, according to their nature, reject any evaluation except in terms of their own categories and ideals is the perfect objectification of what cynicism presents in the form of a subjective reflex.”

- Georg Simmel, *Philosophy of Money*, 256-257





“When people first arrived in the Dream Realm they did not really notice the all-pervading fraudulence. To the casual glance, buying and bargaining went on here according to the customs as everywhere. That, however, was mere pretense, a grotesque sham. The whole of the money economy was ‘symbolic’. You never knew how much you had. Money came and went, it was handed out and taken in; everyone practiced a certain amount of sleight of hand...”

- Alfred Kubin, *The Other Side* (1909), 60



## Betrayal



## Possession

*"If I succeed in establishing contact between psychologist and patient in a way that fully excludes third party interference I'll be of the firm conviction that 80% of all neurological disorders will be cured."*

Dr. Mabuse (Lang, *Mabuse*, 1922)



*"Today! Today! Today!  
An evening of experiments  
Sandor Weltmann*

*Experiments in mass suggestion, sleepless hypnosis, trance,  
natural magnetism, the secrets of the Indian fakirs, the secrets of the psyche,  
the subconscious in man and animal.*

*In the main auditorium"  
(Lang, *Mabuse*, 1922)*

Like Caligari in Robert Wiene's film of 1920, Mabuse is a practitioner of the new science of the soul, psychoanalysis. The question of the manipulation of the will, the integrity of the soul, even the question of the existence of an intractable self that lingered along questions of propaganda, war, advertising, economy, new forms of domination, crime, technology and even cinema itself

is central to this new sinister figure of knowledge and control. Mabuse is almost never 'himself' and it is this very power of disguise that allows him to enter the souls of his victims. His victims become amnesiac. Mabuse generates an atmosphere of paranoia that destabilize the psyches of his victims. Fears which might have been diagnosed as paranoia or irrational in earlier times now appear reasonable if not necessary for survival in the modern metropolis. (HC)







Previous page and above: Dr. Mabuse as Sandor Weltmann capturing the crowd. (Lang, *Mabuse, der Spieler*, 1922)

## Urban Warfare: States of Siege

"I feel like a state within a state with which I have always been at war."

- Dr Mabuse (Lang, *Dr. Mabuse der Spieler*, 1922)





“The anarchy smoldering in this world manifests itself clearly in the admirably handled episode of the police attack against Mabuse's house – an episode which through its imagery intentionally recalls the tumultuous postwar months with their street fights between Spartacus and the Noske troops.” (Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, 82)

“[T]hat [law-preserving] violence when not in the hands of the law, threatens it not by the ends it may pursue but by its mere existence outside the law. The same may be more dramatically suggested if one reflects on how often the figure of the ‘great’ criminal, however repellant his ends may have been, has aroused the secret admiration of the public. This cannot result from his deed, but only the violence to which it bears witness. In this case, therefore, the violence of which present day law is seeking in all areas of activity to deprive the individual appears really threatening.” (Benjamin, *Critique*, 281)



Spartacist uprising (Berlin), January 5-12, 1919

## The Undead, the Revolt of Machines







