



PREFACE

M opened in 1931 amid Germany's worst economic, social, and political crisis, less than two years before Hitler dismantled Weimar's precarious democracy in a matter of months. The film comments on all major concerns of the late Weimar Republic (law and order, media-fueled hysteria, and the weak state) and it does so by employing a range of filmic styles, from theatrical expressionism to gritty documentary realism that foreshadows film noir. Considered to be Lang's masterpiece, *M* is arguably the first film to illuminate conflicts inherent in modern mass society that still plague us today. While exploring the tension between image and sound, the film addresses deeper questions of seeing and knowing, presence and absence. By investigating the role of the deviant outsider and the nature of collective paranoia, *M* also demonstrates, through camera movement, editing, and lighting, the intrusive and manipulative power of the medium itself. This dossier contextualizes *M* within its historical period and highlights the film's prescient insights into the role of mass media in urban modernity, then and now. It also examines the social implications of crime and its threat to the democratic rule of law. The dossier can only begin to draw attention to the rich resonances of Lang's *M* for a critical understanding of our own time.



EIN
**FRITZ
LANG
FILM
DER NERO**

Regie:FRITZ LANG/Buch:THEA.v.HARBOU
Fotografische Ltg:FRITZ ARNO WAGNER
Bild:WAGNER,VASH/Bau-Entwürfe:EMIL
HASLER/Ausführung:HASLER-VOLBRECHT

Ton:ADOLF JANSEN/Tonschnitt:PAUL FALKENBERG/Stand-
fotos:HORST.v.HARBOU/Aufnahme-Ltg:GUSTAV RATHJE

Darsteller: PETER LORRE, GERHARD BIENERT, RUDOLF
BLÜMNER, FRITZ GNASS, GUSTAF GRÜNDGENS, GEORG
JOHN, PAUL KEMP, INGE LANDGUT, THEO LINGEN,
THEODOR LOOS, FRITZ ODEMAR, KARL PLATEN, ERNST
STAHL-NACHBAUR, FRANZ STEIN, ROSA VALETTI, HERTHA
VON WALTER, OTTO WERNICKE UND ELLEN WIDMANN
ALMAS, BALHAUS, BEHAL, CARELL, DAMEN, DOBLIN, ECKHOF, ELSE EHSER,
ELZER, FABER, ILSE FÜRSTENBERG, GELINGK, GOLDSTEIN, GOLTZ, GOTHO,
GRETLER, HADANK, HARTBERG, HEMPEL, HÖCKER, HOERMANN, ISENTA,
KARCHOW, KEPICH, KREHAN, KURTH, LEESER, ROSE LICHTENSTEIN, LOTTE
LÖBINGER, LOHDE, LORETTO, MASCHECK, MATTHIS, MEDEROW, MARGARETE
MELZER, TRUDE MOOS, NETTO, NEUMANN, NIED, MAJA NORDEN, PAULY,
KLAUS POHL, POLLAND, REBANE, REHKOPF, REIHSIG, RHADEN, RITTER,
SABLOTZKI, SASCHA, AGNES SCHULZ-LICHTERFELD, STECKEL, STROUX,
SWINBORNE, TRUTZ, WALDIS, WALTH, WANKA, WANNEMANN, WULF, ZIENER

**WELTAUFFÜHRUNG:
MONTAG, DEN 11. MAI
LIFA PALAST AM ZOO**



PRODUKTION:
NERO-FILM A.-G.
BERLIN

VERLEIH:
VER. STAR-FILM G. M.
BERLIN SW 48 B. H.



Advertisement for *M* in *Der Film-Kurier* (May 11, 1931)

CREDITS



To view the **complete credits in English with hyperlinks** to the director, actors, etc., click [here](#) and select All Credits and Versions.

To view the **film-historical context** of *M*, see Hans Helmut Prinzler's *The Chronicle of German Film (1918-1933)* [here](#).



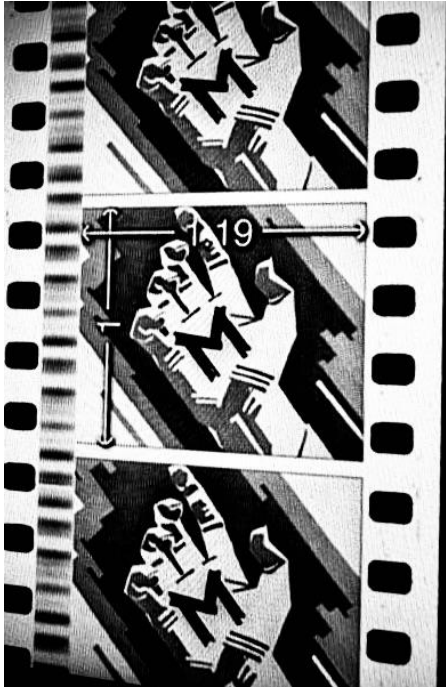
Invitation to *M*'s premiere at the Ufa Palast am Zoo

PREMIERE IN THE UFA-PALAST AM ZOO



In 1931, The Ufa-Palast am Zoo had a seating capacity of 2,165. It was the largest cinema in Germany.

Restoration



M premiered on May 11, 1931, at the Ufa-Palast am Zoo in Berlin with an audience of close to 2200. The film had passed the censorship board without cuts – it was 3,208 meters long and had a running time of 117 minutes.

After its premiere, *M* was shortened and reedited for international export. There was a British version (with Lorre speaking his part in English) and a French version, which reshot the film with French actors and ends with children dancing in a circle, celebrating the capture of the child murderer. (The happy end footage was added by the French distributor.) The American version premiered in 1933 and was first shown with subtitles, which were withdrawn after two weeks and replaced by a dubbed version. (See the article in the next chapter of this dossier

M was banned by the Nazis in the early 1930s and became forgotten for almost three decades. It was Seymour Nebenzal, the original producer, who rereleased the film in 1959 in a heavily altered form, cut down to 89 minutes running time. It also added natural sound (such as traffic noise and footsteps) for greater realism. The 1959 version also changed the title to “M. Dein Mörder sieht dich an” (M – Your Murderer Looks at You). When it was shown on German television, the title was altered again to “M. Eine Stadt sucht einen Mörder” (M – A City Searches for a Murderer).

Starting in 1975, it took Enno Patalas, the director of the Munich Film Museum and



legendary preservationist of Weimar cinema, almost two decades to assemble the missing parts from various copies from different archives and reconstruct the original continuity of scenes. In 1995–6, Donat Keusch refurbished and digitised the original soundtrack. The result of their efforts became commercially available (also with English subtitles) on film, video, laserdisc and became commercially available (also with English subtitles)

on film, video, laserdisc and DVD. This restored version, 111 minutes long, came as close as possible to the original

film of 1931, which ran a total of 117 minutes. This 1996 version was regarded at the time as the most complete version since its premiere. The Janus Films VHS edition of 1998 and the parallel DVD edition, released by the Criterion Collection, disseminated this pioneering restoration worldwide and made *M* into the international classic it is now.

In 2001, on the occasion of a comprehensive Fritz Lang retrospective at the Berlin International Film Festival, a newly restored print of *M* was presented that originated from a newly discovered nitrate camera negative. Martin Koerber, film archivist at the Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek Berlin, had found the deteriorating and incomplete original negative of the film in the Bundesarchiv-Filmarchiv Berlin and embarked on a restoration that took three years. The project involved the replacement of damaged and missing parts with the best surviving elements from other negatives found in various European film archives; the photochemical and photo-optical repair of the 35mm negative; the transfer of the fine-grain master print to high-definition digital video; the restitution of the original aspect ratio; the frame-by-frame cleaning of the digitized print; and the remastering of the audio track. These efforts improved the quality of image and sound in stunning ways.

In 2004, the Criterion Collection updated its first edition of *M* and promoted the meanwhile further improved 2001 restoration in a special double-disc DVD edition, replete with bonus materials and a booklet. In 2010, Eureka's Masters of Cinema Series followed this restoration in its DVD and Blu-ray editions, which also included the newly found 1932 British release version of *M*, courtesy of the BFI National Archive. Criterion's Blu-ray edition of the 2004 version was issued in 2010. Presently, this version of *M* can also be streamed on the Criterion Channel.

In 2011, an 80th anniversary edition of *M* was issued, offering additional corrections and improvements with the help of a rediscovered French duplicate nitrate negative. It incorporated previously missing frames and further enhanced the visual and aural quality by employing the latest film restoration software. Supervised by Torsten Kaiser and produced by Universum Film (in cooperation with the Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek, BFI and others), this most recent restoration is available in Germany on a two-disc DVD edition with optional English subtitles and six hours of new bonus materials. (See Kaiser's interview about his restoration [here](#).) Even this most recent version runs six minutes short of the 117 minutes of the original film because of a still-missing scene that is mentioned in a review of the film's premiere and has survived as part of the film's censorship records. [See below] _____For more information on *M*'s restoration, see the 25-minute documentary "The Physical History of *M*," produced by Criterion and available on their DVD and on the [Criterion Channel](#).

The Missing Scene

Reprinted from Anton Kaes, *M* (BFI: London 2000/2021) Appendix, pp. 103-104.

What follows is a literal translation of a missing scene from Lang's *M* as it was submitted to the Censorship Board in Berlin on 27 April 1931, two weeks before the opening. This board required a copy of the film and the so-called *Zensurkarten* (censorship cards), which contained a written record of all spoken dialogue and textual material. Although they do not indicate details about staging or camera movement, or even the names of the speakers, they have been invaluable in reconstructing early films in their original sequence of scenes. In the case of Lang's *M*, the approved version was recorded as being 3208 metres long, with a running time of 117 minutes. The most complete version we presently own falls six minutes short. Because *M*'s censorship cards have recently surfaced, we have a record of one scene that is either missing from the extant print (i.e. it could still turn up one day) or lost (i.e. it was cut by Lang after the premiere). The scene deals with the baffling phenomenon of self-incrimination by citizens who are eager to become part of the media madness (as happened in the case of Kürten). A review of *M*'s opening in *Film-Journal* (17 May 1931) mentions the film's critique of the 'self-incrimination of innocent people' and allows us to conclude that the premiere version of 11 May 1931 still contained this scene.

The missing sequence, reprinted below for the first time, originally followed the scene in which a mob-like crowd attacks a pickpocket, thinking it has caught the child murderer. The sequence begins with a police poster reporting the murder of Elsie Beckmann and showing the increased reward. The scene then cuts to a group of citizens all claiming to be the murderer. As the production still below shows, they gleefully write letters and cut out type from a newspaper to conceal their handwriting. (The unpublished photograph was found in the Horst von Harbou collection of production stills from *M*.) Cut to the office of Inspector Lohmann who is busy placing a phone call while dictating a press release about those 'most effective allies of the



Self-incriminators at work

police', the press and public. This pronouncement is soon ironically undercut by subsequent phone calls from self-incriminators hampering the investigation and by journalists eager to whip up mass hysteria. Lohmann appears to carry on two conversations simultaneously: one with a citizen from Dresden (speaking, according to the script, in untranslatable, comical Saxon dialect), who insists that he is the serial killer; another with the editor-in-chief of a newspaper who wants to know what progress has been made. When Lohmann realizes that the would-be murderer from Dresden simply wants his name in the paper and a free trip to Berlin, he cuts him off. To the newspaper editor he complains, increasingly irritated, that his investigation is most occupied in dealing with self-incriminators. At this point the missing scene concludes; it is followed by a close-up of the headline: 'Murderer Writes to the Press'. In the absence of this sequence, the present version of *M* cuts abruptly from the mob scene mentioned above to the newspaper banner.

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>47. 15,000 Mark Reward! Another Child Murder. Elsie Beckmann, eight years old, having resided with her mother at Marienstraße 519/IV, was found dead with heavy wounds today around 2 p.m. in a bush at the Wohltitzer Chaussee, close to Kilometre Mark 7,3.</p> <p>48. I am the murderer! It was me! I did it! I am the murderer! I did it! I am the murderer! I did it!</p> <p>49. Damn it. Damn. Miss. Dönhoff 3600. [A Berlin phone number; A.K.]</p> <p>50. Press and public. Press and public ... Do you have it down, Miss?</p> <p>51. Yes.</p> <p>52. Are ... are the most effective allies of the police.</p> <p>53. Yes? Yes ... Just a moment ... self-incrimination of the child murderer.</p> <p>54. Oh no! Hello, yes ... how ... but, for Christ's sake, don't be so nervous. So ... well ... that's now already the third one who claims to have done it. One in Hamburg, one in Dresden and ... Who? ... Oh well, fine, do go there, maybe it's him after all. What now?</p> <p>55. The photographic plates the police want to have printed in the second evening edition.</p> <p>56. Okay, fine, off you go. What do you want?</p> <p>57. What headline?</p> <p>58. Okay ... well ... say this: He is in our midst.</p> | <p>59. He is in our midst. Thank you.</p> <p>60. Connection with telephone office Dresden, Police Department.</p> <p>61. Man, don't babble. I know exactly who you are. You suffer from megalomania. A while ago, you also wanted to be the one who broke into the bank on Kleist Street.</p> <p>62. But, Inspector, I should know best whether I did it. I don't mind coming personally to ...</p> <p>63. Yes, I believe it. To come to Berlin on state funds, right? You'd like that, right? ... Yes ... Unfortunately no, Mr Chief Editor ... it's one of the usual self-incriminations ... (off he goes) ... No ... No ... No ... Yes ... Yes ... Yes ... Yes ... Of course ... Yes ... Yes. These people make me puke ... but no ideal Please ... please ... yes. Good evening.</p> <p>64. Well, will I now get into the papers after all, Inspector?</p> <p>65. Yes, into the funny papers.</p> <p>66. The <i>Berliner Abendzeitung</i>, Inspector.</p> <p>67. Oh well. That will get us into trouble again.</p> <p>68. Headline in <i>Tempo</i>: 'Murderer Writes to the Press'.</p> <p>69. Letter as in title 28, roll 1. [<i>Because the Police did not pass on my first letter to the public, I am now turning directly to the press. Investigate and you will find everything confirmed. But I am not through yet.</i>]</p> |
|---|--|

Zensurkarte for M

Prüf-Nr. 28843	Zulassungskarten für Bildstreifen sind öffentl. Urkunden im Sinne des § 267 Reichsstrafgesetzbuchs. Ohne amtl. Stempel sind sie ungültig. Änderungen dürfen nur von der Filmprüfstelle vorgenommen werden.
Antragsteller:	Nero-Film Aktiengesellschaft, Berlin W 8
Hersteller:	Unter den Linden 21
Haupttitel:	„M.“
	Die Nero-Film A.-G. zeigt: M in einer Hand. Ein Fritz Lang Film.
	Zwischentitel. 1. Rolle. 1. Warte, warte nur ein Weilchen, Bald kommt der schwarze Mann zu Dir, Mit dem kleinen Hackebeilchen, Macht er Schabefleisch aus Dir. Du bist raus! Warte, warte nur ein Weilchen, Bald kommt der schwarze Mann zu Dir, Mit dem kleinen Hackebeilchen, Macht er Schabefleisch aus . . . 2. Ihr sollt det verfluchte Lied nicht singen, hab ich Euch gesagt. Könnt Ihr

The missing scene spans from number 47 and number 67.

Kindermörder? Kindermörder? 44. Das ist der
Kindermörder? 45. Weitergehen! Nicht stehen bleiben!
Weitergehen! 46. Bestie! Schlagt'n dot, die Bestie!
Holt'n runter! . . . Bringt'n um! (Unverständliches Durch-
einanderschreien.) 47. 15 000 Mark Belohnung! Wieder ein
Kindermord! Elsie Beckmann, acht Jahre alt, wohnhaft ge-
wesen Marienstr. 510/IV, bei der Mutter, wurde heute gegen
14 Uhr in einem Gebüsch an der Wohlitzer Chaussee, Nähe
Kilometerstein 7,3, mit schweren Verletzungen tot auf-
gefunden. 48. Ich bin der Mörder! Ich bin's gewesen! Ich
hab's getan! Ich bin der Mörder! Ich hab's getan! Ich bin
der Mörder! Ich hab's getan! 49. Herrgott noch mal! Himmel-
herrgott! Fräulein!!! Dönhoff 3600! 50. Presse und Publikum.
Presse und Publikum . . . haben Sie's, Fräulein? 51. Ja.
52. Sind . . . sind die wirksamsten Bundesgenossen der
Kriminalpolizei! 53. Ja? Ja . . . Augenblick . . . Selbst-

bezeichnung des Kindermörders. 54. Ach, Du lieber Gott! Hallo, ja . . . wie . . . aber Menschenskind, nun seien Sie doch nicht so aufgeregt! . . . So . . . Na . . . Das ist schon der Dritte, der's unbedingt gewesen sein will. Einer in Hamburg, einer in Dresden und . . . wie? . . . Na ja, schön, gehen Sie auf jeden Fall hin, vielleicht ist er's wirklich. Was denn? 55. Die Klischees, die die Polizei unbedingt in der zweiten Abendausgabe haben möchte. 56. Na schön, gut, ab dafür. Was wollen Sie? 57. Was für eine Überschrift? 58. Tja . . . also . . . Setzen Sie: Er ist mitten unter uns. 59. Er ist mitten unter uns. Danke schön. 60. Verbindung mit Fernamt Dresden, Polizeipräsidium. 61. Mensch, quatschen Sie doch nicht! Ich kenn Sie doch ganz genau! Sie haben ja 'n Größenwahn! Damals beim Bankseinbruch in der Kleiststraße, da wollten Sie's auch gewesen sein! 62. Awer, Herr Kommissar, ich muß doch schließlich selbst am besten wissen, ob'chs gewäsen bin. Ich will ja ooch gern bersehenlich . . . 63. Jawoll, das glaub ich! Auf Staatskosten nach Berlin fahren, was? Könn't Ihnen so passen! . . . Ja . . . Polizeipräsidium Dresden! Ja . . . bitte . . . nein, ach wo . . . leider nein, Herr Chefredakteur . . . eine der üblichen Selbstbezeichnungen! . . . (Raus mit ihm) . . . Nein . . . nein . . . nein . . . nein . . . Ja . . . ja . . . ja . . . ja . . . selbstverständlich

. . . ja . . . ja. Zum Kotzen diese Keris! . . . Aber keine Idee! Bitte . . . bitte . . . bitte . . . jawohl . . . Guten Abend! 64. Na, gomm ich denn nu wenichstens in de Zeitung? Herr Kommissar? 65. Ja, in die Witzblätter! 66. De Berliner Abendzeitung, Herr Kommissar! 67. Na, das wird ja wieder 'n schönen Krach geben! 68. Zeitungskopf Tempo: Mörder schreibt an Presse! 69. Brief wie Titel 28 1. Rolle.

3. Rolle. 1. Brief wie Titel 28 1. Rolle. 2. Es ist ein Skandal sondergleichen! Was glauben Sie, Herr Polizei-

[...]

BACK TO MABUSE



Der Kinematograph
DAS ÄLTESTE
FILM-FACH BLATT
VERLAG SCHERL * BERLIN S.W. 68

25. Jahrgang Berlin, den 12. Mai 1931 Nummer 109

Zurück zu Doktor Mabuse

Durchschlagender Erfolg des neuen Fritz Lang-Films

Wenn man boshaft sein sollte, müßte man jetzt mit emphase verkünden, daß unmeßbar die Filmästhetik an haben, wonach sie immer erziehen haben, nämlich den willfilm.

Das spannende, interessante, packende Drama. Ganz in dem Milieu dieser Tage. Voller Probleme, die alle Menschen bewegen.

Das Manuskript ist bereits ausgezeichnet. Man kann das leicht beweisen, wenn man den Inhalt mit zwei Sätzen wiedergibt, so den gesamten Inhalt der Filmbeschreibung bilden.

Eine Stadt sucht einen Mörder. Zeigt zwei ganz

von Haarmann bis Kurten in der letzten Gegenwart von uns schauernd mitleidig wurde, liegt an sich etwas instinktiv Abstoßendes.

Lang findet mit Thea von Harbou die Formen, auf denen die Darstellung nicht nur erträglich und menschlich sondern sogar packend, fesselt und mitreißend wirkt.

Vielleicht liegt das, wenn man genauer hinsieht, an der Aufrichtigkeit, an dem wozu sagen lehrhaften Einschlag.

An der eingehenden, schlichten, lehrhaften Vorlesung über Methodik der Kriminalistik, Bekämpfung des Verbrechenums, Organisation der Unterwelt und all die größeren und kleineren The-

Das spricht nun nicht für ebenfalls im Ufa-Palast am



Screenshot from *Dr. Mabuse, der Spieler*

“Back to Mabuse”: One of *M*’s first reviews in *Der Kinematograph* (May 12, 1931) suggests that Lang’s new film is a continuation of his two-part film *Doctor Mabuse, The Gambler* (1922), rather than his big-budget epics *Nibelungen* (1924) and *Metropolis* (1927). The first Mabuse film promised “ein Bild der Zeit” (a portrait of the times), as its subtitle declares, which in 1922 referred to postwar inflation, market manipulation, and political and social anarchy. (On *Dr. Mabuse, der Spieler*, see also the dossier in this edition.)

Like *Mabuse*, *M* provides “a portrait of its times”: the breakdown of social order in the waning years of Germany’s first democracy. [TK]

SETTING THE SCENE – BERLIN, 1931

Housing and Unemployment



In 1931, Berlin had a population of 4.3 million, making it the third largest city in Europe. Over two million of those residents were part of the urban working class and lived in overcrowded Mietskasernen, or tenement barracks, with dark courtyards and poor sanitation. The Great Depression caused widespread unemployment, with five million people out of work in Germany and nearly one million in Berlin alone. Tens of thousands of beggars and homeless people lived on Berlin's streets and in

railway stations. As depicted in *M*, beggars and criminals alike had their own professional organizations. Prostitution, which was legalized in 1927, increased dramatically. Economic hardship led to the rapid rise of the Nazi and Communist parties, both of which were determined to overthrow the democratic system.

Media and Crime

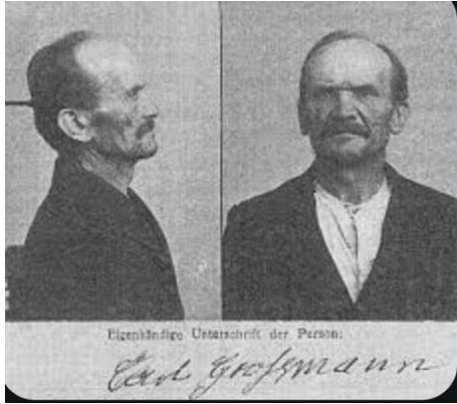


In the 1920s, Berlin was known as the Press Capital of Europe, home to more than 60 newspapers and mass tabloids, some of which had two or three daily editions, plus extras. Most of these tabloids were sold only on street corners and in kiosks. Without subscribers, they relied on lurid headlines about crime, sex, and scandals to attract readers. Ullstein's *Morgenpost* had a circulation of 600,000 and the illustrated weekly *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* had 1.5 million. There was massive sensationalist

coverage of sexual murders (Lustmord) by serial killers, from Grossmann to Kürten. Criminals craved the publicity that the tabloids offered, leading readers to send false confessions to the police just to get into the papers. The tabloids created an unprecedented climate of fear and paranoia. [TK]

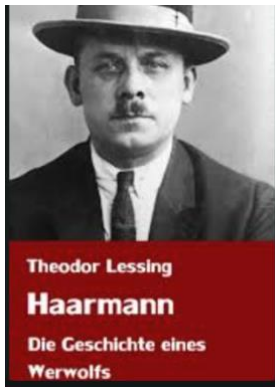
Weimar's Serial Killers and Fritz Lang's *M*

1918 —1921



Carl Grossmann (1863-1922) was known as the “Murderer from Kreuzberg.” He assaulted, killed, and dismembered dozens of destitute women and runaway girls during the chaotic postwar years. He was arrested in 1921 but hanged himself before his trial. Tabloids such as the *Berliner Illustrierte Zeitung* (BIZ) with a circulation of one million in 1920 (and 1.5 million in 1930) sensationalized the murders with shocking details and outrageous headlines that exposed the dark underbelly of modern Berlin.

1918—1925



Fritz Haarmann (1879-1925), also known as “the “Butcher of Hanover,” strangled and dismembered at least 24 young male drifters and transients. His trial in 1925 became an unparalleled media spectacle, exploited and spread by tabloids and illustrated papers. Haarmann inspired the children’s rhyme with which *M* begins: “Just you wait a little while—The nasty man in black will come—With his little chopper and will chop you up.” Haarmann was sentenced to death by beheading in 1925. Cultural critics such as Theodor Lessing viewed Haarmann as a symptom of the social breakdown of the Weimar era.

1924



Karl Denke (1860-1924), known as the “Cannibal of Münsterberg,” was a respected church sexton, who murdered at least 30 itinerants. His actions were shocking because he combined bourgeois orderliness with cannibalistic violence. He hanged himself on the day of his arrest. He left no confession or testimony.

1929—1930



Peter Kürten (1883–1931), also known as the "Vampire of Düsseldorf," committed a series of sexual assaults and sadistic murders in the late 1920s. He used knives and scissors and drank his victims' blood. Kürten was arrested on May 24, 1930, after confessing to his wife. In April 1931, he was convicted of nine counts of murder and sentenced to death by beheading. Prior to his trial, he was deemed legally sane, though he was diagnosed with a psychopathic, sexually sadistic personality disorder. Kürten was aware of his crimes and even wrote boastful letters to newspapers about them. He seemed to enjoy the outsized media attention from the sensationalist press, which spread fear and anxiety among the population about the unknown murderer among them.

In the summer 1930, after Kürten's arrest on May 24, 1930, Lang and his wife Thea von Harbou developed the screenplay for *M* by studying serial killers, criminal psychology, and police methods. Although Lang denied his film was about Kürten, the tabloids still called it Lang's "Kürtenfilm."

1931

Timeline for Kürten – *M*

- | | |
|--------------|---|
| Jan 8 – Feb. | Lang shoots <i>M</i> in Berlin; Kürten awaits trial in prison. |
| April 13 | Kürten's trial begins. |
| April 22 | Kürten is found guilty of 9 counts of murder and sentenced to death |
| April 27 | Lang submits his film to the Censorship Board. |
| May 11 | <i>M</i> premieres at the UFA-Palast am Zoo in Berlin. |
| May 12 | The German League of Human Rights organizes an evening to discuss the pros and cons of the death penalty in light of the arguments made in <i>M</i> , which premiered the previous day. |
| July 2 | Peter Kürten is executed by guillotine in Cologne. |

Merchandise in 2025



Peter Kürten Vampire Of Düsseldorf T-Shirt

★★★★★ No reviews

€23,95

🔥 2 sold in last 96 hours

Size: **Small** [Size guide](#)

Small Medium Large XLarge 2XLarge

3XLarge 4XLarge

– 1 + [Add to Cart](#)

I agree with [Terms & Conditions](#)

[Pay with PayPal](#)

[More payment options](#)

Sku: HO1488

Collections: Historical T-Shirts, Serial Killer T-Shirt Collection, Serial Killer



Screenshot of Lang in Godard, *Le Mépris* (1963)

Fritz Lang on *M*

An Interview with Gero Gandert, 1963

(In Fritz Lang, *M. Protokoll*. Hamburg: Marion von Schröder Verlag, 1963, pp. 123–128.)

Gero Gandert

How did you come up with the theme of *M*? Was it topical in 1931? Is it true that your child murderer, Beckert, was based on contemporary models such as Haarmann, Großmann, or Kürten?"

Fritz Lang

I am more than an attentive newspaper reader. I don't just read newspapers from one country. Above all, I try to read between the lines. I have been interested in a thousand things in my life. Out of all these interests, one has emerged as the main focus of my attention: man (der *Mensch*). I am interested in not only what he does and whether he is guilty or innocent [See Lang's footnote here at the end of the interview], but also what motivates him, *what makes him tick!* Attempting to understand this broadens one's personal knowledge and compassion. It broadens one's perspective and expands one's connections to all that one has experienced in life.

Who can honestly say how they came to a topic? What influences them? It could be a leaf falling from a tree in autumn, a sudden lull in the wind, or a sudden thunderstorm. . .

Once I become "obsessed" with a topic, I conduct extensive research. I want to know every detail, no matter how small. Since there were many mass murderers in Germany at the time, I decided to research Haarmann, Großmann, Kürten, and Denke. Naturally, I asked myself: What motivated these people to do what they did? They were not contemporary "models," as you put it. None of them were child murderers. However, horrific crimes against children were being committed in Breslau at that time, and the perpetrator or perpetrators were never caught.

In the case of *M*, I was not only interested in investigating what drives someone to commit a crime as horrific as child murder but also in the pros and cons of the death penalty. However, the film's message is *not* to condemn the murderer but to warn mothers: "You just have to keep a closer eye on your little ones." This human touch was particularly important to my wife, writer Thea von Harbou, at the time. She co-wrote the scripts for almost all of my German films before 1933, so she naturally played a key role in developing this material. She was my most important collaborator and assistant for many years.

Gero Gandert

Was there a real-life model for Inspector Lohmann? Did you collaborate with the criminal investigation department? Did you have any consultants? Were psychoanalysts or doctors consulted?

Fritz Lang

As for his human characteristics, joviality, and sense of humor, I can only answer "no" to your question about whether there was a real-life model for Lohmann. However, I spoke with members of the Criminal Investigation Department about police investigation methods and learned from it. I also had long conversations with psychiatrists and psychoanalysts about the mentality of serial killers.

Gero Gandert

Critics have claimed that your films contain romantic elements, and in this context, particular reference has been made to *M* and its scenes at the Beggars' Exchange. Would you agree with such an interpretation?

Fritz Lang

I find this comment, like some of the criticism in general, rather superficial. I don't believe that *M*, *Fury*, or other films I made, such as *The Woman in the Window* (1944), *Scarlet Street* (1945), *While the City Sleeps* (1956), and *The Big Heat* (1953), have romantic elements. They may be picturesque, but they are not romantic."

However, when dealing with a romantic theme, as in *Der müde Tod* (Germany, 1921) or *Moonfleet* (USA, 1955), which is set in the seventeenth century, it is important to capture the essence of romanticism through staging. This does not mean distorting the characters' feelings to make them seem "romantic" in the (negative) sense.

If the scenes in the beggars' exchange in *M* are considered romantic, it should be noted that such an exchange existed in Berlin. There was even a crime magazine that published articles and photos of the beggars' exchange during that period. Unfortunately, I don't remember the name of the magazine.

Gero Gandert

Critics repeatedly point to the influence of Bertolt Brecht's *Threepenny Opera* on *M*. Do you think there are such influences?

Fritz Lang

Did Bert Brecht influence me? Certainly. Who wouldn't be influenced by him? Do you want to address the times honestly? Can you simply ignore a genius like Brecht? That doesn't mean you have to adopt his views as your own, though. You only develop under the influence of ideas that come to you from the outside.

Gero Gandert

The use of sound as a dramatic device in *M* has often been praised. One might even get the impression that this field was more advanced in the early days of sound film than it is today.

Fritz Lang

M was my first sound film. At that time, it was difficult to find more than a handful of sound films in Germany. Naturally, I tried to adapt to the new medium of sound. For example, I found that when I sit alone in a café, I hear the noise of the street. But the moment I became engrossed in an interesting conversation or an engaging newspaper article, my brain—or my ears, if you will—no longer registered the noise. Therefore, it makes sense to depict such a conversation on film without adding street noise to the dialogue.

At that time, I also realized that sound can be used as a dramatic element. In fact, it absolutely should be. In *M*, for example, the silence of the streets—I deliberately omitted the optional street noise—is suddenly shattered by the shrill whistles of the police or the discordant and repetitive whistling of the child murderer. Through this, the child murderer gives wordless expression to his instinctual feelings.

I believe I first used a technique in *M* that allows a sentence from the end of one scene to overlap with the beginning of the next. This technique accelerates the film's tempo and reinforces the connection between successive scenes. I also incorporated dialogue between two contrapuntal scenes for the first time. The gang members discussed how to find the child murderer, while at the same time the detectives gathered at police headquarters for the same purpose. The dialogue was structured so that the entire conversation formed a cohesive unit. For instance, when a criminal begins a sentence, a detective finishes it. They finish each other's sentences, and vice versa.

Conversely, when the blind street vendor hears the wrong melody coming from a barrel organ, he covers his ears. Suddenly, the sound stops. Although the audience should be able to hear it, the vendor's reaction is understandable. However, that doesn't mean such an attempt establishes a rule. I don't believe film is bound by any rules. It's always new. What's appropriate in one sequence of scenes can be completely inappropriate in the next.

Gero Gandert:

According to Siegfried Kracauer's *From Caligari to Hitler*, *M* was originally supposed to be released under the title "Murderers Among Us." According to Georges Sadoul's *History of the Art of Film*, a Nazi Party emissary threatened to boycott the film because of the "insulting" title. You then gave in. Is this information correct?

Fritz Lang:

For once, Kracauer is right, except for his claim that *M* is a film about the Düsseldorf child murderer. First, Kürten was not an outspoken child murderer. Second, the script for *M* was finished before he was arrested.

What Georges Sadoul wrote is completely fabricated. I changed the original title, "Murderer Among Us," to *M* during filming. I was influenced by the scene in which one of the pursuers draws an *M* on his palm with chalk to mark the child murderer for future pursuers. I thought the title *M* was more interesting and effective.

Gero Gandert

Certain motifs and moods seem to recur in your films. There is an inexorable fate at work: the guilty and the innocent are persecuted, and the protagonists are at the mercy of base drives and instincts. Death is stronger than they are. Can you explain this?"

Fritz Lang:

The struggle of the individual against fate is probably at the heart of all my films: the struggle of good people against a superior force, be it generally accepted injustice, a corrupt organization, society, or authority. Or the force of their own conscious or unconscious drives.

When you say that my films show that 'death is stronger' than anything else, I don't think you're right. As far as death is concerned, I believe it's sometimes preferable to an unworthy life. One must fight for what one recognizes as 'right,' even against superior forces and the threat of death. Struggle and rebellion are important.

FOOTNOTE BY LANG ON GUILT AND INNOCENCE

On the one hand, there is innocence with all the appearance of guilt, as in *Fury* (USA, 1936) and *You Only Live Once* (USA, 1937). On the other hand, there is guilt with all the appearance of innocence. Who doesn't realize that they are all one and the same? Beyond appearances, what are guilt and innocence? Can one be innocent or guilty? If there is an absolute answer, it can only be negative. Each individual must find their own truth, no matter how dubious it may be. What does it matter if he finds himself guilty or innocent? These thoughts were first expressed by Jacques Rivette. I believe a good director must be a kind of psychoanalyst. Rivette subjected me and my films to a thorough psychoanalysis.

ONLINE INTERVIEWS WITH FRITZ LANG



Lang with [Jean-Luc Godard](#) "Le dinosaur et le bébé." 1967 (60 min)



Lang with [Ernst Leiser](#), 1968 (27 min.)

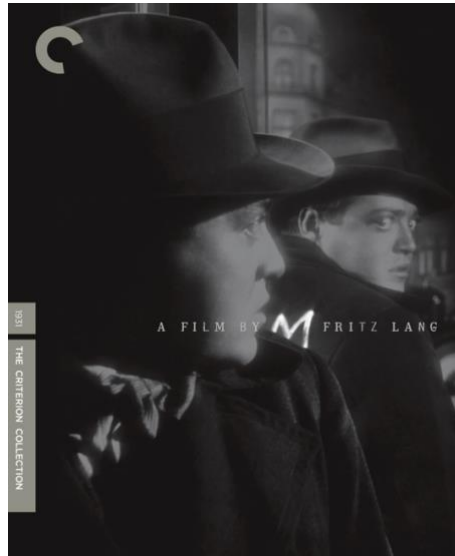


Lang with [William Friedkin](#), 1975 (subtitled in Italian & English), 91 min, recorded a year before Lang's death.



In this short [documentary](#) from 2004, Harald Nebenzal, the son of Seymour Nebenzahl, remembers his father, who produced Lang's *M* and *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*

HOME VIEWING



DVD/BLU-RAY

We recommend the Criterion Classic Edition of *M*, which was released in 2010. This edition includes the long-lost English-language version of the film in which Peter Lorre speaks English. It also includes classroom audiotapes of editor Paul Falkenberg discussing the film.

Another excellent option is the 2011 restoration by Torsten Kaiser from Universum Film, released in honor of the film's eightieth anniversary. This edition includes six hours of bonus material. It is in PAL format with region code 0, meaning it can be played anywhere without restrictions.

STREAMING

We recommend the Criterion Channel and Kanopy for streaming.