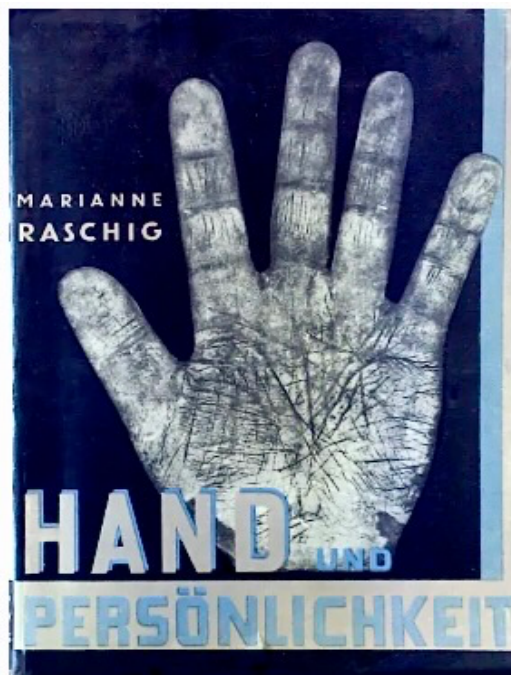


# CONCEPTS AND CONSTELLATIONS

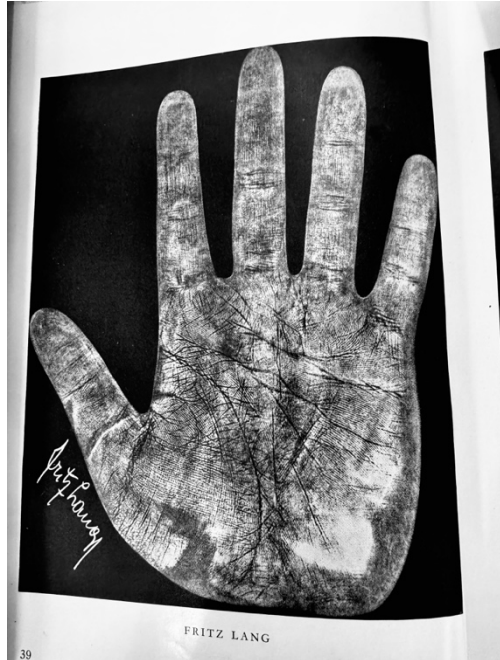
## I. THE HAND AS A SIGNIFIER



Original Poster, 1931



Marianne Raschig,  
*Hand und Persönlichkeit*, 1931



From 1925 to 1936, Marianne Raschig popularized palm reading, transforming it into a pseudo-scientific tool for character analysis like graphology. Raschig collected handprints from over 1.500 people and claimed in her 1931 book, "Hand and Personality: An Introduction to the System of Palmistry," that "hands speak more sincerely than the mouth and more truthfully and authentically than facial expressions." A second volume includes palm prints by film directors like Lang, Murnau, Pabst, among others. Raschig's generalizations, derived from correlating hand lines to the character of individuals, often border on the esoteric, but Lang's emphasis on the hand's signifying power in *M* is worth noting. [TK]

Lang's palm print in Raschig's book 1931



M. Raschig's Handarchiv — Fritz Lang, Nov. 27, 1925



**The hand is inscribed. It also inscribes and marks a body.**



**Notice the small reflection of the chalk mark in the center of the frame as well as the face masks of children in the window display. They serve as silent witnesses.**

**The gloved hand signifies force and control over the city**





## IDENTITY AND IDENTIFICATION

### Fingerprints as forensic identifiers



**Lorre acts with  
his hands**







A close-up of Lorre's hands



## II. *M's* MODERNITY

### Murder as a Media Event



Note that the poster offering a 10,000-mark reward for identifying the serial killer is surrounded by advertisements for a comedy show (Lachbühne”), a revue featuring the Jackson Girls, a boxing match, a movie, and a dance course. Men gather around the Litfaßsäule, a structure found in public spaces throughout Berlin. Those in the front read the poster aloud for those in the back. This allowed Lang to transform the written text into a sound collage of different voices and accents. News spreads by word of mouth, leading to false rumors, accusations, and collective panic and paranoia. [TK]

vorenthalten hat,  
mich nun gleich  
Presse! Forschen  
Sie werden bald  
finden. Aber ich

## THE FRENZY OF THE PRESS



## SURVEILLANCE AND SUSPICION



## Who's the Murderer?

From baseless suspicion





... to sudden aggression



The extreme camera angles exaggerate, ridicule, and critique the power of the accuser over the accused.

... to mob violence



## Surveillance in the Bureaucratic State



Police Inspector Lohmann inspects the papers . . .

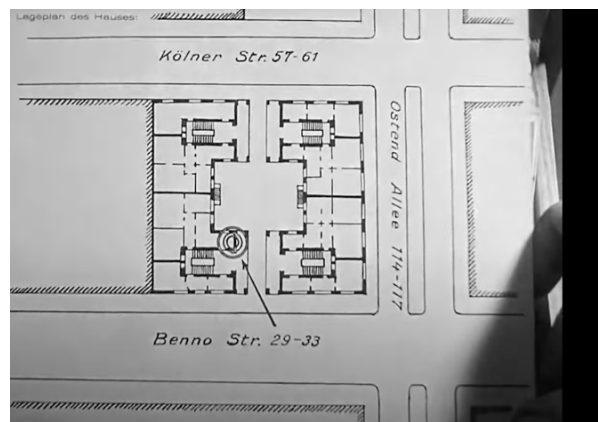
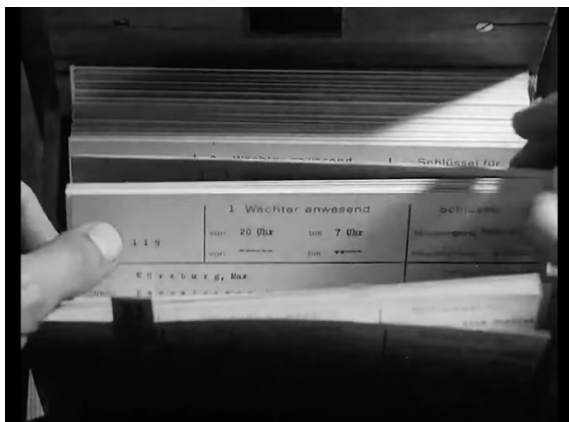
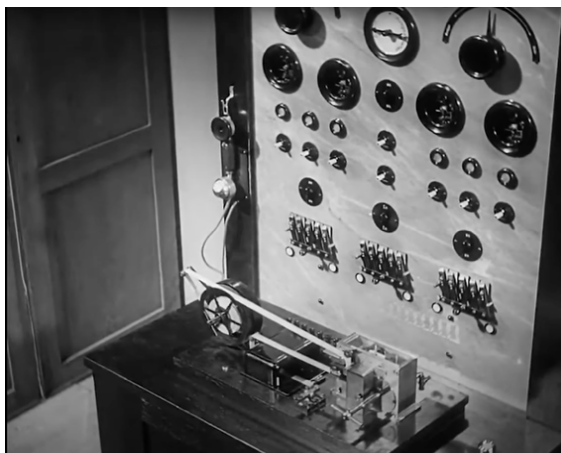


**. . . and discovers a forgery. The film subtly undermines the omnipotence of the surveillance state**



# Surveillance by Technology:

## Alarm System 1931



## FILES, RECORDS, INVENTORIES



A graphology expert dictates his report in front of a fortress of files

ist bei den Haussuchungen besonders darauf zu achten,  
- ob belastendes Material festgestellt werden kann  
in Bezug auf den Brief des Mörders an den Städtischen  
Courier. - (Ob sich in der Wohnung ein alter Holz-  
tisch befindet, der bei Anfertigung des Briefes  
als Unterlage gedient zu haben scheint, - ob sich  
ein Rotstift vorfindet - ((ev. Farbstift ohne Holz)  
oder Spuren vom Anspitzen eines solchen Stiftes,  
gleiches Briefpapier usw.)  
Die Recherchen sind völlig unauffällig durchzu-  
führen.

Note the correction of the spelling error, a detail that undercuts the bureaucratic seriousness of the report

## Inventories



# Photography and Neue Sachlichkeit/New Objectivity

Inventing and Recording the World

Images of Absence





### III. THE POLITICS OF CRIME

#### A State within a State



ARTUR LANDSBERGER

#### The Berlin Underworld

First published in *Die Unterwelt von Berlin* (Berlin: Paul Stegemann, 1929), 9--10, 15-18, 20, 22-24.

The tempo of development in Berlin is breathtaking. First came the inflation, then the radio broadcast tower, the police exhibition, later the Iron Gustav, the London gas explosion in Tempelhof ...but the final touch was still lacking. Then-at last---on the first day of the year 1929 Berlin became a metropolis: the slums of Chicago and the gangsters of New York were pushed into the shadows by-the underworld of Berlin.

To be sure, fifteen thousand people were already disappearing without a trace in Berlin annually; fifty thousand complaints were registered with the police: on account of burglaries and pickpocketings, on account of forgery and bond swindles, on account of counterfeiting and more delicate things. The police were busy, the courts were busy,

district attorneys were pleading their cases on an assembly line. And at Alexanderplatz, our first-rate Scotland Yard, fingerprints were diligently being collected (a half a million are already on file). And the mugshot album displayed, not without pride, forty thousand portraits.

Horrible numbers? Now Berlin has meanwhile absorbed four and a half million inhabitants; the times of the famous stilt-house village in the woods are unfortunately past and not everyone is bedded on roses. All kinds of things are happening. Murders and manslaughter, one every three days; uproars and cocaine are the sociological comforts of the metropolis.[ ...]

The antithesis between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat is manifest, to deny it would be a pointless venture. Individuals slip out of both classes, lose the connection to their class, and become—in the sense of the state—asocial. When the well-situated bourgeois child slips out, he becomes a bohemian or, if he musters enough courage, a swindler, an insurance or loan embezzler, a counterfeit prince, or a hotel thief. If the proletarian slips out of his class, he is forced to commit break-ins or skip out on checks, to become a pickpocket or a vagrant. He lacks the necessary education for the "higher" crimes.

Between the criminality of the bourgeoisie and that of the proletariat is an intermediary stratum of people unable to embrace either their class or criminality. They lack will in all respects: these are the passive elements who fail to find the strength to maintain themselves in their classes, who are too weak to commit a "proper" crime. From among these people the bohemians are recruited, the gigolos, pimps, and prostitutes live on with the longing for "higher things" in their hearts—higher things appear to them as the well-tended order of the bourgeoisie. They do not distinguish what is to be valued from what is to be despised in bourgeois institutions. They fall for appearances, which are most accessible to their desires: the Bacchanalian rituals of students, solidarity, flags and insignia tablecloths, association meetings, and first-class funerals with music.

Since it is evident to them that membership in the Blue-Red Tennis Club or Wannsee Golf and Country Club is out of their reach, they found their own associations.

Their associational life is in no way to be distinguished from that of a men's singing group or ex-servicemen's association, as is demonstrated by the following statutes:

- I. 1. The association bears the name "Ever-True Sport Club of 1921" and has its seat in Berlin. 2. Political and religious endeavors are prohibited.
- II. The goal of the association is to be achieved: 1. Through the promotion of

friendship and conviviality among the members; 2. through support to be rendered in case of illness and special emergencies; 3. through support upon occasions of death.  
[ ... ]

XVIII. Every member will receive a signet ring upon completing five years of membership.

In Berlin there are approximately a dozen such associations. One could never characterize the membership as a whole as criminals or pimps. There are certain to be honorable cigarette wholesalers among them, modest handicraft workers, people who have only once been convicted of a petty triviality and are no longer fully recognized by the rigorous citizenry (for in this regard the class-conscious proletariat is also a citizen). Here in their association, they feel at ease, are people among people; they do not have to fear skeptical glances and pointed remarks. Here as well the sense of group honor develops, which is much more sensitive than the personal sort. And many among them have never been sentenced.

Even if they are also linked to many similar associations in the country through the cartel of "the ring," it is nevertheless wrong to represent them as dangerous. On the contrary, insofar as they lend moral encouragement to their members, infuse them with their good and strict bourgeois code of honor, they do good. Since these associations have existed (the first was founded nearly fifty years ago and membership during the war was mainly non-political deserters who could not, like the bohemians, go to Switzerland) surveillance of criminality has been made much easier: the police easily find the inter-mediate stratum all gathered together. They are likely reluctant for that reason to dissolve the associations. Who wants to make his work harder for no reason? Moreover, the ring associations are thoroughly apolitical. They could not care less whether Hitler or Thalmann, Seeckt or Scheidemann declares the dictatorship. They have better things to do: tending to the life of the association.

And when the associations hold their celebrations, solemnly carrying the banner into the decorated hall to the sound of drums and call of bugles, then just try coming and saying it is all a farce. It is deadly earnest to them, true to their motto: The Good, the True, the Beautiful.

## The End of Order and Security



### ERNST JÜNGER

#### On Danger

First published as "Über die Gefahr," in *Der gefährliche Augenblick. Eine Sammlung von Bildern und Berichten*, ed. by Ferdinand Bucholtz (Berlin: Junker und Dunnhaupt Verlag, 1931), 11-16.

Among the signs of the epoch we have now entered belongs the increased intrusion of danger into daily life. There is no accident concealing itself behind this fact but a comprehensive change of the inner and outer world.

We see this clearly when we remember what an important role was assigned to the concept of security in the bourgeois epoch just past. The bourgeois person is perhaps best characterized as one who places security among the highest of values and conducts his life accordingly. His arrangements and systems are dedicated to securing his space against the danger that, at times, when scarcely a cloud appears to darken the sky, has faded into the distance. However, it is always there: it seeks with elemental constancy to break through the dams with which order has surrounded itself.

The peculiarity of the bourgeois' relation to danger lies in his perception of it as an irresolvable contradiction to order—that is, as senseless. In this he marks himself off from other figures, for example, the warrior, the artist, and the criminal, who are given a lofty or base relation to the elemental. Thus battle, in the eyes of the warrior, is a process that completes itself in a higher order; the tragic conflict, for the writer, is a condition in which the deeper sense of life is to be comprehended very clearly; and a burning city or one beset by insurrection is a field of intensified activity for the criminal. In turn, bourgeois values possess just as little validity for the believing person, for the gods appear in the elements, as in the burning bush unconsumed by the flames. Through misfortune and danger, fate draws the mortal into the superior sphere of a higher order.

The supreme power through which the bourgeois sees security guaranteed is reason. The closer he finds himself to the center of reason, the more the dark shadows in which danger conceals itself disperse, and the ideal condition which it is the task of progress to achieve consists of the world domination of reason through which the wellsprings of the dangerous are not merely to be minimized but ultimately to be dried up altogether. The dangerous reveals itself in the light of reason to be senseless and relinquishes its claim on reality. In this world all depends on the perception of the dangerous as the senseless; then in the same moment it is overcome, it appears in the mirror of reason as an error. [. . .]

This was a war that not only nations but two epochs conducted against each other. As a consequence, both victors and vanquished exist here in Germany. Victors are those who, like salamanders, have gone through the school of danger. Only these will hold their own in a time when danger, not security, will determine the order of life.

Precisely for this reason, however, the tasks that order must accomplish have become much more comprehensive than before; these tasks have to be performed where danger is not the exception, but is constantly present. As an example, the police force might be mentioned. It has transformed itself from a group of civil servants into a formation that already greatly resembles a military unit. [. . .] The history of inventions also raises ever more clearly the question of whether a space of absolute comfort or a space of absolute danger is the final aim concealed in technology. Completely apart from the circumstance that scarcely a machine, scarcely a science has ever existed which did not fulfill, directly or indirectly, dangerous functions in war, inventions like the automobile engine have already resulted in greater losses than any war, however bloody.



What especially characterizes the era in which we find ourselves, into which we enter more deeply with every passing day, is the close relationship that exists between danger and order. It may be expressed in this way: danger appears merely as the other side of our order. The whole is more or less equivalent to our image of the atom, which is utterly mobile and utterly constant. The secret concealed within is a new and different return to nature; it is the fact that we are simultaneously civilized and barbaric, that we have approached the elemental without having sacrificed the acuity of our consciousness. [. . .]

One needs no prophetic talent to predict that soon any given event will be there to see or to hear in any given place. Already today there is hardly an event of human significance toward which the artificial eye of civilization—the photographic lens—is not directed. The result is often pictures of demoniacal precision through which humanity's new relation to danger becomes visible in an exceptional fashion.

One has to recognize that it is a question here much less of the peculiarity of new tools than of a new style that makes use of technological tools. The change becomes illuminating in the investigation of the change in tools that have long been at our disposal, such as language. Although our time produces little in the way of literature in the old sense, much of significance is accomplished through objective reports of experience. Our time is prompted by human need—which explains, among other things, the success of war literature. We already possess a new style of language, one which gradually becomes visible from underneath the language of the bourgeois epoch. The same, however, is true of our style altogether; it is reminiscent of the fact that the automobile was for a long time constructed in the form of a horse-drawn coach, or that a wholly different society has already long since established itself beneath the surface of bourgeois society. As during the inflation, we continue for a time to spend the usual coins, without sensing that the rate of exchange is no longer the same.

In this sense, it may be said that we have already plunged deeply into new, more dangerous realms, without our being conscious of them.

## CRIMINALITY AND THE DISINTEGRATION OF SOCIETY, 1931



### **SIEGFRIED KRACAUER** **Murder Trials and Society**

Originally published as "Mordprozeß und Gesellschaft," *Die neue Rundschau* 42, March 1931, pp. 431–432)

Murders in Berlin and elsewhere in Germany are on the increase. I am not thinking just of political murders—those street shootings and meeting-hall slaughters reported without interruption in the daily press. A striking number of bloody crimes are being committed by persons other than the National Socialists and the Communists. Life has recently become cheap.

A careful observation of the Ulbrich murder trial yields some of the reasons for widespread unstable behavior in regard to the fundamentals of life and death. This case gains symptomatic significance in that the three youths involved are average people who cannot be essentially differentiated from others in their circles. I grant the inferiority of the perpetrators; still, Stolpe's brutality, Benziger's weak will, and the girl's erratic nature do not suffice to distinguish the three within their environment. An additional

noteworthy factor is that they stumbled into the crime without any genuinely personal motivation. They were driven neither by the passion of lovers nor hate nor insatiable greed. In short, they did not really commit the murder, but simply happened upon it unexpectedly. Normal people are slipping toward atrocity without noticing their slide.

It is important to know that the perpetrators come from the milieu of the unemployed. Unemployment, which now affects approximately five million Germans, has long since ceased to be an individual fate. It has become the permanent condition of masses of Germans, and doubtless an immediate cause of the desperate, thoughtless games being played with life. For those who are cast out of the social order and condemned to a backstairs existence also lose sight of the accustomed rules of behavior. And the hopeless wait for a change cannot but render them utterly insensitive to the laws responsible for the preservation of order. I do not know of a single place in which waiting could be more demoralizing than in the Unemployment Office. Completely aside from the fact that in these stagnant times there is no manifest goal, what is lacking above all is the magic. Neither outrage is permitted to raise its voice here, nor can the enforced idleness be devoted to anything else. On the contrary, doing nothing can only take place in the shadows and must do without the title of nobility that is otherwise its due. Still there would be much to conjure, for in these rooms poverty has nothing to look at but itself. Abandoned to merely unmitigated presence together, the waiting these people suffer is doubly burdensome. The older ones perhaps befriend it like a comrade, but for the youthful unemployed it is a poison slowly working its way through their veins.

To the ominous lack of routine in which people without work are compelled to live is added the difficulty altogether of gaining a footing in current social conditions. It is exceedingly telling that Stolpe complained that he was verbally abused by the officers during his incarceration. (The judge's obvious reminder of Stolpe's own crime obviously did not really penetrate his consciousness.) In the letters of Lieschen Neumann as well, emphasis fell randomly on trivial and significant details. This remarkable deadening of the capacity to distinguish necessarily leads to particularly severe excesses in times of need; for if the murderer is vexed by a few rude words, then the murder he commits will seem to him nothing more than rudeness. Would that the perpetrators were still pathological in nature, but their normality marks the prevailing confusion of standards among them as the sign of a more general disposition. Certainly they went a step farther than most other, more inhibited people: but what made their crime possible was their loss of a doctrine to orient them in daily life. This is the other side of the German temperament and German philosophy—and it is not by accident that it becomes so

plainly evident today: that it has opened the nation's daily life to all kinds of attacks and insinuations. In France, for example, there are still certain traditions that extend all the way from top to bottom, encompassing individuals relatively independently of social status, to enforce on all a specific attitude toward the basic facts of existence. Here, on the contrary, all things that go without saying are dying out one by one; our ethical foundations are being shaken along with the economic, and new points of stability are in the meantime wanting.

We live in a state of confusion which is recognizable by various signs. It is not the least betrayed by the disappearance of social hierarchy. The upper stratum has long since ceased to offer a true model for the so-called lower orders, however much property might still be desired and fashions imitated. At present it is neither capable of lending its ideological superstructure the force of ideas, nor does it influence the masses through its behavior. In a series of investigations that appeared several years ago in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, "The Little Shop Girls Go to the Movies," I analyzed various exemplary social films, teasing from them a few truths that they are all too eager to conceal. It turned out, and this is easily demonstrated in the most recent films as well (for example, the sound film *The Private Secretary*), that though all of these productions endeavor to actualize the daydreams of the public through enticing depictions of high society, they in fact continually discredit the very same society. The suppression of binding social obligations is also intensified by the neutrality of important public expressions of opinion. This may in part be a result of domestic political tensions—but the other part undoubtedly signals a failure. Dominating the radio and ruling over the fake variety of juxtapositions in many big newspapers, neutrality expands to every area it possibly can to inspire the impression of plenitude—a neutrality that is the precise opposite of wisdom and attests to nothing more than the absence of any guiding principles. The lack of substantive consensus necessarily endangers the suffering masses the most. For Lieschen Neumann and her unemployed comrades, the insecurity of society in regard to all critical matters has become their doom.

The exceptional degree of this insecurity is what characterizes the overwhelming process of social transformation that has been our lot since the end of the world war. Until the new contours have become solidified, our path will continue to be marked by blood and tears.

## ANTICIPATING FILM NOIR

### NIGHT IN THE CITY





## NO ESCAPE



## PANIC



# THE QUESTION OF JUSTICE



Berlin Police headquarters "Alex" at the Alexanderplatz

## FRANZ ALEXANDER AND HUGO STAUB

### The Criminal and His Judges

First published in *Der Verbrecher und seine Richter. Ein psychoanalytischer Einblick in die Welt der Paragraphen* (Vienna: Internationaler Psychoanalytischer Verlag, 1929), xvii-xix.

It is no longer necessary to try to justify the claims psychoanalysis makes in understanding the mentally sick and in extending to them therapeutic help.

Yet not so many centuries ago hysteria still belonged to a domain other than medicine; it was a phenomenon on which only the law courts were supposed to be competent to pass judgment. The woman suffering from hysteria was called a witch and she was punished as such; the punishment was severe, more severe than the one meted out today to a murderer. It is not improbable that our treatment of the criminal will undergo a similar change in the future. The very fact that in "doubtful" cases today a medical expert (i.e., a psychiatrist) is usually asked by the court for an opinion is the first step in this direction. A deeper knowledge of the psychology of the criminal would considerably increase the number of such "doubtful" cases. Yet our plea for a better understanding of the criminal seems to require some justification. Is not the criminal a public menace? Should not the interest we have in him be limited to an attempt to render him harmless and to make the punishment imposed upon him serve as an example to others? Thus, a deeper study of the criminal personality might at first appear as nothing but a luxury, a manner of squandering one's scientific zeal. Is it not true that tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner? Is it not true that the psychologist who strives to understand the criminal

must at first put himself in the criminal's place, or as we say in psychoanalysis, he must identify himself with the criminal? One might even become suspicious that such a psychologist seeks to help the criminal rather than society; thus the psychologist becomes open to suspicion of disloyalty to society.

The authors hope that in the course of this study they will succeed in clearing themselves of any such suspicion; they wish, however, to try to prove in the beginning that a psychological understanding of the criminal does not primarily help the criminal but, on the contrary, serves the interests of society. In order to do this we will have to deviate from our main line of thought, but this deviation will furnish us incidentally with some basic ideas that will prove the need for a psychoanalytical criminology.

We are justified, we believe, in assuming that a sentence on a criminal which is generally perceived as just presupposes the psychological understanding of the person responsible for the act judged; in other words, it presupposes a knowledge of motives underlying the given act. One and the same act may be approved or condemned, depending upon the motives underlying it. We praise the killing of the enemy in war; we condone a murder committed in self-defense; we sometimes forgive the killing of a person when it is done in a state of understandable affect, but the murderer who kills to rob is unanimously condemned. As far as the act itself is concerned, it is identical in all cases cited; our judgment on it seems to depend merely upon the various conscious aims it has and its various emotional motivations. Without the knowledge of these motivations one is unable to form any attitude toward a given act. The main question whether or not a given act is to be considered criminal depends entirely upon the psychological diagnosis we make. This paramount importance of psychology by which the judge is guided will be considered in detail later. It is mentioned here only in order to establish definitely that the feeling that a given court sentence is just is closely bound with the proper evaluation of the motives which lead to a given act.

Yet this reason alone does not appear sufficiently to justify a too zealous search for the psychological understanding of the criminal from whom society seeks to protect itself. We may say, of course, that our intention to study the psychic life of the criminal in detail is justified because we want to assure the criminal a just judgment of the law. But why this intense need of a theoretical justice in cases of frankly antisocial individuals? It might almost seem that we are trying to find a way to protect the criminal from society and not society from the criminal. Thus, our previous assertion that we seek to serve the interests of society appears unwarranted. This apparent contradiction might disappear only if it could be definitely proved that the judgment pronounced upon the criminal,

which we perceive as just, really serves the interests of society. Hence, for the purpose of clarity we are ready to submit to cross-examination by the Solicitor General of Society, who might want to bring the authors of these pages to account and say:

"Why this wish to understand the criminal at any cost? It is much more important to seize him and free society of his presence. Why not turn your psychological ardor toward the understanding of more worthy objects? Despite all you say, your great ardor does appear to me nothing but an attempt to help the criminal."



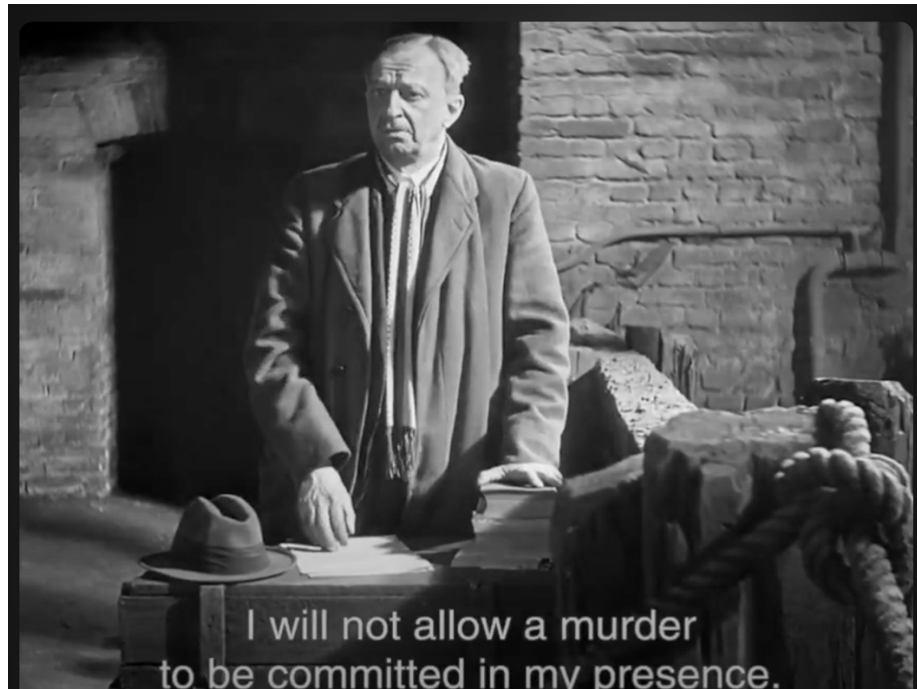


## THE UNDERWORLD TRIBUNAL



## THE RULE OF LAW (Democracy on a Thread)









**HANDS UP**





## THE HAND OF THE LAW



## CODA

On July 5, 1934, *M* was banned across the German Reich.



In 1940, Goebbels ordered the Nazi Propaganda Ministry to produce the anti-Semitic "documentary," *Der ewige Jude* (The Eternal Jew). The 66-minute compilation film directed by Fritz Hippler included a two-minute clip from *M*, in which Peter Lorre's character confesses his compulsion to kill. Shown without its narrative context and accompanied by an anti-Semitic voice-over, the clip was intended to support Nazi propaganda about the innate criminality of Jews. Hippler's vile hodgepodge premiered on November 28, 1940, at the Ufa Palast am Zoo—the same theater that just nine years earlier, had celebrated Lorre for playing the victim of a lynch mob.

By 1940, both Lang and Lorre had long left Hitler's Germany behind and found success in Hollywood. Their work often reminded viewers of *M*'s narrative and visuals. Lorre continued to play outsiders, and Lang's first American film, *Fury*, bore similarities to *M*. Much of Lang's subsequent American work followed the film noir framework pioneered by *M*. Like *M*, these films used crime to critique the social order of the time and explore the tension between law and justice. Lang and Lorre lived in Hollywood for the rest of their lives, yet they never collaborated again.