

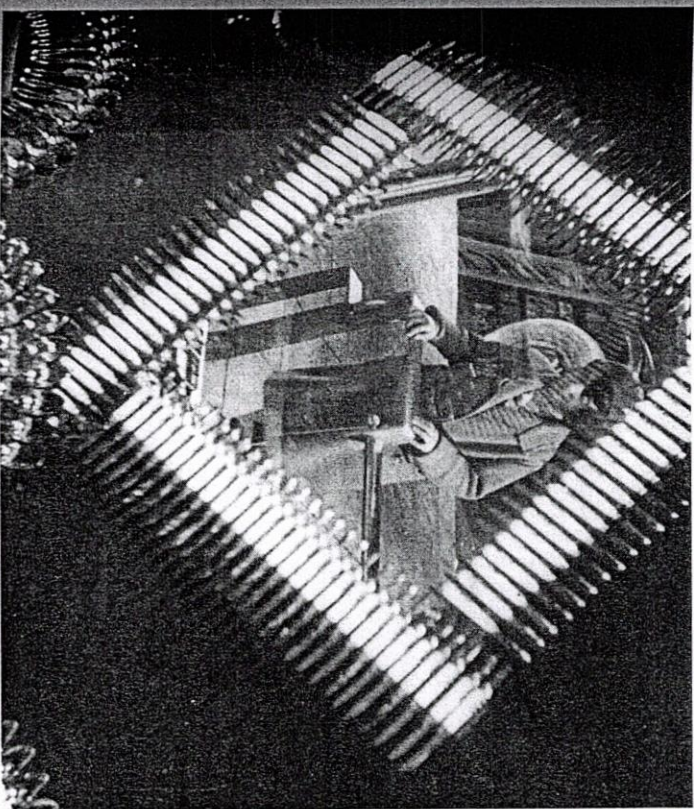
M: The City Haunted by Demonic Desire

'Oh Mother I Am Lost!' The Murder of Elsie Beckmann

Out of the deceitful emptiness of a mirror
A face rises slowly and indistinctly
From the horror and darkness: Cain!
The velvet curtain rustles quietly.
The moon shines into emptiness through the window.
I am alone with my murderer.

Georg Trakl, 'Horror'?

If *Metropolis* is the albatross around Lang's neck, *M* remains his most universally admired film. The complexity and originality of its structure, the studied ambiguity and ambivalence of its themes, the power of its images and sound guarantee it a place in film history and film criticism no matter how much canons are abjured or the idea of masterpieces viewed with suspicion. Such status and achievement frequently



Tom Gunning,
The Films of Fritz Lang:
Allegerie of Vision +
Modernity
London: BFI, 2000

freezes critical acumen, although in the case of this film at least three brilliant studies those of Noel Burch, Roger Daddon and Anton Kaes, have ventured insights which have deeply influenced my own remarks, and a host of other fine essays and studies have been produced.³ No critic can hope to propose a definitive or even a thorough reading of this film. But I will approach it in terms of Lang's total *œuvre*, and as a pivotal film, one that turns like a hinge between Lang's silent cinema and sound cinema and also (I would maintain even more than the film that follows it chronologically, *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*) between his German and his American career. *M* ties up a number of themes from the first part of Lang's career (although in some respects – such as the homage to the Expressionist tradition discussed in the last chapter – *Testament* provides the true farewell to Germany and silent cinema), but most importantly it announces new themes and preoccupations.

The structure of *M* is unique, the high point of Harbou's work as a scriptwriter. Rather than being built around a central conflict between individuated characters and/or a heterosexual romance (the classical patterns of narrative cinema and evident in every previous Lang film), *M* takes its form from both process and setting: an interaction expressed in one of the secondary titles sometimes given the film, *A City Searches for a Murderer*. The systematic nature of the search, a rational, goal-oriented process, interacts with the gridded space of the modern city with its networks of communication and intersections already explored in Lang's master criminal films. But like the highly symbolic spaces of his allegorical films, particularly the court of Worms in *The Death of Siegfried* and the urban and industrial spaces of *Metropolis*, the city in *M* seems to possess a will of its own; as this secondary title suggests, it could be seen as the protagonist of the film.

The film's lack of an immediately identifiable protagonist who organises the point of view of the film marks its greatest difference from previous Lang films (even *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* with its mystery surrounding the figure of Dr. Mabuse and his role in the film, ultimately centres on a conflict between Lohmann and Baum). As Noel Burch was one of the first to point out, Hans Beckert could hardly be said to dominate the film's action since he is rarely even seen in the first half of the film.⁴ Although a stronger claim might be made for Lohmann's role in the action as the detective who guides us through the investigation, he 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). Lohmann's *doppelgänger* in the underworld, crime boss Schranker, enters the film even later than Lohmann, and although he does organise the detective action of the film, the capture of Beckert, he could hardly be said to dominate the film or its point of view. Instead the film co-ordinates several points of view, presenting a number of semi-autonomous episodes, all centred around the search for a murderer of children.

The film does pivot around Hans Beckert, but around his absence rather than his presence, around the search for this mysterious and initially elusive figure. This may seem to be merely a ground rule of the mystery genre – the search for and naming of the culprit – but *M* does not truly introduce any doubt about the identity of the murderer. Beckert appears early in the film, although in a manner that stresses the impossibility of grasping him – as a shadow, as a reflection in a mirror. Throughout the film, as Burch has indicated, Beckert plays hide and seek with us, appearing usually indirectly or obliquely, then withdrawing into the darkness, the realm of the unseen.⁵ The film may well pivot around Beckert, but he is the film's blind spot; its aporia, rather than its point of coherence.

Absence imprints this film from the start and determines the way it uses sound and constructs space. Although *M*'s innovative use of sound forms one of the clichés of film history, this universal acknowledgement cannot render its power banal. Key to everyone's analysis of *M*'s sound design is the way a sound can open up an off-screen space, imprinting a space we see on screen with the voice or sound coming from unseen space. As Lang moved away from the broad tableaux of the silent films of the 1920s to the more fragmented space found in *Spies*, the uncertainty caused by the way a frame bounded our visual field became a Langian device. Haghi's exit from his office in that film's climax, revealing his previously undisclosed mobility and casting his shadow on the wall after he passes through the frame, shows Lang's ability to play with the frame as a masking device, concealing and revealing spaces, drawing attention to what lies off screen through shadows and off-screen looks. But the soundtrack transforms Lang's frame even more radically. At any moment the frame can haemorrhage toward an unseen area simply by including a sound whose source is not seen. *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*, as Michel Chion reveals, makes this possibility into an element of the plot – the uncertainty of the source of Dr. Baum's voice.⁶ But in place of *Testament*'s exploration of new technologies of voice, *M* explores its spatial dimension, opening seen space into a constant interchange with unseen space.

The first sequence of *M* (called 'The Murder of Elsie Beckmann' by Burch in his useful division of the film into nine parts)⁷ stands not only as one of Lang's and Harbou's most sustained achievements in stylistic and narrative mastery, it also serves as a sort of tutor text, introducing the major themes and devices of the film as a whole. Although subject to strong analyses already by Kuntzel, Ropars-Wuilleuriemier and Marie (as well as Burch), it still provides the essential entry point for any reading of the film.⁸ As Marie has said, 'it is impossible not to analyse the first sequence, due to its fundamental importance for the later unfolding of the narrative as well as the system of signification it develops'.⁹ This is especially true of the use of sound. In the recently restored version of *M*, the credits unroll in silence (other than an apparent gong sounding under the title: *Ein Fritz Lang Film*) until we are plunged into darkness with a black screen.¹⁰ The film will emerge from this darkness with its first sounds preceding the image, a child's voice chanting a nursery rhyme:

Just you wait a little while.

Paradoxically this voice from the darkness has something of the effect of the look at the camera. Located in no represented space, it emerges from the screen in a mode of direct address, speaking in the second person, and tells us to wait for a moment. The image that soon appears anchors the voice within a space and an action, a small child viewed from above in the courtyard of a Berlin *Mietkasernen*, the tenement blocks with a central courtyard familiar from the drawings of Heinrich Zille. The diminutive child, surrounded by other children, plays a circular pointing game, completing the morbid rhyme:

The man in black will come after you
And with his little chopper
He will make mince meat of you.

She adds, as she points to a child within the circle that surrounds her, 'You're out.' The camera then drifts off to the left, tilting upwards as it moves. As the children's

game edges off screen, the child's voice continues, diminishing somewhat in volume, dividing our visual and aural orientation, visually directed left, towards the direction the camera is moving (for what reason?); aurally, right, back towards the children we still hear. Looking upwards we see through a railing the next level of the tenement as a woman moves through the frame. Her attention is drawn by the children's song and she moves to the railing's edge and calls down in irritation, telling them to stop singing 'that awful song!' adding, 'Can't you hear me?' The child's off screen voice falls silent, as the woman heads into the building, muttering. The camera lingers after she leaves and after an instant we hear the girl's voice begin again: 'Just you wait a little while ...' as the film's first shot ends.

The very first shot not only sets up the play between on screen and off screen sound, it also establishes the roving and exterior point of view of this film. In one shot we view both the children and the woman, but both of them from pronounced angles: the children from above, the woman from below. The camera does not align itself with any character. Further, it has a will of its own, directing us away from the action and making us imagine events off screen through sound cues. Lang does not cut or move back to the children when they resume their game. Instead the camera remains fixed on a frame empty of people. The high angle recalls other Lang compositions (the 'topographical' views, first introduced in *The Diamond Ship*, which abstract space and action by viewing them from above) and operates here as it does in other films to create a strong sense of the camera as an observing presence outside the consciousness of any character. But never has a single shot so elegantly demonstrated the power of the camera frame as the border between the seen and the unseen.

The second shot (especially in the version which restores its opening) continues this play with off screen space and begins to comment explicitly on the role of sound. The woman who reproached the kids in the previous shot enters from the bottom of the frame in a shot of the tenement stairwell, but before her head bobs into the frame we hear her laboured progress up the stairs, her heavy breathing and the banging of the over-laden laundry basket on each step. This brief beginning of the shot (cut in most available versions of the film) situates us firmly in the social and material realism of this film, a portrayal of environment dedicated to the detailed reproduction of the locales of daily life in all their physical and sensual specificity. The space of the stairway – one of the many in-between, liminal spaces of communication through which people move in this film – awaits the woman's entrance: we see it before we see her, although we hear her approaching. The city is made up of these passageways that connect a series of autonomous little worlds. As in the overhead shot of the jewel heist in *The Diamond Ship*, Lang's viewpoint on the city stresses the determinate geometry of these separate yet connected spaces, as a structure which imposes itself on the lives and movements of the inhabitants.

Lang's 'realism' in this film depends on the geometrical structures in which the rhythms of daily life are caught. The way the woman, both hands burdened with the laundry basket, manoeuvres her elbow to ring the doorbell to Frau Beckmann's apartment, provides a degree of observation of social behaviour few previous Lang films could match. (Similarly, to those able to hear and recognise it, the Berlin accent of this woman provides an aural sign of social specificity.) The sound of the bell once her elbow has angled itself properly, her reluctance to put the basket down even for a moment (presumably because it will be so hard to pick up again – sharp-eyed commentators like Kuntzel have pointed out that the woman is pregnant),¹¹ the automatic way Frau Beckmann takes the basket from her as she opens the door,

all of these details of sound and gesture root us in a world recognisable in its solid materiality, yet deeply observed as well, never casual. Like much of the *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) movement to which Lang's last German films show an affinity, the effect differs from nineteenth-century realism through its emphasis on non-human patterns, the thing-like nature of reality, its blend of abstraction with the detailed rendering of objects. Lang's use of sound exemplifies this approach. This voice of things renders them much more palpable, but at the same time these sounds are rarely just an attempt to convey the various surrounding sounds of the world. Each sound seems magnified, attracting attention to itself and its source. Thus the woman's heavy tread up the stairs before we see her, the startling sound of the doorbell (the first of many alarming sound signals we hear in this film) carry an almost ominous overtone.

As Lang makes a 180 degree cut in this doorway, transferring us from a focalisation on the pregnant woman to the world of Frau Beckmann (as the first shot transferred us from the children to the woman carrying laundry, setting up a pattern of transfers between characters that will be pursued until the end of the film), Beckmann responds to the woman's complaint about the children's song, saying, 'As long as they're singing at least we know they're OK.' As Robert Bresson has stated, the soundtrack invented silence.¹² Lang understood that sound evokes not only the unseen, the off screen, but also outlines it own negative, the unheard, that which has been silenced. Throughout this sequence, Frau Beckmann will interact with a growing silence, to the silence which equals death.

Frau Beckmann puts down the laundry as automatically as she received it, and resumes her rhythmic labor at the scrubbing board, until its repetitive sound is interrupted by another sound signal, the cuckoo of her cuckoo clock. Burch has described the primary formal structure of *M* as an interaction between continuity and discontinuity – that is, between sequences which are based primarily on spatial discontinuity (usually some form of parallel editing) and scenes which unroll within a relatively unified and continuous scenic space.¹³ Whereas the classical Hollywood film of the sound era tends to privilege continuity, made up mainly of a succession of scenes acted out within a basically continuous space and time, *M* privileges discontinuity, creating a series of sequences which intercut actions in different locations. It is not until the police raid on the underworld hang-out that *M* presents a scene that is not intercut with another location. Intercutting continues after that scene (as in the famous alternation between the police and the crooks as each side tries to come up with a method for finding the child murderer), but Burch sees a progression toward a greater reliance on continuous scenes, culminating in the lengthy 'trial scene' at the end of the film where Becker confronts the mob in one long-lasting continuous scene. The pattern of intercutting to other spaces in *M* begins with this first sequence, as we cut between Elsie's mother and Elsie's (interrupted) journey home from school.

But the moment and means by which Lang first introduces a parallel cut to another space demand scrutiny. In the first four shots of the film Lang has taken us on a tour of the living space of the *Mietkasernen*, moving step by step from exterior to interior, from courtyard, to landing, to stairway, through a doorway and into the Beckmann apartment. Now he embeds this domestic space within the city as a whole, using first sound, then editing, and relying on the most persistent of Langian objects – a clock. Lang cuts from a closer shot of Frau Beckmann bent over her scrubbing board to a shot from her point of view of the ornate cuckoo clock on her wall as she hears it mark the hour of noon. But over the shot of Frau Beckmann's

touchingly kitschy clock (another one of the striking details that capture the milieu of this tenement family), we also hear, a few seconds later, the booming bell of a larger clock, coming from a church or municipal building somewhere within the city space off screen, outside this apartment. Following the sound, Lang cuts from Frau Beckmann smiling and flicking the soap from her hands to a long shot of the city street in front of the school (the sound of the hour being struck now much louder in this public space and mingling with the beeping car horns of passing traffic) as parents stand waiting for their children to emerge.

I have claimed the city could be seen as the protagonist of this film; while this may put undue strain on the term 'protagonist', there is no question that, at least in these early sequences, Lang does not simply use spatial discontinuity as a formal device, but as the strongest means to create a sense of the space of a city, made up of locations separated from each other, but also interconnected. This atomisation of the city is portrayed by the merging of two Langian techniques: the topographic view and parallel editing. Although the topographical view primarily appears as the overhead god-like perspective that Lang adopts in the film's first shot, it also becomes a less literal means of portraying the city space as a diagrammatic, patterned environment, easily figureable in maps and diagrams, highly rationalised and rendered as both clearly visible and ordered. Parallel editing, although sometimes used for suspense (as in the intercutting between Beckett and the mob in the ransacking of the office building), or as an ideological comparison (as in the cutting between the meetings of criminals and police), provides a primary way of creating this urban topology.

As in the technologically interdependent robberies and raids of the master criminal films, Lang creates a modern environment in which every space interacts with and affects every other one. As in Mabuse's first robbery, Lang uses the clock and modern standard time as a way to interrelate this atomised but interconnected space. Thus, as Frau Beckmann hears the chime of the noon clock, announcing the imminent return of her daughter for lunch, we cut to other parents gathered at the school for the same reason at the same moment. As Georg Simmel pointed out, clock time holds together and regulates the life of the metropolis.¹⁴ But although Frau Beckmann shares time and a concern for her daughter with the other people in the city, there is no true communication between them. The shot of parents in front of the school shows people arranged in independent clumps, not talking to each other, not interacting. The brilliance of Lang's urban topography is that it shows people united in patterns, yet alienated and separate from each other. What they share most deeply as city dwellers is their loneliness and their fear.

The chiming of the city clock continues over the next shot of Frau Beckmann tasting the soup she has prepared for her daughter. From this point until the last five shots of the sequence Lang sets up a very clear pattern of shot by shot alternation, but it does not always involve cutting to another location. Lang cuts constantly from Frau Beckmann to a shot associated with Elsie. In some cases he cuts directly to Elsie – as in the shot which follows immediately: Elsie stepping off the sidewalk near her school, nearly being hit by a car that enters from off screen and then being led across the street by a policeman; or the next pair of shots which cut from Frau Beckmann setting the table to Elsie bouncing her ball and her encounter with Beckett as a looming shadow over the *Lifffassliden*, the circular advertising pillar which bears an announcement of his last murders. But sometimes, as in the following four shots, Lang stays within the space of the apartment, intercutting Frau Beckmann (the anchor of the sequence) with shots that do not show Elsie directly, but rather

picture her absence. Thus we cut from Frau Beckmann cutting up vegetables for Elsie's soup to her point of view of the clock, now showing 12:20. While the earlier shot of the clock announced Elsie's arrival, this one indicates her delay, her *not* showing up at the appointed time. Sounds coming from the landing (off screen) cause Frau Beckmann to leave the apartment in the next shot and go out there. The following shot of two girls running up the stairs once again shows Elsie's absence: she is not with the girls, as they turn and explain in response to Frau Beckmann's off screen question.

The next pair of shots restores the cutting between distant locations as the cut from Frau Beckmann standing on the landing, first looking up towards the girls, then down into the stairwell, then returning inside. She is filmed from a low angle. The following shot shows Elsie and Beckett purchasing a balloon from the blind toy-seller. It is shot from a high angle, as if matching Frau Beckmann's point of view as she looks down into the stairwell, but the match is not only misleading, it is almost cruel. This scene is precisely what Frau Beckmann *cannot* see (think of her final line which ends the film: 'we should keep better watch on our children'). The high angle surveys the scene, but offers only an obscure view of Beckett from the back. The shot ends as he begins whistling his theme, 'In the Hall of the Mountain King' from the *Peter Gynt* suite; Elsie curtsies and thanks him as he leads her off.

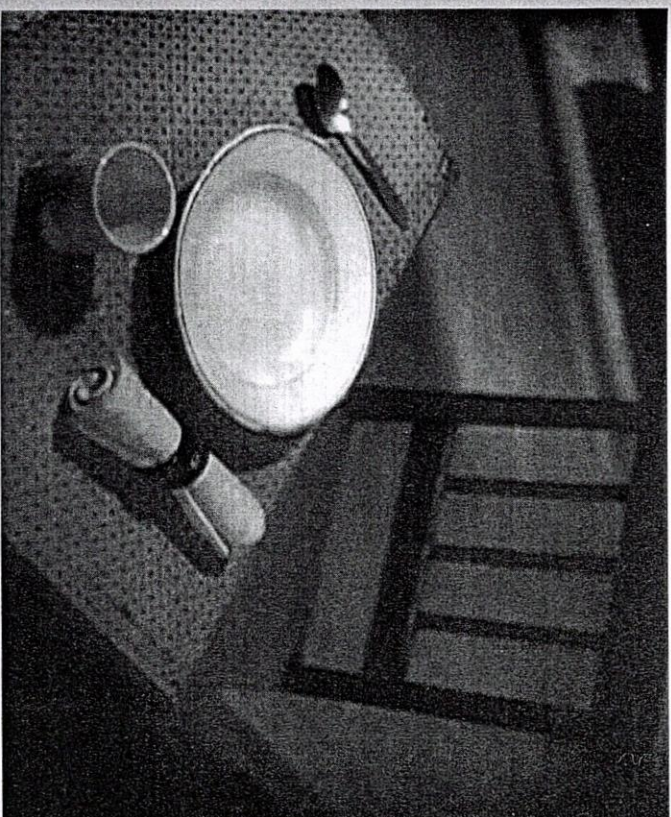
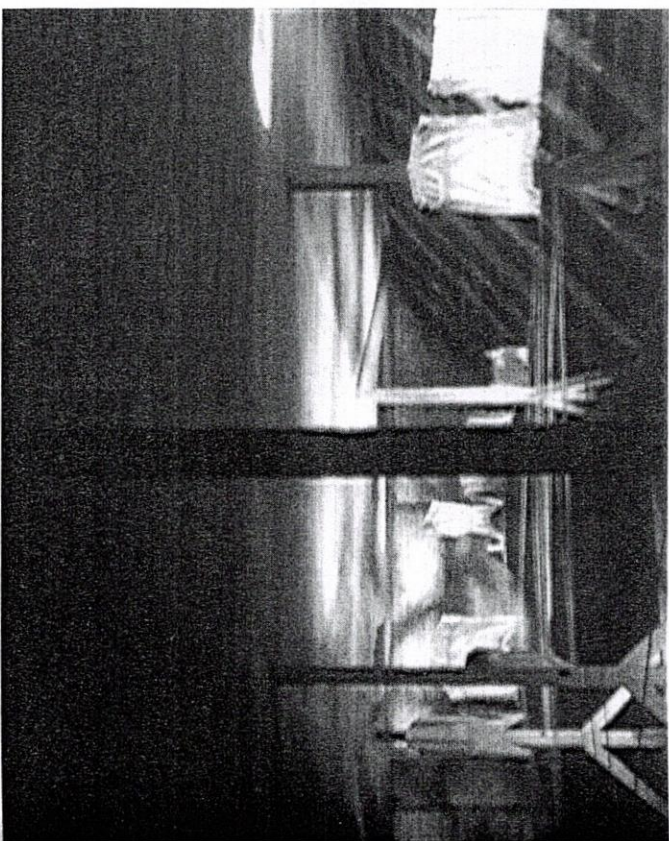
The harsh door bell sounding from off screen opens the shot which returns to Frau Beckmann as she puts the soup tureen on the stove to keep it warm. She crosses to the door, clearly hoping this will be Elsie, only to find a man delivering a new 'thrilling and sensational' instalment of a *feuilleton*. This man has not seen Elsie either and as he continues on his rounds Frau Beckmann walks again onto the landing, ending the shot by looking down into the stairwell. The next shot supplies the point of view shot withheld in the previous pair of shots: a nearly overhead shot of the stairwell, the stages of stairs creating a series of nested quadrilaterals, almost spiral-like in their vertiginous emptiness. This empty shot – empty, that is, of the very thing Frau Beckmann searches for there, Elsie – continues the alternation between mother and images either of her child, her expected arrival, or her prolonged absence. In its stark, almost Expressionistic (yet totally rooted within a realist environment) geometry and abstraction, this shot presents the harshest image yet of Elsie's absence. The mother calls her child's name over this shot for the first time.

The next pair of shots shows Frau Beckmann's return from the landing, shutting the door to her apartment and looking off screen left. The complementary shot provides her point of view of the cuckoo clock (the third shot of the clock in the sequence), which now reads 1:15. The clock no longer marks an anticipated return and break in the routine of housework, or the first stirrings of anxiety. Frau Beckmann reads on its face not just the time but Elsie's prolonged absence and her own growing fear. With a mechanical indifference that seems almost like mockery, the clock strikes the quarter hour.

The cut back to Frau Beckmann shows her twisting her hands on her apron in anxiety. As if drawn by the sound of a peddler calling his wares outside, she walks over towards the kitchen window, the camera panning with her; she opens it and leans out, calling again 'Elsie, Elsie!' The five shots which follow bring this sequence to its end and break the consistent alternation between shots of Frau Beckmann and images associated with Elsie. Frau Beckmann calls Elsie's name five times, twice in this shot of her at the window, her voice becoming progressively more shrill and desperate, never receiving an answer. The cries cluster over the first two shots, while the last three unroll in silence, the silence which is most certainly death.¹⁵

The first shot seems almost like a stutter in the film's editing. Instead of Frau Beckmann's point of view outside the building, we see the stairwell again, an exact repetition of the earlier shot, but its repetition makes its dizzying geometry even more insistent and inhuman, bereft of the desired child or any other presence. In the following shot Frau Beckmann's voice penetrates into the attic where laundry is drying (as Kuntzel points out laundry is one of the threads weaving through the sequence).¹⁶ This is a deep, cavernous space (it anticipates the cellar that ends the film as well as the office building attic in which Becker will hide from the mob: liminal, hollow places where people do not ordinarily gather). Deep in the back-grounds we see a child's playsuit hanging. In its poignancy and its growing bitterness the shot recalls a line from an early Brecht poem: '...in the attic/Where they hang the washing up to dry and let it piss'.¹⁷ Although this space is presumably at some distance from the Beckmann apartment, the mother's voice is heard in growing terror. The next shot returns to the Beckmann apartment, but not to Frau Beckmann, who seems herself to disappear from this film, as if expiring in the last gasp of her call. Instead, we see Elsie's place at table, her spoon, soup bowl and rolled-up napkin forming a perfect still life, like the many geometrically precise arrangements of objects that Lang delights in introducing in this film. But this is not simply an aesthetic arrangement. Prepared with motherly care in anticipation of her child's return, it now speaks only of her absence. Like the empty place left at the table at the inn by the disappearing lover in *Der müde Tod*, the image bodes the presence of death in this emptiness. An uninvited and invisible guest has taken its place at Elsie's table. As Kuntzel says, the emptiness previously glimpsed outside the apartment has now entered into the centre of the Beckmann home.¹⁸

The final two shots of the sequence move not only outside, but presumably far away. The sequence has moved from a city courtyard filled with children to a



suburban area covered with scrub brush. From off screen, out from some shrubbery, rolls the ball Elsie bounced on her way from school. This shot, looking down at the ground, is paired with a second shot looking up at the sky framed by a utility pole, as the balloon Becker bought for Elsie (possessing a grotesque humanoid shape, a round head with goggle eyes, a bulbous body and dangling arms and legs) is caught in the power lines. The breeze shifts and the balloon is freed, ascending out of the frame as the shot fades to black. These images present Elsie's murder, an event which, as Lang frequently said, could only be imagined, not pictured.¹⁹ They depict what has happened just off screen, close by, previous to these shots, but very recently. They are, as Lang says, very concrete and material signs of her death,²⁰ but also of the emptiness that surrounds it, the lack of human agents or victims rendering it not more palatable, but more deadly and chilling. The inanimate motion in these shots, the ball rolling to a halt, the balloon carried by the wind, emphasises their distance from the human. Lang's tendency, especially since *Spies*, to replace people with objects evinces a new degree of pain in this scene.

Frau Beckmann holds this sequence together, provides its centre. But the sequence extends beyond her, stretching towards her daughter as she awaits her arrival. The mother's consciousness stretches through the city, searching out her daughter, but the city evades her knowledge. The clock-time which regulates the city's space gradually becomes a figure of terror, the Destiny-machine which in this film cannot be claimed by anyone completely, least of all the three characters in this first sequence. The city is first imaged as a space of shared sound, the chiming of the clock which aligns people in carrying out their daily tasks. But ultimately the city becomes a space that sound cannot penetrate. Elsie cannot hear her mother's voice calling her from the window, just as her mother cannot see her from her vantage point. The indeterminate place where Elsie is killed (Marie calls it '*terrain vague*')²¹

becomes precisely distance itself, the wasteland, the space of separation that Martin Buber refers to: 'We say "far away"'. The Zulu has for that a word which means in our sentence form: 'There where someone cries out: "Oh Mother, I am lost."'²²

But if Frau Beckmann represents the anchor of this sequence (one unfortunately from which Elsie becomes unmoored), the narrative motor, the disturbing element which upsets the equilibrium of daily routine and moves us into the story, from the typical to the unique and sensational, is Hans Beckett, as yet unnamed, except as the *schwarze Mann* (black man, 'man in black') invoked by the children's rhyme. As the anchor to the sequence, Frau Beckmann is visible in nearly half (twelve) of the shots of this twenty-six-shot sequence. In her motherly concern for her child's nourishment and safety, her weary but strong physicality, she is palpably present in the sequence. The *schwarze Mann*, in contrast, is seen directly in only one shot of the sequence (the high angle long shot where he buys Elsie a balloon, which doesn't show his face clearly), but he haunts the whole sequence, permeates it with his absence, his invisible but looming threat.

The introduction of Beckett is justly famous for its dramatic use of off screen space and sound: his shadow looms into the frame, threateningly cast on the police poster describing his crimes and offering a reward for his apprehension, while his surprisingly unthreatening voice compliments Elsie (also off screen) on her lovely ball and asks her name. Besides the cultural association of shadows with evil (and the literalisation of 'schwarze Mann' in this dark silhouette), Lang images Beckett as somehow abstract and insubstantial, in contrast to Frau Beckmann's maternal presence. He does not appear directly in the frame, but only as a shadow and a disembodied voice. Further, this shadow rests upon another indirect representation of Beckett, the poster which describes his deeds. Beckett is a compound of signs of identity and this describes one problem propelling the film story: focusing a range of identifying marks onto Beckett's elusive body, a task achieved only when Heinrich will reverse the situation of this shot (Beckett's dark shadow obscuring the words which accuse him) by imprinting a letter, M, on his dark body.

If Beckett is visible in only one shot, many shots in the sequence evoke him, although not as powerfully as this shadow. Clearly the final shots of the sequence invoke his actions as much as they do Elsie's death (Kuntzel sees the ball rolling to a stop and the fluttering balloon not so much as replacement images of Elsie's death-throes as of Beckett's spasm of pleasure).²³ One of the scandals of *M* lies in the strong relation the children have to their murderer. The first reference to Beckett comes from their mouths as they chant the rhyme the adults do not want to hear. The pleasure the children get from evoking this bogeyman is obvious, and the chant and circle game has a ritual dimension, becoming a chilling invocation of terror. Viewed from above, this circle of children recalls the circular pattern of hands similarly viewed from above in the seance sequence of *Dr. Mabius, the Gambler*. The children in their innocence call up this figure who destroys them. I am far from blaming the victims here, since I am not dealing with any normal causality which would carry responsibility. Rather children have a bond with the *schwarze Mann*, as they do with all monsters.

Beckett's pleasure in those things that children love forms part of this bond. Like them, he loves sweet things, powdered sugar and tropical fruit, and most especially toys. His admiration of Elsie's ball, his choice of a balloon that would fascinate any child in its grotesque and comic semi-human physiognomy, all of this joined with Torre's unique voice and physical appearance mark him as belonging in some way to the child's world of immediate gratification; the exact opposite of the voice of the

adult world in the opening shot which calls from above in an irritated voice and commands them to stop their songs and game. Any child would think this woman hated children and that Beckett with his immediate engagement with a child's game loves them. The final shots of the sequence do join Beckett and Elsie through their toys, their games; but Beckett unfortunately is not a true child, but an adult whose only means of penetrating a child's world is through their physical destruction. Nonetheless Lang maintains this unique portrayal of Beckett, as alternately a spirit or demon invoked by the children, somehow insubstantial, appearing and disappearing, and as an overgrown child, simultaneously touching and repulsive, powerless and threatening.

M delivers Lang's ultimate vision of urban space, and that encompasses his vision of modern space. I have traced out a transition in the underlying structures of his German films from the semantically rich references of allegory to the more formal and logical networks of modern space based on surveillance and communication found in the urban thrillers. Do these two models have anything in common? They represent totally different ways of organising the world, one, ultimately religious and the other, secular; one, composed of images and figures that refer back to master narratives such as the Bible or mythology; the other, seemingly bereft of narrative and engaged in a purely geometrical subdivision and mastery of information and populations. But Lang reveals their common abstraction and common reliance on a deathly emptiness. The frozen, airless quality that Benjamin finds in allegory becomes a prefiguration of the modern landscape. The death's head that Benjamin finds lurking behind allegory's emblems, Lang reveals as well in the arrangement of the modern city. As Benjamin intuited a relation between baroque allegory and modernist practices, Lang's career demonstrates the progression from one to the other. Ultimately the modern space of *M*, as the opening sequence shows, is read allegorically as well, as the space which measures separation and death.

It is important, therefore, to deal briefly with the film Lang made between *Spies* and *M*, his last silent film, *The Woman in the Moon*. I find this Lang's least successful silent film, a judgement largely based on fairly conventional criteria, those things for which Eisner also criticises it ('lack of sustained suspense').²⁴ However, prompted largely by comments by Raymond Bellour, I realised I should try to come to terms with it.²⁵ I discovered that while the film still fails for me as a dramatic work, it represents an ideal point in Lang's work, an experimental extreme, from which I think *M* both profits – and reacts against. Truly this is a film in which Lang seems to bypass character in favour of a drama of technology. The lack of drama or complex psychology in the characters tips its dramaturgy back towards allegory (indeed the drama that is enacted here recalls medieval allegories about Greed, such as Chaucer's *The Pardoner's Tale*).

The central set piece of the film, the launching of the rocket, pays almost no attention to personal drama, focusing instead on the pure spectacle of technology. With the countdown to launch making the Langian obsession with time into the literal substance of the drama, the massive crowds of spectators, the constant intercutting of clocks and dials, the slow rhythms of the rocket's approach into position, the roving beams of spotlights, the Destiny-machine emerges from being a background or subterranean force to take centre stage. More than anything in *Die Nibelungen* or *Metropolis*, this seems to be, in fact, the sequence in Lang's work that most anticipates *Triumph of the Will*. The radio announcer standing before his microphone and dramatically narrating the spectacle to the masses who watch in

master criminal films) Lang cuts on the question 'Who is the murderer' (in those films the question is: who is behind all this?) to the perpetrator. But whereas in the master criminal films, the cut expressed the power of the criminal, something else is at issue here. Lorre is writing a letter (a sort of confession, yet an anonymous one) to the press (a word he underlines twice, along with the words *I* and *end*), whistling his *Peer Gynt* leitmotiv. The link holding these shots together is the circulation of information through the city by means of newspapers. Like all modern metropolises Berlin is a city hungry for and inundated by information. But the way this flow of information interrelates essentially alienated individuals is attested to by Becker's letter, his desire to communicate to the press, to participate in this flow of information, yet remain anonymous.

The following shots continue the links between voices, as sentences are continued and complemented by a series of different speakers. Once again the formal device serves to create the topography of urban information. We cut from Becker's handwritten text to a printed poster giving the details of the latest murder surrounded by a turbulent crowd, jostling for a better view, the sound of a voice reading the poster overlapping with the end of the shot of Becker writing. Bystanders ask someone in front to read the poster, which a voice does as the camera pulls back through the layers of people. Some descriptions of the film claim the voice of a radio announcer intervenes here,³³ which would continue the theme of the expansion of information through diverse media, but I confess I don't hear this transition. The reading of the poster mixes into another voice reading the same information which in the next shot is revealed to be a man at a bar reading a newspaper (the overlapping dialogue in these shots, sound preceding the actual cut to another shot, underscores the circulation of information).

The following succession of brief scenes which make up this less than six-minute sequence demonstrates the divisive, rather than community-building effect of the information and the fear it breeds. Lang presents a series of vignettes of typical scenes as the city is gripped by fear. This atomistic narrative approach (each scene has different characters and we never see any of them again) further articulates the fragmentary nature of the citizens of the metropolis, not only mutually suspicious of each other, but each absorbed in their own dramas and reactions to the crisis. Yet every scene is overtly linked by overlapping and rhyming sounds. A group of caricatured bourgeois men (looking like a George Grosz drawing brought to life) seated around a bar table listen as one of them reads a newspaper article which emphasises the deceptive nature of appearances ('candy, a toy, a piece of fruit can be the murderer's weapon'), and asks again the question, 'who is the murderer?' The article adds, 'He is one of us. Your neighbor could be the murderer.'

One of the men nods agreement and accuses a man across the table of being the murderer. The angry pair are separated by the other men, and the accused's cry, 'Slanderer!' is picked up by another voice as Lang cuts to an apartment being searched by a detective and a man, the source of the exclamation, enters from off screen, furious that an anonymous letter has denounced him and prompted the police investigation. The detective's voice explaining that they must follow up every lead because 'any man on the street could be the guilty one' overlaps the cut, with the next shot, showing a 'man in the street' as the phrase 'the guilty one' is heard on the soundtrack. Lang presents another vignette as a young girl asks this old man for the time and bystanders view this innocent conversation with suspicion and confront the man. A crowd gathers, getting progressively more excited and accusing the man of being the murderer. The crowd calls for a police officer. Lang cuts to another

high angle topographical view, this time of a double-decker bus with a police officer coming down the stairs apparently in response to the call. But this is another example of the misleading links, the delayed comprehension, discussed earlier in relation to *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*.³⁴ This officer is actually arresting a pickpocket caught on the bus. But our mistake is taken up by the crowd waiting to board the bus. When the pickpocket tells the cop he should be out catching the child murderer, the crowd hears only this word and begins pummeling the pickpocket, assuming he is the murderer. Truly the murderer is 'one of us.' In a succession of scenes, Lang shows four different people accused by their fellow city inhabitants. 'One of us' becomes 'the guilty one.' The anonymous crowd cloaks the murderer from detection, but also renders everyone suspicious.

The following sequence (called by Burch 'Police Procedures and their Inefficiency')³⁵ presents another topographical view of the city and the process of looking for the murderer by intercutting various sequences in diverse locations. In contrast to the process of gossip, accusation and misrecognition in the previous sequence, this sequence follows a rational procedure, the police investigation. Yet this process gets no nearer to the murderer than the actions of blind suspicion and the same fragmented, alienated population is revealed. The sequence opens by picking up and resolving the elements which began the last one. We see Becker's letter now printed in the newspaper, returning us to the themes of mass media that opened the second sequence. But a hand holding a pince-nez enters the frame and we are pushed into the next sequence, as a government minister berates the chief of police over the phone about the progress of the investigation. This sequence, the most freely roving in *M* in terms of urban space, will be mediated and portrayed through this phone call.

Lang demonstrates again his understanding of the technological nature of the modern terrain. But this sequence contrasts sharply with the phone call which culminates the opening robbery of *Dr. Mabuse, the Gambler*; it does not narrate a moment of intense suspenseful action. Instead, we watch a conversation between a government minister and a subordinate in bureaucratic hierarchy. The sequence is primarily retrospective, as the police chief describes actions they have already taken, providing a systematic description of police procedure. The phone conversation, linking speakers separated in space, naturalises and accelerates the discontinuity evident in the previous sequences, allowing Lang to cut very freely through space (and presumably time) as the exposition of the investigation converts the city into a series of charts and maps, a rational order designed to discover the anonymous murderer, separating him from the masses he dwells among. Lang capitalises on the telephone's extension through space and its role as a network to make his own connections between separate shots taking place in different locations. The phone call brings coherence to this highly discontinuous sequence through another innovative use of sound: the separation of voice from a speaker's bodily presence. We hear the police chief's voice-over as we see the scenes he describes, an innovative technique for the period. The frequent cuts back to the police chief pull these brief bits together, so that he behaves like a sort of switchboard, directing the audience through the shots with his spoken commentary.

The first section of the phone conversation dwells on the processing of evidence, specifically the murderer's letter to the press which prompts the minister's call. We saw this letter as Becker wrote it; then we saw it reproduced photographically in the newspaper, part of the circulation of news. Now we see it dissected and analysed, scrutinised for clues it might hold beneath its ostensible message. The sequence

hyper-enthusiasm – these are the images of mass excitement and devotion that Rutsky noted the lack of in *Metropolis*, if a comparison to Nazi spectacles were made.²⁶ We see here the masses of *Metropolis* not only pacified but energised, enjoying themselves, having been transformed into spectators of the wonders of technology rather than simply its slaves (but is there a difference?). *M* will provide the flip-side of this vision of united masses as spectators of technology's spectacles, with the image of city inhabitants as isolated, atomised individuals under a regime of terror. The two images present the public and private face of living under fascism as the nightmare of modernity.

In addition, *The Woman in the Moon* is a film about space, in both senses of the word, and therefore Lang's most abstract film. As Jacques Rivette stated, in *The Woman in the Moon* 'the plot primarily served Lang as a pretext for his first attempt at a *totally closed world*;²⁷ only, instead of enclosure, I would stress the sense of space as total separation, in this film which does paradoxically conflate agoraphobic fear of infinite extension with a claustrophobic fear of entrapment. No other Lang film so thoroughly indulges his love of the diagram, the abstract representation of space. The topographical view from above, the nearly two-dimensional images – not only the actual diagrams and animations in the film, but also the spaceship hurtling across a dark void – the vast expanses of highly illuminated emptiness that form the moon's terrain, all these devices accumulate in this film to create a feeling of agoraphobia, of a Pascalian fear of space itself, of its infinite quantity and extension. If the crowds and radio announcer greet the moon shot as a triumphant moment, the space-travellers themselves experience it in two primary ways: loss of consciousness and terror. Only the old man who goes mad with enthusiasm and, to some extent, the boy, express delight in this voyage.

Lang described his own inspiration for the film as coming from the experience of falling asleep in a train, 'the consciousness to be carried from one place to another without having anything else to do but lie still dreaming'.²⁸ The key role loss of consciousness plays in the rocket trip to the moon offers experiences such as sleep (and dreams), hypnosis and a consciousness outside of space and time as an analogue of space travel. Even the supposed Langian invention of the countdown recalls certain hypnotic techniques, while the constantly revolving surface of the moon outside the window as they begin to land is almost unwatchable without at least some dizziness (part of my problem with the film has always been that it makes me incredibly drowsy – bored? or something more trance-like?).

Loss of consciousness evokes regression, and the title along with the usual cultural associations of the moon invokes the idea of returning to the mother (notice how the final shot of Helius and Freide alone on the moon as he places his head against her breast recalls the regressive gestures Kracauer analysed in the earlier Weimar 'Street films', which he glossed as 'the desire to return to the maternal womb').²⁹ But if this regressive fantasy drives the film, Lang seems to express terror rather than comforting submission at this breaching of primal repression. Space travel for Lang entails a space of separation, rather than reunion, and it is this primal terror that drives his characters crazy. The fantasy of returning to the mother evokes the primal trauma of separation. Stated explicitly by most of the characters, it is perhaps most beautifully portrayed when the crew find the boy stowaway and he brings out his comic books to prove he has been studying the moon for a long time. The first images of monsters cause laughter, but the last image of a spaceman parachuting from the moon to earth stops the merriment. Like the fiery brand cast into the lunar cave only to disappear into nothingness,

these characters are stranded, terrified of their own separation and isolation. Ultimately this is Lang's most inhuman film, but also a revelatory one; outer space becomes his ultimate nightmare: a world made of emptiness and separation where no-one can hear you scream, 'Oh mother I am lost'.

Formed in Fright: The Topography of Terror

The wasteland grows. Woe to him that hides wastelands within.

Nietzsche

The 'Murder of Elsie Beckmann', the first sequence of *M*, ends with persistent images of emptiness, standing in as images of grief, violence, desire and death, with all three of the suffering and tormented characters – Elsie, her mother and her murderer – exiled from the screen in their paroxysms of sorrow, death and desire – pushed into a space we cannot see, but which echoes through and reverberates within these empty shots. We are left only with places and objects, mementos of the characters we have lost and of the horrors that have taken place. Perverse desire, mother love, childish delight, growing anxiety and terror have snaked their way through the city space Lang has laid out topographically and we are left with this *terrain vague*, this wasteland which grows in the middle of the metropolis.

The following two sequences extend Lang's topographical portrayal of city space, of the interconnections and atomisation of the world of the metropolis, a space gridded and integrated, yet strangely blind to itself, unaware of what happens within it. As Anton Kaas has said, 'Lang's unstated project in *M* – a portrayal of the inherent relation between urban living and danger – is made all the more terrifying by the anonymity and disintegration of the city's social space'.³⁰ As Kaas shows in his brilliant comparison between Lang and Ernst Junger, for Lang (and here the psychology of Weimar Germany is truly laid bare) city space has become a space of danger and, indeed, of warfare. The city in *M*, as Kaas puts it, is mobilised, that condition of constant fear and readiness which Junger saw as the necessary state of modern man who never moves out of a state of warfare and danger.³¹ In *M*, fear simultaneously unites the city in a common emotion, and fragments it, providing, not community, but mutual suspicion.

Like the first sequence, the second sequence of *M*, which Burch nicely titles 'Fear Spreads in the City',³² begins with sound coming over (or out of) a dark frame, the fade to black which ended Elsie's life and the first sequence. But instead of a child's nursery rhyme we hear the voice of the city, a carefully orchestrated mounting chorus of news vendors, their diverse voices competing with each other and with car horns, announcing an extra edition. The image fades in, showing another high angle shot looking down on a city street as people rush to buy the papers. The second shot, still from a high angle, though somewhat closer to the action, shows a vendor surrounded by people anxious for news, their comments blending with the vendors' hawking. We hear the question 'Who is the murderer?' and Lang cuts to a shot of Becker, hunched over the windowsill in his apartment, only his back and the top of his head visible.

The sequence shows the sort of sound links and rhymes we traced in Lang's following film *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*. As in that film (and indeed in all his

recalls the processing of information in *Spies* and especially Tremaine's telegraph message. But translation here is not so simple, since the enigma lies not in the meaning of the message but the identity and intentions of its author.

The first cut from the phone call to the images that illustrate it presents a shot of a dossier of fingerprints as the police chief speaks of the difficulty in getting clear prints from Becker's letter. (Lang's sense of humour is wonderfully – if almost subliminally – evident here: the dossier is for a crook known as 'Four-Fingered Ernst' and the blotter shows four prints with an empty space where the print of the forefinger would be.) As the chief describes the need to compare any print with the prints in their archive, a magnifying glass sweeps over this file and Lang cuts to one of the most famous shots in the film, a police officer writing at a desk as an enormous projection of a fingerprint fills the frame above him, numbered lines pointing out key features. The contrast in scale, the man dwarfed by the huge fingerprint, expresses the power of this processing of identity, the print itself a sort of diagram or blueprint of the individual as caught within the police archives of information and its processing.

Then the handwriting of the letter is scrutinised, the chief's voice-over saying it was sent to a graphologist. Lang cuts to this expert pacing and dictating his report to a female secretary (the process of transcribing is omnipresent) as he claims the shape of the letters reveal a perverse sexuality. The close-up of the writing fills the screen as the graphologist's voice-over continues. But as he ties these letters to the personality of an actor ('*Schauspieler*') Lang cuts to the most direct view of the murderer so far in the film. Becker is still given to us in a mediated fashion, since we see his face most clearly reflected in a mirror. The shot is chilling, as Becker appears first to admire himself in the mirror (the apparent narcissism matching the graphologist's claim of an actor's personality), his lowered eyelids and half-opened mouth expressing an almost masturbatory pleasure in his own visage. But then he

uses his fingers to distort his face into a wide-mouthed grimace, his bulging eyes widening as well, converting his previously smugly handsome face into a child's mask, the face of a bogeyman. The graphologist summarises that the writing shows undoubted signs of insanity.

This single shot holds a strange position within this sequence. Everything else portrays facts the police chief knows. This shot exceeds his knowledge. The voice-over which accompanies it is not, in fact, that of the chief, but of the graphologist. His voice leads us into it, but this image, in contrast to the words of Becker's letter, exceeds his knowledge, showing us things he can only hint at. It would be hard to exhaust or even inventory all the energies released by this shot, our first clear view of the film's shadowy title character. Some of the meanings rest on the surface: Becker is narcissistic, he is insane; he is split in two, like a *doppelgänger* or a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. But his effort to move from a self-image that entraps him to one which terrifies (him as well?) reaches to the core of his horror. If he is an actor, he is one who performs entirely for himself. In his loneliness, his alienation, the restricted scope and poverty of his anonymous life, he performs spectacular dramas before his mirror. The actor solicits the gaze of others. But M keeps out of sight, hiding throughout the film, afraid to be seen. But alone he displays to himself his own desires. What drama does he perform? Although Becker is silent in this shot, the only other sound we have heard from him (or will hear from him for many scenes to come) may offer a strong clue. Maria Tatar pointed out that in Ibsen's *Peer Gynt*, Grieg's 'In the Hall of the Mountain King' introduces the sequence where Peer comes to the royal hall of the trolls, who try to transform him into a monster.³⁶ Although I find her final explanation of this wanting, she provides a key insight into Becker's private drama. Peer comes to ask the king of the trolls for a bride, and must answer correctly the riddle: What is the difference between men and trolls – 'As far as I can see none at all. Big trolls will roast you and little trolls claw you; and we'd be the same – if we dared.'³⁷ These motifs and Peer's final attempt to escape when the trolls insist on taking out his eyes, all have resonance in Becker's fantasy life, as we shall see.

What we see in the mirror in horrifying compression is the essence of Becker's private drama which begins with attraction and ends with repulsion and self-horror. In the private theatre of the mirror Becker enacts his own transformation into a monster. While he has escaped the gaze of others, he is still imprisoned within his own gaze. This is the most terrifying drama of childhood, the vision of the monster who only appears when one is entirely alone – the bogeyman whom one cannot flee from, because it is one's self. Lorre here is trapped within the reciprocity of his own gaze. He cannot hide from this monster's eyes; the horrifying face that stares out from the mirror is so terrifying because it is a face terrified by itself. The graphologist's analysis of Becker's handwriting cannot take us into this vision, but Lang/Harbou can, and do.

Lang needs to return us to the prosaic world of the phone conversation after this interior climax, and he cuts back to the minister and then the chief, as the minister demands 'results' and the chief reacts with frustration. The images that follow under his voice-over are more simply illustrative, showing the police stations manned around the clock. The processing of minute details is then shown: a high angle, topographical view of a crime-scene with detectives combing the area, taking photographs, brushing for fingerprints and poking into the bushes. From this rather distant, wide angle view Lang cuts to a close-up of a candy bag handled almost surgically by a detective with forceps. The cut between these two shot sizes is unusual, because it eliminates the focus on the human face and figure which makes



the medium shot the most frequent framing of classical film-making. Lang cuts directly from the topographical high angle long shot to a close-up focused on a fragmentary clue. These are the essential spaces for the police investigation and the following shot literally inserts them into a broad rationalised view of the city under the lens of surveillance and investigation.

As the chief's voice-over continues its running commentary, Lang introduces a chart seen from above at an acute angle. In the centre is a three-dimensional mock-up of the locale where the clue was found, placed within a map of the neighbourhood. A compass uses the crime scene as a centre and describes circles around it, cutting through the city in widening radii. As the chief explains that they interrogated candy shop owners around the site in an ever-enlarging area, Lang cuts to a view of this chart from directly overhead: the crime-scene model becomes the centre of a bull's-eye of concentric circles traced by the seemingly huge compass. These images make literal the topographical view that underlies much of this film and its inherent abstraction. Viewed from above, the city becomes a pattern of lines and forms, intersections and borders, placed within the hard-edged geometry of the compass.

As in the visual abstractions that underlay his earlier allegorical films, these topographical views employ a vision which, like an x-ray, sees through appearances to essential structures. But, as in the technological environments of the master criminal films, in *M* this eye gazes upon a world already suffused with a will towards order and abstraction, the world of the modern city. These images of the city map anchor the logic of this sequence, its ability to coordinate different phases of the investigation as points within a larger plan or system. But the juxtaposition of these shots depicting order to the earlier shot of Becker making faces in the mirror highlights their disparity. Can this rational order truly encompass the acting-out of horrific scenes of perverse desire? Or does this world of abstract order present the negative of *M*'s fantasy world – a rationalised space where desire is driven underground, made to hide out in the most private and repressed atmosphere, taking on monstrous shapes and distortions?

Even the chief's narration admits the irrelevance of these techniques to the complexities of the case, pronouncing their task hopeless. In a series of three silent shots, a succession of ordinary citizens manning candy stores and snack shops, shake their heads and indicate they saw, or remembered, nothing. The blindness and anonymity of the modern city defeats its rational order of investigation. The final section of the conversation juxtaposes witnesses who did see something, but can't agree on what it was, and images of the police combing the city, walking in closed ranks through the underbrush of parks, checking flophouses and underworld hang-outs. The topographical view of the city persists, but less as an effective tool than an image of the modern world, its archive of facts (fifteen hundred clues, the documents fill over sixty volumes) explains the police chief, an attempt to make sense of this world, to force it to yield up its secrets.

As I have stated, the topographical dividing-up of urban space may be rendered starkly visible by the search for the child murderer, but it pre-exists it, inherent in the organisation of the modern city. Thus the sense of the extensive atomised and subdivided space of the city appears as much in the middle of the first sequence of a mother waiting for her child to return from school as it does in a police investigation. Lang portrays in *M* a systematic understanding of space and order, precisely the sort of modern space described by Henri Lefebvre, abstracted and subordinated to the needs of power.³⁸ But Lang also anticipates Foucault, not only in founding

this modern space in actions of surveillance and the discursive organisation of the archive, but as thoroughly absorbed into the practices of everyday life. As Anton Kaes has pointed out, Junger's concept of 'Total Mobilization' not only compares the modern society to a state of constant warfare but reveals that these structures are founded on fear, and the terror occasioned by an anonymous serial killer simply throws them into relief. Describing the city-wide search in *M*, Kaes says:

The mobilization produces a dense surveillance network aimed at making visible what has inexplicably evaded the tightly woven web of controls already in place: criminals and vagrants have identity papers (forgeries are easily detected as the film shows), they are registered and monitored, their fingerprints are recorded, asylums and hospitals keep records of their patients and their medical histories. Telephone lines link the population to the authorities and office buildings have alarm systems directly connected to police headquarters. Plain-clothed detectives control the street, searching in widening circles for every possible clue; neighbors watch each other; parents discipline their children to be wary, and even innocent bystanders are seen as potential suspects. Newspapers and extra editions keep everyone up-to-date at all times.³⁹

These techniques of surveillance and order are practised by the whole society, including not only the forces of order, but even the supposed forces of chaos, the underworld.

The famous sequence in which Lang cuts between the meetings of the police and the crime bosses occurring simultaneously on the same subject, the apprehension of the murderer (in Burch's count, the fifth sequence which he entitles – a bit misleadingly since there is no common plan – 'The underworld and the police pull together' – *se concertent* in the original French)⁴⁰ not only displays a wonderfully witty cutting on gestures which ties the two groups together, but reveals their shared use of surveillance and control through hierarchicalised power. Lang's master criminals have always ruled by their precise organisation and order; they are agents of fear, but not chaos. Although Mabuse's testament will speak of spreading chaos, it is part of a carefully calibrated plan (as Baum describes it, 'logical and indisputable') to attain the mastery of crime, crime as a total system. In a somewhat less theatrical manner, Schranker and his gang organise to restore 'normal' order to the city interrupted by Becker's murders and the effects they produce. As Roger Dadoun has claimed, in *M* the mob reveals itself as the 'refraction, the imitation, the counter-relief' of the legal structures and official codes of power.⁴¹

Lang undertakes much of this comparison in the form of a parody (most obviously in the stock market blackboard of leftover food in the headquarters of Dr. Beggars' Union where prices fluctuate in a parody of the stock market scene in *Dr. Mabuse, the Gambler*) inspired undoubtedly by Brecht's *The Three Penny Opera*. The opening of the fifth sequence takes on this parodic form as we see the gang members watching by the police raid through binoculars (the surveillance of the underworld surveyed by the underworld) and showing a great concern about the exact time. Displaying Lang's fundamental synecdoches of the technological environment, the pickpocket calls the telephone operator for the exact time, then takes out a half dozen watches and sets them, discarding one which doesn't tick.

Schranker, the crime boss (whose black gloves Lang claimed telegraphed to the audience that he never leaves behind a fingerprint – a perfect example of the underworld as the counter-relief of police procedures)⁴² runs the meeting like a chairman

of the board, referring to procedures and assuring proper representation at the meeting of each branch of the professions, as well as corporate concerns about funding and public image (in contrast to charismatic master criminals like Haghi and Mabuse who rule their underlings by mystification and fear as much as organisation), denouncing the murderer as an 'outsider' not belonging to their organisation who is disrupting the normal flow of business. Lang begins the intercutting between Schranker's meeting and that of the police with a perfect match on action as Schranker's sweeping hand gesture and spoken sentence is completed in the following shot by the police chief, as both figures open the meeting to discussion. Initially the intercutting is shot by shot, so that police sometimes seem to answer crooks and vice-versa, as if they actually were planning a common strategy. The cops emphasise the problems already detailed in the police chief's previous phone conversation: the lack of public awareness, the unremarkable everyday appearance of the murderer. Smoke fills the respective meeting rooms as frustration builds. A police advisor locates the problem in the fact that the murderer and victim are linked by chance, part of the anonymity of the metropolis, and the murderer leaves no trace behind. The crooks pick up on this sense of contingency, saying that if the police catch the murderer, it will be by accident.

After a period of silent pacing and smoking in both meetings, courses of action are suggested. Both, in somewhat different ways, rely on the rational organisation of the modern city: the police on the archive of documents, the trace left behind by citizens even when they are determined to leave no clue; the crooks on direct visual surveillance of the city determined by a subdivision of urban space. Lohmann's off screen voice in the police meeting suggests that a person as disturbed as the murderer must have had contact with the law before and must have left a record. A systematic investigation of persons released from asylums and prisons must be undertaken. The crooks for their part decide they must apprehend the murderer by permanently watching every square foot of the city. Lang supplies one of his strongest topographical images, an overhead shot of a map of Berlin as Schranker's black-sheathed hand moves over it, pointing. The problem raised about his plan, however, is the same one solved by Benham's panopticon: how to watch without being seen. Schranker's solution is brilliant, drawing on the blindness and lack of awareness of the modern city so often raised by this film. Who are the invisible people of the metropolis, omnipresent but never regarded? Its abject members, the beggars!

In this world of omnipresent order, even the abject are organised. Schranker can use the beggars not only because they are invisible, but because they are already an orderly systematic group that he can enroll. The process of assigning each beggar his 'square foot' of the city is shown in a convergence of the two emblems of this modern instrumental system: the map and the archive of identity. Lang's roving camera shows the queue of beggars appearing before a desk: a high angle shot shows another city map, demarcated by lines and figures, as each beggar is assigned a territory. The assignment is then recorded in a log book, giving the territory, the beggar's 'union number', and then his name. As in *Spies*, numbers can replace names, as they record one's identity as a place within an organisation, an archive.

Both investigations, police and underworld, leave a paper trace of their process and use the rationalised divisions of space and information as the scenario and guide for their processes. Lohmann receives in his office the list of patients released from mental hospitals, with a file of reports from every institution and another file giving the former patients' present addresses. However, Lang still indicates the

porous nature of this web of information. He cuts from a shot of the list of addresses to an apartment building entrance approached by a detective. Lang shows the name on the doorbell (Elizabeth Winkler) then a close-up of the detective's handbook with a series of names crossed out, as he points to the next one on his list, 'Hans Becker c/o Elizabeth Winkler Gelder St. 15, 2nd Floor'. The police have found Becker's apartment and in the following scene will even invade his private theatre, the site of his writing and performances before the mirror. But they will not recognise it. And, even more ironically, at the beginning of the shot of the building entrance, we see Becker go out just before the detective arrives. Many viewers of the film miss this appearance of Becker, so anonymous is his appearance.

The seizing of Becker in the office building by the underworld shows the ease of adaptation of the underworld to the systematic nature of modern order. The crooks even become nightwatchmen, making their rounds through the building so as not to set off the automatic alarm. Their adoption of this routine is signalled by another Langian shot of a chart showing the watchman's rounds and the locations of the time clock which must be punched periodically. This chart in the hands of the crooks is matched by the chart of the building in the hands of the cops when the alarm is triggered (the alarm sounds at headquarters and yields, in successive images: a number code, then a file card – with the building layout and location on the back). The crook's search is carefully timed, starting from Schranker's decision that it will begin precisely at eleven o'clock. He counts off the hours they have to wait, and the sequence opens with the chiming of a city clock (reviving not only the theme of time, but a motif from Elsie's murder). Once the alarm is set off, instead of fleeing in panic, Schranker insists they have five more minutes to finish the job. This temporal order mirrors the systematic spatial search of the building (as if Schranker's subdivision of the city for the beggars has shrunk to this one location), as he assigns people to each floor and area. His commands when the alarm is sounded: 'Five more minutes and six more compartments!' Becker seized, the building is cleared as systematically as it was searched. Lang ends the sequence with a series of silent images showing no movement: the tied-up watchmen, forced doors, smashed partition, as an eerie quiet and stillness prevail.

Lang's new style of abstraction in *M*, epitomised by the high angle topographical shots, also shapes a technique closely related to these shots, and which will appear in nearly every film he makes after this: a high angle view of a complex, geometrically ordered arrangement of objects. In a sense the still life of Elsie's empty place at the table premieres this new device in Lang's *œuvre*. However, most of the arrangements are more complex and less domestic than this one. The first strong examples appear in the aftermath of the police raid on the underworld hang-out. After Lohmann and his cops have examined the papers of the denizens, booked a few and engaged in witty repartee, Lang shows a detective opening a case left behind by a customer, apparently considered to be incriminating evidence. The case unfolds to reveal an *etui* as carefully arranged as a surgeon's, holding every sort of burglary tool. The following shot pans across an extraordinary display of objects, the detritus of the raid, as hands enter placing new finds into precisely sorted categories: first, tools: a power drill, hammers, saws; then, weapons: automatics, revolvers, brass knuckles and knives; next, objects of value, presumably stolen: cigarette cases, spectacle frames, silverware, watches and jewellery, purses and wallets, furs. What is striking in this shot is not simply the accumulation of goods, but their artistic arrangement into symmetrical rows and stacks – hardly the sort of placement likely to result from a police raid. Lang's own obsession emerges here, as if the arrangements of actors typical of the

allegorical films – *Siegfried* and *Metropolis* especially – had become miniaturised and frozen. Lang now lavishes on objects the careful *mise-en-scène* his monumental crowd scenes received previously.

Our introduction into the Beggars' Hall shows one of these arrangements in the process of formation, as a beggar lays on a table a series of cigar and cigarette butts, precisely sorted according to the length and type of tobacco, symmetrically displayed. Other beggars, engaged in preparing the supply of leftover food, are arranging half-eaten sandwiches with the same decorative impulse. These arrangements reveal several things about Lang's topographic style. First, the primacy of geometry which rules all his German films can avoid a large-scale stylisation by moving into smaller-scale arrangements, while the sense of an abstract order viewed from an overhead point of view remains constant. Second, if Lang moves away from Expressionist influences to influences from the New Objectivity this move is facilitated by his fascination with objects as much as a turn towards greater realism. The objects which bore emblematic and often enigmatic meanings in the allegorical films here become increasingly opaque, material. As Lang stated in a later interview, 'In my films objects are signs, but very concrete signs.'⁴³ These still-life arrangements speak of a style that increasingly replaces people with objects, such as the refraction underlying the horror of Elsie Beckmann's murder – transformed into a random play of objects, a ball and a balloon. Finally, these arrangements recall simultaneously the many diagrams and maps (often they interact with them, as in the still-life arrangement with map discovered on Dr. Baum's desk at the end of *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*) but also the key art of the modern consumer society, the arrangement of displayed goods in shop windows. Such windows also become a motif in Lang's films from *M* on, and the use made of them in this film stands at the centre of this modern topography where people and objects are interchangeable and desire is captured through a careful arrangement of things.

Der Schwarze Mann

... it forced me, by what means I do not know, to lift my eyes and imposed on me an image, no, a reality, a strange, unbelievable and monstrous reality, with which, against my will I became permeated: for now the mirror was the stronger and I was the mirror.

Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*⁴⁴

Who is the murderer? This is the question that organises *M* temporally and spatially as a search for one man an attempt to give a criminal a name and a face; to make a criminal act yield up a personal identity: 'the guilty one'. Yet, as has been pointed out, *M* is not a murder mystery. We, the viewers, gradually learn the name and face of the guilty one, long before the other characters do. Rather than identifying the murderer from a range of suspects, this film traces the process of constructing an identity for the obviously guilty one, giving him both a name and a body. Although it may appear that the crime world's investigation is more successful than that of the police, both actually achieve different parts of the objective. Almost simultaneously the police give Becker a name and address while the mob mark and seize his body. This process of constructing an identity for the murderer not only reveals

the panoply of institutions and processes the modern state and metropolis possess for keeping track of their citizens, but also the fundamental loss of identity on which this modern institution is founded, the overwhelming anonymity and loss of a unique, individualised place within a community that necessitates the machinery of categorisation and surveillance. As in *Spies*, Lang reveals that the fixing and tracing of identity rests upon a previous effacement of the person and the community. Lang's master criminals play on the labile quality of modern identity through a theatrical use of disguise. But Haghi showed that the best disguise is none at all, the ordinary face of an average man that hides behind the mask of Nemo, 'no-one'. However Becker performs his transformation from nebulous to monster only for himself and his audience of single little girls. He is in many ways conceived as the antithesis of the master criminal. Mabuse speaks of becoming a giant, a titan, one poster for the premiere of *Dr. Mabuse, the Gambler* (possibly patterned on a similar image for both the novel and film of *Fantomas*) shows him as a colossus striding over the city.⁴⁵ However Becker needs no disguise to remain invisible because he is so insignificant and powerless. He cannot command underlings, mesmerise young men and police investigators, make women do his bidding through his charismatic indifference, command technology, or panic the stock market through his control of information. And yet he monopolises the media and terrifies an entire metropolis, upsetting its routines even more than Mabuse's campaign of organised terror. This is the final irony of Lang's German crime films: his least powerful, most anonymous character has the greatest effect.

If the sign of Mabuse or Haghi's power was their apparent omnipresence, their ability to exert their will across a vast terrain through either their criminal organisation, supernatural powers, or their mastery of technology, Becker's unique ability to evade the forces searching for him comes from his ability to hide. Burch points out that an over-arching 'movement' persists throughout *M*: 'the gradual "unveiling" of the central character' through a series of appearances.⁴⁶ Equally importantly, his appearances most often are followed by disappearances, Becker moving out of visibility. The murderer disappears even more powerfully than he appears, as his absence at the end of the first sequence shows us.

Becker's initial appearances, as Burch notes, are shadowy, still 'veiled' and strongly visually mediated: he is seen as a shadow, from the back, in a mirror, almost unnoticed as he walks out of frame at the opening of a scene, shot through highly reflective window panes. But his disappearances, his ways of exiting from the scene, become more spectacular and even magical in the second half of the film. After Becker's first extended sequence in the film (previous scenes had been limited to single shots), the sequence before shop windows which I will discuss later, he with-draws to an outdoor cafe and literally seems to hide from the camera which glimpses him through a hedge. This extremely curious scene consists of a single long-lasting shot (more than a minute and a half) beginning in long shot as Becker enters the abounded area of the cafe, sits at a table, begins to whistle 'In the Hall of the Mountain King' and orders a cognac. The camera dollies in but stays outside the abour, showing a rather obscured view of Becker through the foliage. This unusual framing emphasises both the surreptitious nature of the camera – once again outside the scene viewing it from a distance – its spy-like nature, and Becker's furtive nature, his hide-and-seek game with the camera. Becker downs a second cognac, holds his head between his fists, tries to smoke, starts to whistle his theme from *Peter Gynt* again, seems to make his monster face again. Then, when the lights inside the cafe come on and illuminate him, he rises suddenly, pays the bill and

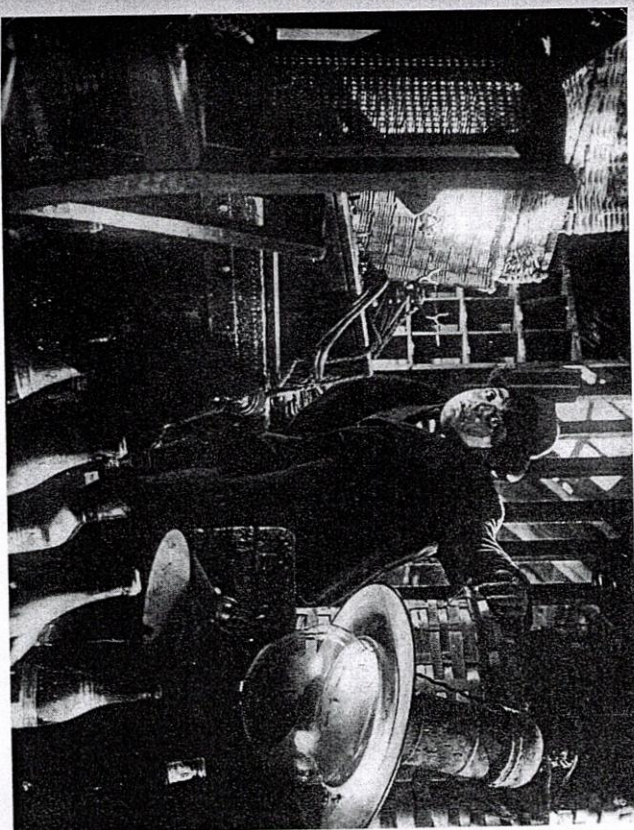
leaves, the camera pulling back just before he emerges – as if afraid to be caught in its compromising position.

Beckert's most impressive disappearing act comes just before his capture. It is preceded by his most elusive appearance (heard, rather than seen), but the one which will seal his fate. Over a shot of the blind beggar who sold Beckert Elsie's balloon we hear the off screen whistling of the music from *Peer Gynt* and see a quickly passing shadow. As he recalls the tune, the blind beggar matches his sharp ears with a young man's, Heinrich's, keen eyesight to glimpse Beckert in the off screen distance. In pursuit, Heinrich seems to have lost him, but then glimpses him through the window of a below street level fruit market buying candy for a little girl. This high angle image recalls the shot of Beckert buying the balloon, one of several *déjà vu*-like images scattered through the second half of this film which recall the first sequence.

This sighting leads directly to Beckert being marked with the chalked-on M, and being trailed as he walks with a new potential victim through the streets of Berlin. After Heinrich reports to the underworld headquarters, Beckert is pursued by a myriad of beggars operating in relays. It is as though once marked with the letter M, Beckert has lost a magical invisibility (whereas before it was only the blind who could recognise him). Beckert seems to realise this as he glimpses the mark on his back in a mirror and immediately turns and stares – briefly, but directly – into the camera. This look at the camera (a rarely used device in this film until the final scene) does not claim enunciatory power over the lens and audience, but rather expresses the embarrassment of visibility, being caught in the gaze of the camera. Beckert now sees his pursuers swarming everywhere, and their shrill, whistled signals seem to come from every direction of off screen space, entrapping him. Lang expresses this with a topographical overhead shot as Beckert is literally cornered, standing in the street with a pursuer on every corner of the intersection. Beckert rushes into the large entrance-way of an office building, keenly observed by his pursuers in long shot. But, magically, a fire truck, its alarm bells ringing, sweeps through this frame and seems to wipe Beckert off the screen. After it passes he is simply no longer there.

Beckert seems once more absorbed by the anonymous city within which he thrives. An extensive pan and tilt of the empty courtyard and massive architecture, seems to scan helplessly an impassable barrier that shields him. Likewise, as a bell announces the office's closing time (another temporal signal here, as in *Metropolis*, triggering a mass exit) and the crowd of workers leave the building, the beggars do an extraordinary job of looking each person in the face (they are beggars; they can approach people like this) to make sure Beckert is not among them. The cacophony of voices that fills this space underscores Beckert's complete disappearance, swallowed by the metropolis. Beckert has, in fact, withdrawn into the farthest reaches of the building, its storage attic, where we can just distinguish him, huddled among the abandoned furniture, old ledger books, empty bottles. The watchman, finding the door open, makes a quick patrol and, turning the light out and locking the door, leaves Beckert in his hiding place. In the darkness we barely see his silhouette and can just distinguish his laboured, almost asthmatic, breathing.

Beckert will hide/disappear twice more before he is produced for his trial before the underworld in the cellar of the abandoned brewery. First, when he attempts to pick the lock of the attic and suddenly sees the handle to the door turning, then hears the key in the lock. Beckert tiptoes away back into his attic refuge, returning quickly to turn off the light, leaving the corridor dark and empty until the gang opens the door. He huddles among the jumble of odds and ends, listening to the off



screen voices of his pursuers closing in, his eyes bulging. Then from off screen a flashlight beam illuminates him as he stands up, involuntarily fascinated and terrified, staring into the light. The *schwarze Mann* has emerged from darkness. We next see him in his last (involuntary) disappearing act, as a bundle, carefully wrapped, twisting and struggling, the largest burden carried off by the departing crooks.

The gang tries to find Beckert, to drag him into the light, for only one purpose, in order to eliminate him. As Schranker says (in words the Nazi overtones of which are clear), 'he has no right to live. He must disappear.' Beckert is dragged out of his anonymity in order to be expunged. As Dadoun argues, Beckert is the ultimate reject of this society where even the beggars play an organised role. He is the waste product, the truly abject.⁴⁷ Thus he is associated with spaces like the attic storage room where he finds his last temporary resting place among the other rejected objects, or the abandoned brewery with its smashed windows and collapsing roof, appearing like an image from bombed out postwar Berlin. In the organised world of the city the underworld and the police interact like a hand and a glove, but the perverse desire of Beckert truly finds no place, other than a place to hide. He emerges from the darkness of anonymity into the glare of apprehension and identification only as a stage on the road to oblivion.

While the underworld gets Beckert within their sights and marks his body with the sign of Cain, the police tie him to a name and address, an official place within the city, as Dadoun again points out, through the systematic investigation of his rejects, an Arston cigarette, red pencil shavings, the contents of his waste basket.⁴⁸ Lang intercuts the blind beggar's recognition of the Grieg tune with Lohmann recognising the brand of Beckert's cigarette butt ('A-ri-ston', as he writes in the air) in the detective's inventory of Beckert's waste basket. Lohmann is able to relate this bit of trash to the police's archive of facts. Lang cuts from the arcing camera movement which discloses the M imprinted on Beckert's shoulder to Lohmann poring over the inventory of one

of the crime scenes where Arison butts were found. The next shot returns to Becker's apartment with a close-up of the window sill on which he wrote his letter to the press (unexamined in the previous search, since the detective concentrated on the perfectly smooth table). A magnifying glass enters the frame and sweeps across the sill's coarse-grained surface. An extreme close-up through the lens reveals the fatal imprint, the trace of the word 'press'.

Thus Becker is caught between two literal impressions and inscriptions: the M imprinted on his back which renders him visible, and the mark he himself left as he wrote the confession to the newspaper. Like Tremaine's message caught by carbon paper, this shot reveals the unconscious betrayal writing can leave behind without the writer even realising it. The window is opened and the detective wipes it with his fingertip and finds the red pencil shavings – evidence they were looking for. In close-up he brings them, stuck on the tip of his finger, towards the camera lens. Becker's self-betraying writing seems poised between the preceding and subsequent Lang films, between Tremaine's telegraph message whose impression is read by the spies, and Hofmeister's message etched in another window (also discovered by Lohmann who refers to it as 'window writing') in *The Testament of Dr. Mabius*. Lang cuts from Lohmann's excitement at the discovery to the underworld receiving word of the beggars spotting Becker. From fragments and memories, from cigarette butts and the snatches of a tune, Becker's identity has been constructed at last. The police have him as well as the underworld. The detectives only miss him because they wait in his apartment and Becker never returns home again.

But this accumulation of bits of facts, of the refuse of both normal and criminal society, this name and address taken from the police file and this body marked as a target for elimination – how does all of this relate to Becker's sense of his own identity? Lang provides us with glimpses of him alone, outside the gaze of others, within the scenography of his private fantasies, as in the shot played before his mirror at home. Perhaps the most powerful sequence of the film occurs when Becker confronts the image of his desire and his monstrosity on the city street.

In his later confession before the underworld Becker speaks of his need to wander the streets. Marie has even described him as a *flâneur*.⁴⁹ In the sequence which occurs during the first police search of Becker's apartment, he strolls along a Berlin commercial street munching on a piece of fruit. Up to this moment every view we have had of Becker in the film has been either mediated (the shadow, the reflection) or from behind. This sequence begins the same way, but will also present not only the first extended scene with Becker, but our first clear view of him. We see him in long shot on the sidewalk as he casually comes into frame, idly attracted by an elaborate window display, tossing his fruit carelessly into the gutter and taking another from his bag. The next shot gives a startling reverse angle and introduces a new motif in the portrayal of Becker, shooting him through a window which is itself reflecting another scene and projecting it over Becker – a sort of natural superimposition. This image is famous and yet still powerful. A medium shot shows Becker (our best view of him so far – nearly half-way through the film!) as he continues to munch his apple, his attention directed at the window display. The image reflected on the glass in front of him shows us what he sees: an elaborately arranged display of cutlery.

Lang and cameraman Fritz Arno Wagner flaunt their mastery of frames and geometrical patterns in this shot. Becker's head is haloed by the reflection of a large diamond-shaped pattern of knives pointed inward; his belly is rimmed by a rainbow arc of spoons. It is one of Lang's masterpieces of arrangement and composition, but the

effect of superimposition gives it a ghostly quality. These patterns seem to radiate out of Becker, like the metaphysical force lines emanating from characters in an Expressionist painting. But if the Expressionist influence is here, it has also been transformed. Becker's expression at this moment is casual, as if unaware of the forces that shimmer around him, or aware of them only as shiny attractive objects, drawing the eye of the passerby. He bends down, as if to look more closely at something in the window. We get his point of view shot of the lower part of the display, another carefully arranged series of diverse objects, cases of knives and small scissors, the lozenge of knives no longer visible in this lower framing.

Lang cuts back to Becker, seen as in the first shot through the glass, framed within the knife pattern, chewing in apparent contentment as he surveys the wares spread before him. Suddenly he reacts: his eyebrows raise, his face freezes, his eyes stare. Lang supplies the point of view shot, this time showing the area of the window previously out of frame. The lozenge of knives is now seen directly, their glimmering forms sharply surrounding a mirror. The mirror reflects a young girl, perfectly framed by the knives as she, too, gazes into the window display from somewhere off screen. Lang returns to Becker reacting to this vision: he rubs his mouth with his hand slowly, his fingers pulling down the left corner, so that it approximates the monster face he made in the mirror of his apartment, his eyes beginning to bulge as he stares off screen. A brief shot flashes back to the girl in the mirror, then we see Becker again, as his eyes close and he rocks on his feet as if losing his balance. He straightens up and stares in front of him, his eyes bulging. The point of view shot shows the little girl just slipping out of the mirror which is left empty, reflecting the street and vacant sidewalk, while her dim reflection moves across the window glass. Becker, viewed from the back, stands in front of the window, the empty mirror to his right as he looks to the left, the direction in which the girl departed. His face is doubled by its reflection in the window. His fingers twitching, his mouth widening, he begins to whistle his theme as he lurches off to the left.

Becker's madness, the moment of it seizing him, is portrayed both by Lorre's performance and Lang's succession of imagery. The window display introduced here, and soon to be elaborated further, becomes a motif associated with Becker's obsession. An essential part of the modern urban scene, 'show windows' were intended to use visual curiosity and fascination, 'to arouse in the observer the cupid-ity and longing to possess the goods' as one merchandising expert, L. Frank Baum, put it.⁵⁰ Becker's highly perverse and repressed desire is stimulated by the devices of the urban consumer culture. These highly illuminated mini-spectacles were designed to release desire through visual stimuli, channelled towards making a purchase. Becker responds to the first part of their purpose, the visual stimulation and the arousing of desire, but the object of his desire comes from taboo territory. The reflective quality of the window, and especially the mirror, recall Becker's performance before his own mirror. His private drama has taken over the public space of the street, with a vision of forbidden desire seemingly conjured before his eyes. The vision is fixed for the moment, but then slides away, as if beckoning Becker to follow.

Lang has devised this mirrored and highly visual environment so that this young girl can appear to Becker, not as a creature of flesh and blood, but as an image, an image about to disappear. Becker's relation to his obsession is an imaginary one, based in a virtual reality in which the superimposition of geometrical patterns enforces a sense of entrapment, of predetermined framings. The knives and the mirror seem to impel Becker towards his next victim. Further, the scenography of bright shiny objects, reflected light, and Becker's trance-like reaction suggest a

scene of hypnosis, Beckett being taken over by a will not his own. (In his later confession at the 'trial' he claims he has to obey the evil thing inside him.) As Kraeuer put it, 'Evil urges overwhelm him in exactly the same manner in which multiple objects close in on his screen image.'⁵¹ But this surrender to an alien will takes the form of a drama, a performance. Given Beckett's fascination by his own image in the mirror, his absorption in a world of fantasy, this vision of a young girl has also entered his private world in which he can play a dashing lover and a terrifying monster (and probably never play one without the other). The complex of imagery indicates that Beckett in the throes of his madness enacts his own private movie, the closest he gets to the enunciatory ambition of the master criminals.

The following shot extends this imagery. The little girl has wandered to another shop window, this time a book store. But if this seems anodyne compared to the display of knives which threatened to impale her image in the previous shot, the visual devices of the window are much more aggressive. A large arrow bounces vertically up and down, pointing to a picture in an open book, while in the background a circle decorated with a spiral spins, pulling attention towards its eternally withdrawing centre. Such mechanical signs were considered the apex of modern window dressing, a way to draw strollers irresistibly to your display.⁵² Besides continuing the linking of visual attraction and desire, the spiral particularly evokes hypnosis. As the girl moves from one window display to the next the camera follows her, Beckett's whistled theme coming from off screen. This is probably the first example of the 'stalking' camera movement that became a cliché of serial killer films in the 70s, as the camera's cautious following of the child parallels Beckett's trailing of her. The camera seems to obey Beckett's will, extending his timid claim at enunciatory command, but it is interrupted almost immediately as this middle-class girl runs into the arms of her mother, in contrast to the fate of Elsie Beckmann.⁵³ Immediately the camera movement and the whistling stops. The camera then reverses itself as mother and daughter walk to the left. They pass by Beckett, no longer master of the camera, huddling, in the doorway, his back turned to them and to us, hiding once more. Emerging, he gazes off screen at them almost wistfully, the spiral in the window behind him seeming to emerge from his body. He half scratches, half caresses his hand as he looks off, then turns and gazes directly at the camera, our first, though brief view of him full face. His previously described withdrawal behind the hedge of the beer garden follows.

The next appearance of Beckett also involves shop windows. After Heinrich, following the blind beggar's suspicion, glimpses Beckett and a new little girl through the window of the fruit market, he watches as they exit and enact a little drama. The girl curtsies and offers Beckett a candy, he pulls out a knife in close-up, causing Heinrich some panic. The following close-up diffuses the drama, but only by offering a substitution: Beckett carefully slices the peel of the orange he offers the girl. His role as the consumer of little girls as sweet things and cute toys cues us to the implicit violence in this image. This is the moment when Heinrich chalks the M on his own hand and, pretending to be just another chance urban encounter, imprints it on Beckett's shoulder. The beautiful irony of the little girl's solicitous manner as she returns the potential murder weapon, the knife Beckett dropped when Heinrich stumbled against him (Marie calls her 'the ideal little Red Riding Hood offering herself in sacrifice to the Big Bad Wolf'),⁵⁴ affirms the bond children seem to have with this childlike man.

Beckett is now a marked man and his stroll with the little girl is followed closely by the beggars. But unaware of this, the odd couple proceed arm-in-arm at a

flâneur's pace, pausing in front of a toy store window. This is Lang's most phantasmagorical setting. He shoots Beckett (and the little girl) from inside the store, some of the display of toys visible in the foreground, others reflected on the window pane and seemingly superimposed over the couple as they gawk, mouths open in wide-eyed admiration. A group of dolls and teddy bears sits in the foreground on the display case facing outward, like a miniature audience for the joy of the enraptured pair. Over their heads another mechanical attention-grabber operates, a jumping-jack whose legs enframe them as they gaze into this child's paradise. If Beckett remains partly still a child, attracted to children because he is a reject from the adult world, this would seem to be a moment in which he innocently shares a childlike fascination with his miniature love-object. His face does not show the trance-like fluttering of the eyelids, nor does he show any loss of balance or take on his monster face. He seems simply to enjoy the display, and he apparently asks the girl which toy she likes best and he beams as she points to one. She seems like the bride that Peet Gynt entered the Hall of the Mountain King to ask for, the one for whom he is willing to become a monster.

But Beckett is not a child and he is not innocent. His love of children leads, we know, inevitably to a rage against them, becoming the bogeyman who terrifies and destroys. He already bears the mark of the murderer, the letter M on his back, although he has not realised it yet. But as Kuntzel has revealed, it is present almost subliminally within this scene of toyland. The jumping-jack legs, when stretched wide apart, form an M above Beckett's head, and, further, one can see another dim white M, a reflection on the window, as the legs part.⁵⁵ The subliminal becomes explicit in the following shot, from outside the store, as the little girl tells Beckett he's 'all dirty'. The discovery takes place next to the toy display they just looked into, in the shop's doorway.



Here a mirror allows Beckett to search for this dirt the girl has spotted. Another shop window is visible on the left, doubled in the mirror. This one displays rows of both full and half masks of what appear to be children's faces. Starkly white and phantom-like, they witness Beckett's discovery of the mark. At first he sees nothing and asks the child where the dirt is. She points to his shoulder. In medium shot Beckett sees the mark in the mirror; straining to see his own back, he reads it with bafflement. A close-up follows of the M. Still the gracious child-bride of the monster, the little girl tries to wipe it off, as Beckett seems unsure what to think. But as he turns to look over his shoulder in the mirror, he glimpses something which truly terrifies him; he turns quickly and shoots a glance directly at the camera.

On this image my analysis buckles with the previous discussion of Beckett's sudden visibility, his discovery of the pursuers, his final disappearance and eventual discovery. The look at the camera, again, is too brief to assert control over the film Beckett's expression of panic forms the opposite of Haghi or Mabuse's amused confidence. But in being caught in the eyes of others, Beckett's fantasy world also collapses, his private movie, his childlike idyll at the shop window, ends. But his idylls always end in horror. The masks and the children's faces that watch him from the windows as he discovers this dirty mark anticipate his description at the final trial of the horrific turns his private movie always takes: 'And I am pursued by ghosts. Ghosts of mothers. And of those children ... They never leave me. They are there, there, always, always. Always ... except ... except when I do it ...' Beckett is trapped in a private drama, a film with continuous screenings which he cannot control or bring to an end. The child always gives way to the bogeyman, the child-bride and her loving mother become vengeful ghosts. He can only live with this horror by becoming a horror himself and eradicating his child audiences. But now he has been recognised by others, who will end his private drama with a theatrical performance of their own.

The People vs Hans Beckett

Fantastic! Against humanitarian soppieness. For the death penalty. Well made. Lang will be our director one day.

Joseph Goebbels' *Diary*, 21 May 1931, after seeing *M*.⁵⁶

With a stump of chalk from his tunic pocket he drew a small cross on the palm of his hand

...
As a token of his approval and solidarity would pat anyone who cursed on the shoulderblade, whereupon the marked man, white cross on his back, would be caught by the SA

...
I ran away terrified at home I looked at my back in the mirror to see if it didn't bear a white cross.

Bertolt Brecht 'The Chalk Cross', *Poems 1913-1956*

Beckett's brief glimpse of his beggar-pursuer as he turns from the mirror, then flees in panic abandoning his child-bride/victim, could cut directly to his first point of view shot when he is pushed into the cellar of the abandoned brewery.

Falling down the stairs, he turns and screams defiance at his tormentors standing above him, then looks around and becomes silent. The point of view shot shows this grim, subterranean space filled to the gills – the shot pans slowly to include them all – with silent, immobile people seated and staring at him. Beckett has been caught in the gaze of others with a vengeance, the furtive glance of the spy multiplied into a glare of judgement. Burch has pointed out that the film's dominant style of discontinuity in space lessens towards the end of the film. Here in the cellar, the final scene of the film (outside of the two-shot epilogue) stays within a single space and continuous time for nearly fifteen minutes, without a single cut-away to another space.⁵⁷

This return to the uninterrupted scene (with its unity of dramatic space) rather than the sequence (with its intercutting of different spaces) marks the highly theatrical nature of the film's climax. Although this trial is run by outlaws, it not only maintains many of the basic court procedures (another parody of the codes of ordered society appearing in the underworld), such as a variety of testimonies and a presiding 'president', Schranker, it also maintains the theatricality of the courtroom. The cellar overflows with audience, and the scene consists of a series of speeches or performances before them. The basic drama enacted here is the simultaneous establishment and stripping away of the identity of Hans Beckett, murderer.

After Beckett's game of hide-and-seek, and his final discovery, he is, in effect, completely uncovered. Most of our views of him have been mediated by windows, mirrors, views from the back. Now he is displayed frontally with nowhere to hide, stripped of his screens and props, made to confront not only his judges, but his victims and himself. He begins by moving towards the camera after it has moved towards him, his hands outstretched, an ingratiating, if nervous, smile on his face, insisting there has been a mistake. But if Beckett delivers himself to this close-up view, his frame is soon invaded from off screen left, as a hand grabs his shoulder and his expression freezes in terror. The beggar's voice comes from off screen denying there is any mistake. The camera pulls back from the close-up which Beckett dominated, to a wider framing and reveals the beggar holding a balloon identical to the one purchased for Elsie. As he asks Beckett if he recognises it and mentions Elsie Beckmann, Beckett gives a start. Lang cuts 180 degrees to a high angle shot showing the assembled trial members and audience in the background, Beckett in midground gazing up, and in the foreground, in slightly soft focus, the wavering form of the balloon. As it sways in the frame, the balloon alternately obscures, then reveals Beckett's figure standing below.

This is an unbearable moment for Beckett. He backs away from the balloon, stuttering over Elsie's name, 'El ... El ... Elsie ... El', and then shouts denial, 'No, no, no.' But his withdrawal only brings him closer to his judges, as he nearly backs into the table at which Schranker and the other underworld leaders sit. The camera too pursues him as he moves back, seeming to fly in its overhead position past the balloon to keep Beckett in frame. Beckett confronts images from his private drama of monstrosity, the return of the dead. The balloon took on Elsie's identity at her death and seemed to ascend into the heavens. Now it has reappeared in the underworld, an infernal, vengeful presence. It is the visual equivalent of the ghosts of his victims which Beckett will soon confess haunt him continually. But now he is not only haunted by these vengeful ghosts, but confronted by the reality of the mob assembled to judge him. Beckett is caught between them. His backward retreat is interrupted by a shout and a sudden reverse angle cut, and Beckett spins around as Schranker shouts a question about another victim.

The 180 degree reverse angle cutting typical of many Langian scenes of confrontation (such as the meetings with the 'man behind the curtain' in *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*) dominates this final scene of *M. Lorre* looks directly into the camera as he responds to Schränker, again claiming he doesn't know these girls, the camera clearly serving as an accuser and witness. Schränker continues to facilitate the dragging of Becker's private movie into this public space. He displays to Becker a series of photographs of his victims, ending with Elsie Beckmann. After the first photograph, Becker again moves backward. But the succeeding photographs are in close-up from his point of view. Unable to distance himself, Becker first puts his hand in his mouth as if stifling a scream, although the gesture also expresses the orality so often noted in Becker's character, his infantile regression. At its most primal here, he seems to wish to swallow himself in order to disappear, or to eat the photograph and make it disappear, as he has already consumed the girl herself like a bit of sweetness. After Elsie's photograph (complete with her ball – another *déjà vu* image) Becker turns and runs. But as Schränker has already told him, there is no way out of here. As in Haghi/Nemo's last performance, space is enclosed on all sides, except the one open to the audience. There is no off screen space into which Becker can move unseen. His disappearing act no longer works: he is exposed to the glare of visibility and witnesses who remember his acts. His frenzied attempt to get out the doorway is repressed with brutal physical violence, as the voices of the crowd cheer his attackers on, suggesting places to hit him ('his shins!'). Again Peer Gynt's visit to the Hall of the Mountain King is recalled, as Peer searched vainly for a way out and the trolls called out to bar his way and bite and kill him.

Schränker restores order and insists on instructing both crowd and prisoner on the way the order of law will be followed ('we are all experts on the law here: from six weeks in Tegel to fifteen years in Brandenburg'). A long pan over the grotesque faces of the convicts sitting in judgement underscores the parodic tone, the almost carnivalesque inversion of a criminal court. But Lang does not allow us to participate in this carnival with levity. Becker's anguished and hysterical cries echo through the cellar, until again a hand enters from off screen and pokes him on the shoulder. Here another element of parody introduces himself. Becker's defence lawyer, picking up his hat in order to tip it in a Chaplinesque gesture of abject dignity. Becker's demands to be handed over to the police are greeted with ever-increasing laughter from the audience off screen, the child's nightmare of mockery at the moment he is being most serious, pleading for his life. Becker does not have Nemo's fine-edged sense of irony. He cannot stand being taken for a clown at the moment of his death. Schränker repeats his demand that Becker must disappear, a term taken up by an off screen voice – 'Yes, disappear! Becker's most powerful trick is now being demanded of him, at the same time as any possibility of achieving it has been taken away from him.

Becker's monologue that follows is simultaneously one of the finest performances in sound cinema and an extraordinary example of writing for the new 'talkie' by Thea von Harbou. As an act of public self-explication and confession, its theatrical nature carries enormous power. In essence, Becker claims he is not responsible for his acts, that he is compelled to perform them, that he is deeply split in two ('I can't help myself. I haven't any control over this evil thing inside me. ... It's me pursuing myself'). Lang cuts to a medium close-up as Becker begins by addressing the camera most directly, starting into it with a sudden authority, not at all like his cringing denials earlier in the scene. One thinks of a secondary title the

film was sometimes given: *Dein Mörder sieh Dich an, 'Your Murderer Looks at You'*.⁵⁶ But his eyes shift to the sides as if scrutinising the site of off screen space, the zone of invisibility, as he describes this force that pursues and drives him. As he recounts his plight in vivid terms – he wants to escape and cannot – we realise that his description of his life subject to his compulsion precisely mimics the imagery of the film ('pursued down endless streets') and ends inevitably in the situation he is now in: wishing to flee from the all-powerful, scrutinising eyes, wanting to escape, but unable to. Because he cannot escape from himself, his own self-scrutinising, self-terrorising mirror drama. His private torment has now found its public equivalent.

His impassioned description cannot help but arouse sympathy, and Lang shows several of the audience nodding in understanding or empathy. His monologue brings us deeper into the horror of the drama he is caught in. As he describes his pursuit by the ghosts of his child-victims and their mothers, Lang shows two mothers listening in horror, showing not so much revulsion or anger, as pure terror, clinging to each other and twisting their handkerchiefs, as if Becker succeeds in getting them to picture his haunted life. These visions are with him 'always, always' – except ... except when he does it.

A new motive is given here for Becker's murders. He commits them in order to stop the infernal repeating drama, the imaginary snuff film on an endless projection loop, to give himself relief, to make himself unconscious. Lorre's pantomime is at its most extreme here, almost painful to watch. His hands have become claw-like and make strangling motions, gestures replacing words ('When I ...'), his face becomes truly demonic, a sort of spasms passing over it. The face and hands collapse and hang limp and flaccid. His now somnolent face claims, 'and then I can't remember anything'. The murder is the blind spot of his torment, the release from the con-stant images and torture – oblivion. He has reached what Dadoun describes as 'the abyss of total unconsciousness in which he plunges and disappears when he kills a little girl'.⁵⁹ Dadoun further glosses with great insight: 'One could say that he disappears, that he dies phantasmically with or within the real death of his victim. It is only in fantasy. In reality he comes back to life, back to consciousness, back to being tortured by his ghosts. It is a scenario Lang will replay in his Hollywood films with Edward G. Robinson, first as comedy (*The Woman in the Window*) and then as tragedy (*Scarlet Street*). One awakes from an imagined/attempted death/suicide only to find the private movie is still unreeling.

Becker awakes to be immediately confronted by his crime, as an inhabitant of the modern city in which the news is plastered everywhere. Becker recalls the scene from the opening of the film's second sequence, the crowds gathered to read of the latest crime. And Becker tells us he is among them: 'I read and I read ...' But like everyone else in the city he cannot locate the murderer, he cannot recognise himself in what he reads. He acts out his compulsion once more, the drama begins again (triggered by the act of reading?). His utter aloneness with this drama ('Who knows what it's like to be me?') and the self torment of both his interior split between demanding monster and terrified slave ('Don't want to ... Must ... Don't want to can't bear to hear it!') as he covers his ears and screams at the same time, attempting to close out the sound of his own suffering. He holds his head and cries 'I cannot ... I cannot ...' One shudders to think of the scene from his own childhood, what encounter with what past monster he is accessing, what experience of torture he has

been doomed to repeat as he appears to us now, not as an adult, not even as a monster, but as an abject, suffering, abused child.

There is a sort of anticlimax to the film after this point. Not a failure of dramatic construction, which actually gains increasing suspense as Becker's fate is debated. But the curiosity, the mystery surrounding Becker from the beginning of the film, his shadowy oblique existence, has now been exhausted. In Burch's term, he has truly been unveiled before the camera and the audience (of the trial and of the film). He has no more secrets, except the impenetrable ones of human torment and the cycle of cruel madness which both causes it and which responds to it. In effect there is no exit from Becker's drama. Instead of resolution, Becker now becomes an object of discourse. Schranker begins by responding to Becker's performance by taking up a role within it, becoming the monster who wishes to punish Becker, but who also promises some deliverance in supplying a final end, instead of an endless cycle. He repeats his demand that Becker be eliminated, disappear.

The argument offered by the defence attorney occupies a curious place in this array of discourse. There is no question that this figure introduced with comic pretensions and self-irony gains considerable dignity and shows true courage as he defends a liberal position: that Becker is sick and needs to be taken to an asylum, rather than delivered to the rough justice of the mob. Schranker's shrill demand that Becker be snuffed out like a candle⁶² not only recalls Nazi rhetoric of 'living beings unworthy of life', it dwells very much within the paranoid fantasy of Becker's own madness: the punitive parent. The mocking laughter of the mob as the attorney pleads for humanity directly echoes the response to Becker when he first appears. The defence lawyer, however, maintains the reflective and deflating Berlin humour so evident in much of the film, as in his opening statement which refers to Schranker as 'our honorable president ... wanted by the police for three murders'. But it is to the lawyer's arguments that the crowd responds with the clearest antipathions (although in 1931 we should perhaps simply say echoes) of Nazi rhetoric. When he refers to Becker as 'this man', an off screen voice shouts out, 'that is not a man!'

In later years Lang allowed it to be assumed that the film's point of view was that of the defence lawyer, and that *M* was an argument against capital punishment and for the humane treatment of mental patients.⁶¹ In the atmosphere of the film's release this viewpoint was not the most common. Many viewers and reviewers, including liberal or leftist journalists as well as Herr Goebbels, found the film sympathetic to the death penalty and mob justice. In a contemporary review Kraauer attacked these easy interpretations of the film,⁶² stressing the ambiguity of Lang's presentation. Lang seems determined not to make a statement here, but to raise a variety of points of view. And indeed it would seem in the aftermath of Becker's confession no statement is given absolute authority. The defence attorney has rationality, irony and a liberal tradition behind him. Schranker, however, responds to his speech not only with hysteria but also with fear of an endless cycle ('another man-hunt, ... the compulsion all over again and so on and so on to doomsday').

The emotional response comes from a woman who stands and invokes the dead children and their mothers. She ends with a cry that is taken up by the crowd, 'Ask the Mothers!' This final discourse returns us to the primal pain and separation that opened the film, Elsie and her mother. But this image of motherhood is no longer that of the patient, caring, nourishing mother, but of angry, vengeful mothers, the Eumenides: 'ask the mothers, do you think they will have mercy on him?' It is this question which whips the crowd to the highest point of hysteria, not only shouting,

'Kill him. Crush him' but ready to rush into action, to tear him apart. Having separated Elsie and the other children from their loving mothers, Becker now encounters the monstrous mother, the mother-murderer. The faces of the crowd as they call for his murder have become distorted and monstrous, like Becker's own faces in the mirror, or when he acts out the moment of murder and oblivion before the court. According to Dadoun's reading of the mirror imagery in the film, this accords with Becker's driving fantasy, the union of murderer and victim becoming the symbiosis of mother and child, 'M identifies with the child-about-to-be killed, he identifies with the mother-who-must-murder'.⁶³ The courtroom scene again delivers itself up to the primal fantasy of Becker's own murderous cycle, acted out now in public before his eyes.

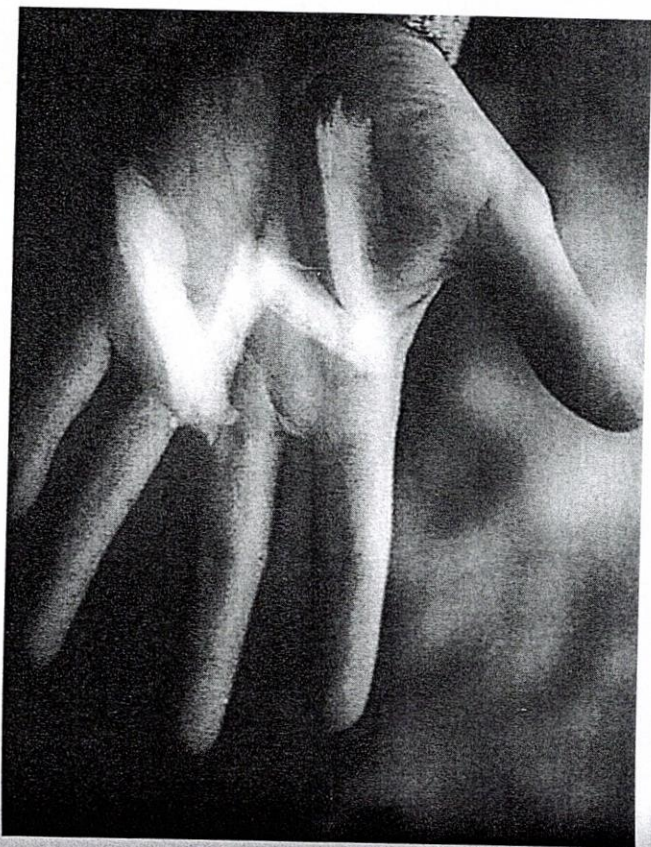
This scene of primal destruction, this *sparagmos* of the guilty one, is interrupted in mid-action by a *coup de cinéma*, another dramatic use of off screen space. The mob rushing towards the off screen Becker suddenly stops in its tracks. With a look off to the left, they all make the same gesture simultaneously, as carefully timed as the masses in *Metropolis*, raising their hands (except Schranker who pointedly delays his gesture a second), as silence fills the cellar. In the following shot, Becker looks bewildered until another hand touches him on the shoulder from off screen (the third in the sequence), and an off screen voice declares, 'in the name of the law'. The apparent restoration of order remains elliptical, dramatic in its effects, incommunicative in its meaning. Lang's final shots emphasise both immediate restoration of order, but also a strong discontinuity. He cuts immediately to a court bench in which the judges sit down to pass sentence, but all we hear is a rhyming complement to the previous voice: 'In the name of the people'. The final verdict is given to the mothers. But the three grieving women who end the film are not the vengeful Eumenides seen in the cellars. The one who looks at the camera and speaks directly to us to end the film is, in fact, Elsie's mother, the caring and nourishing – and now mourning – Frau Beckmann. She says that 'this' (presumably the verdict against Becker and his punishment) will not bring the children back. And as the image fades into the final darkness of the film she says, 'We, too, should keep a closer watch on our children.'

The return of Mrs. Beckmann, takes the film back to its opening, something images and words throughout the final scene in the cellar seem constantly trying to accomplish. It is, of course, the structure of a murder mystery to try throughout its length to get back to the primal act, to clear it up and make sense of it. But *M* denies us that satisfaction. We do indeed learn who committed these murders and we even learn a great deal about what drives him to them. But the structure of the final scenes works against resolution: the courtroom debate is not decided in favour of any one discourse, the rousing to a primitive violence that demands fulfilment in brutal action is stopped in mid-stride, curtailed; the legal process is stopped in mid-sentence. We are only left with the act of grief and mourning and an address to the audience. One feels Frau Beckmann, in the key address to the camera in this film, makes a request to us we are not sure we can fulfil: to watch, to watch more carefully ...

Like *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*, and indeed like all of Lang's German films, *M* exists under the shadow of the Third Reich and the holocaust, one of the last stations on Kraauer's trajectory from *Calligari* to Hitler. The echoes and anticipations of Nazi policies appear everywhere for contemporary viewers of this film: Schranker's leather jacket and cane summon up the image of an SS officer, the rhetoric of final solutions and eliminations of the outsider, the euthanasia of mental patients, Becker's inscribed *M* as the star of David – all recall the Shoah. I believe it is as dangerous

to make these associations automatically as it is to ignore them. Simply to assume an identity between Beckert and the Nazi victims is not only extremely problematic but was also done as a propaganda device by the Nazis themselves. The Nazis banned *M* in 1933, but appropriated a section of Lorre's final monologue in the 1940 racist documentary *The Eternal Jew* to show simultaneously the dominance of the Weimar cinema by Jews (such as 'the Jew actor', Lorre) and as a portrayal of psychotic Jewish behaviour. Goebbels' claim that the film was proto-Nazi ('Lang will be our director') is no more inherently convincing than later claims that the film is anti-Nazi. Kracauer himself recognised the ambiguity of the film, wavering between different attitudes. It is precisely the manner in which the film is pre-Nazi that makes it so complex. The anxieties about modernity and urban life are inventoried. More than ever before Lang grounds these anxieties in the primal fears of ordinary people, a working-class mother rather than a bored countess, a pathetic, childish psychopath rather than a master criminal hypnotist. It is important not to lose the concrete specificity Lang has brought to this film by creating a series of metaphorical substitutions. But as the concrete world portrayed in *M* generated Nazism, it is on this concrete level that the film can speak to us about its heritage.

Within the narrative that Lang fashioned to describe his own relation to the Nazis, whose climax (we have already seen) revolves around *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*, *M* also plays a crucial role. Lang claims that the film's working title, *Murders Among Us*, caused him a number of problems. Anonymous threatening letters were sent and at first the Staaken studio was refused to him as the venue for principal photography. Lang describes the key encounter, once again, in the style of a scene from one of his films. In a heated discussion with the owner of the studio, Lang had grabbed the man by the lapel. Feeling something on the underside, he flipped the lapel over and exposed a Nazi party badge.⁶⁴ I make no claim for



the veracity of this anecdote. It seems a bit too dramatic (why would one have to conceal a Nazi badge at the time, anyway?) to ring true. But its scenography employs not only Langian devices but the new concrete 'objectivity' of *M*, the focus on objects. Lang's discovery functions like a visionary scene. He uncovers what lies behind the opposition to his film: the fears the Nazi party had that his title 'Murders Among Us' referred directly to them, their fear that he, like a Heartfield collage, would expose their monstrous face. But no overlap-dissolve is needed here, no stylised, allegorical imagery: just the object itself, the Nazi badge come out of hiding. As in Lang's allegorical films, the revelation caused a conversion. It was on that day, Lang told Kracauer, that he came of age politically.⁶⁵

Perhaps the most striking thing about *M*'s political vision is its mixture of obscurity and terror, an atmosphere which would persist in *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*, an obsession with fragments, an inability to get a full picture. Although powerful as formal devices, Lang's approaches to the unexpected zones of off screen space in *M* also contrast with the carefully arranged and transcendent visions of the allegorical films, or the grand schemes of the master criminal films. Lang has spoken of his desire in this film to bid farewell to the epic film.⁶⁶ But this issue involves more than scale. Lang's vision becomes more barred, more mediated. Instead of visionary clarifications, however dire their message may have been, we see characters whose vision does not so much penetrate the skin of reality as catch their own desires, fantasies and even their own faces, reflected back to them in distorted and monstrous ways. An obscurity and a sort of blindness enter Lang's cinema from this point on. Lang provides a bitter parody of allegory in Elsie's grotesque balloon that ascends to heaven after her death. At this high point in his career as a film-maker Lang questions the possibility of vision and representation, and shows us a world caught in multiplying the images of its own terror.

- 10 Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: The Seabury Press, 1972), p. 60.
- 11 David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), pp. 59–60.
- 12 Reproduced in Bernard Eisenschitz and Paolo Bertetto (eds.), *Fritz Lang*, p. 122.
- 13 Raymond Bellour, 'Le Regard de Haghi', *iris*, no. 7, second semester, 1986, p. 5.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- 15 *Ibid.*, p. 5.
- 16 René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy in The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 15. French and Latin versions in *Méditations de Prima Philosophia/Méditations métaphysiques* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1960), pp. 23, 24.
- 17 *The Night Watches of Bonaventura*, p. 213.
- 18 Eisner, p. 394.
- 19 This encounter appears in the English language print, but is actually truncated in the generally more complete German prints.
- 20 This connection is less clear in the German version, which locates the microphone in the office of the Japanese spies, Haghi's means of spying on them as they spy on Sonja. The effect is the same, but in the shorter version it is actually more direct.
- 21 Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire*, p. 48.
- 22 Noel Burch, 'Fritz Lang: German Period', pp. 11–17.
- 23 Quoted in Frederick W. Ott, *The Films of Fritz Lang*, p. 148.
- 24 Actually the English language version is more elliptical while the German version devotes more than twenty shots to the period between Tremaine's awakening and the wreck.
- 25 Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or*, vol. I, trans. David and Lilina Swenson (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 30.
- 26 According to the English language print. The German simply has him ask for 'a little music, please'.

Chapter 6: *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*

- 1 Franz Kafka, 'The Great Wall of China', trans. Willa and Edwin Muir, in *The Complete Stories* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971), p. 244.
- 2 This is true of the English language print, the German message does not appear to be in code.
- 3 Sigmund Freud, 'A Note upon the "Mystic Writing-Pad"', *Standard Edition*, vol. XIX, pp. 225–32. This metaphor of Freud's has been the subject, of course, of Jacques Derrida's influential commentary, 'Freud and the Scene of Writing', in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 196–231.
- 4 Nicole Brenez, 'Symptome, exhibition, angoisse', p. 14.
- 5 David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, p. 160.
- 6 Noel Burch, 'Fritz Lang: German Period', pp. 17–20.
- 7 Michel Marie, *M. le Maudit, Fritz Lang Étude critique* (Paris: Nathan, 1993) p. 34.
- 8 Brenez, p. 11.
- 9 Herman Melville, *Moby Dick or The Whale in Romances of Herman Melville* (New York: Tudor Publishing, n.d.), p. 857.
- 10 Siegfried Kracauer reported Lang's claim in *From Caligari to Hitler*, p. 66. Lang repeats the story in 'La nuit viennoise, un confession de Fritz Lang', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 169, August 1965, p. 52, and in Peter Bogdanovich, *Fritz Lang in America*, pp. 63–4.
- 11 Kracauer, pp. 66–7.
- 12 For the imagistic aspect of intertitles and words in German Expressionist films, see Philippe Dubois, 'L'écriture figurale dans le cinéma muet des années 20', in Francesco Prassino and Leonardo Quaresima (eds.), *Scrittura e Immagine: La didascalia nel cinema muto* (Udine: Forum, 1998), especially pp. 75–85.
- 13 Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, trans. Claudia Gorbman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), pp. 31–47.

- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 37.
- 15 *Ibid.*, pp. 37–42.
- 16 Jonathan Crary, 'Dr. Mabuse and Mr. Edison in Russell Ferguson (ed.), *Art and Film Since 1945: Hall of Mirrors* (Los Angeles, CA: Museum of Contemporary Art, 1996), p. 271.
- 17 Chion, p. 42.
- 18 Jorge Luis Borges, 'Death and the Compass' in *Labyrinths*, pp. 86–7.
- 19 *Ibid.*, pp. 17–29.
- 20 Chion offers an insightful analysis of this and the opening phone call as well, pp. 66–73.

Chapter 7: *M. The City Haunted by Demonic Desire*

- 1 Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, p. 44.
- 2 Georg Trakl, *Autumn Sonata*, trans. Daniel Sinko (Mount Kisco, NY: Moyer Bell, 1989), p. 19.
- 3 Noel Burch, 'Fritz Lang: German Period', pp. 20–30 (original version, with diagrams not included in English translation in *Revue d'Esthétique* special number *Cinéma, théorie, lecture*, 1973, pp. 227–48); Roger Dadoun, 'Le pouvoir et "sa" folie', *Positif*, no. 188, December 1976, pp. 13–20; Anton Kaes, 'The Cold Gaze', pp. 105–17. Kaes' forthcoming book for the BFI on *M* promises to develop the rich insights of this essay.
- 4 Noel Burch, 'Fritz Lang: German Period', pp. 21–2.
- 5 *Ibid.*, pp. 20–30.
- 6 Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, pp. 17–18; 30–47.
- 7 Burch, *passim*.
- 8 Thierry Kuntzel, 'The Film Work', *Enlittic*, vol. 2 no. 1, 1978, pp. 40–61; Michel Marie, *M. le Maudit*, pp. 101–16; Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier, *Le Texte divise* (Paris: PUP, 1981), pp. 93–104.
- 9 Marie, p. 101.
- 10 This version, a project of 100 Jahre Kino Europarates and Taurus Films, with image reconstruction by the Munich Film Museum and sound restoration by Donat Keusch and Christian Zaiac will be my principle version, although others have been consulted.
- 11 Kuntzel, p. 41.
- 12 Robert Bresson, *Notes on Cinematography*, trans. Jonathan Griffin (New York: Urizen Books, 1977), p. 21.
- 13 Burch, p. 21, and *passim*.
- 14 Georg Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', in *Of Individuality and Social Forms* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1971), pp. 328–9.
- 15 Thus the restored print. Other prints continue the cries over all the shots, less effectively, in my opinion.
- 16 Kuntzel, p. 59.
- 17 Bertolt Brecht, 'Utterances of a Martyr', trans. John Willet, in *Poems 1913–1956* (New York: Methuen, 1976), p. 15.
- 18 Kuntzel, p. 59.
- 19 Peter Bogdanovich, *Fritz Lang in America*, p. 86.
- 20 *Ibid.*, pp. 28–9.
- 21 Marie, p. 116.
- 22 Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), p. 18.
- 23 Kuntzel, p. 60.
- 24 Lotte Eisner, *Fritz Lang*, p. 109.
- 25 As much for his personal expression of enthusiasm for the film, which I could not take lightly, as for his article, 'La Machine-Cinéma', in *Cinéma et littérature 8: Les Temps des Machines*, Valence, 1990, pp. 49–55.
- 26 R. L. Rausky, 'The Mediation of Technology and Gender', p. 29.
- 27 Jacques Rivette, 'The Hand', p. 141.
- 28 Quoted in Frederick W. Ott, *The Films of Fritz Lang*, p. 148.
- 29 Siegfried Kracauer, *From Caligari to Hitler*, p. 122: photo with caption facing p. 129.

- 30 Kaes, p. 108.
- 31 *Ibid.*, pp. 114–15.
- 32 Burch, p. 23.
- 33 For instance, Burch, p. 23, and *M, a Film by Fritz Lang*, trans. Nicholas Garnham (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), which is based on the transcription from *L'Avant-scène Cinéma*, no. 39, July–August 1964, p. 20.
- 34 And identified by Marie, p. 34, as a characteristic of *M*.
- 35 Burch, p. 24.
- 36 Maria M. Tatar, *Lustmord: Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 158. My good friend and collaborator Travis Preston first alerted me to the significance of the Peer Gynt play to *M*. I am also indebted to his observations about the relation between Becker and the children.
- 37 Henrik Ibsen, *Peer Gynt: A Dramatic Poem*, trans. Peter Watts (London: Penguin Books, 1966), p. 69.
- 38 Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Blackwell, 1991).
- 39 Kaes, pp. 114–15.
- 40 Burch, p. 25; 'De "Mabuse" a "M": Le Travail de Fritz Lang', *Revue d'Esthétique*, special number: Cinéma, théorie, lecture, 1973, p. 237.
- 41 Dadoun, p. 16 (my translation).
- 42 Quoted in Ott, p. 156.
- 43 In 'La nuit viennoise, un confession de Fritz Lang', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no. 169, August 1965, p. 52 (my translation).
- 44 Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1964), pp. 94–5.
- 45 The Mabuse poster appears in Gunter Scholdt (ed.), *Norbert Jacques...*, p. 153. The *Fantomas* film poster appears in 1895: L'année 1913 en France numéro hors série Oct. 1993, p. 244.
- 46 Burch, p. 21.
- 47 Dadoun, p. 19.
- 48 *Ibid.*
- 49 Marie, p. 52.
- 50 Quoted in William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1991), p. 60. Besides being an expert on shop windows, Baum was, of course, the author of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*.
- 51 Kracauer, p. 221.
- 52 See Baum, quoted in Leach, p. 60.
- 53 Eisner makes the point that Lang wanted to say that the ultimate reason for the murders is the unequal distribution of wealth. Frau Beckmann is forever at the tub; hence she has no time to look after Elsie properly or fetch her from school', *Fritz Lang*, p. 128.
- 54 Marie, p. 53.
- 55 Kuntzel, pp. 43–4.
- 56 Quoted in Patrick McGilligan, *The Nature of the Beast*, p. 157.
- 57 Burch, p. 21, p. 29.
- 58 See Ott, p. 155.
- 59 Dadoun, p. 20.
- 60 *Ibid.*
- 61 Higham and Sheenby, *The Celluloid Muse*, p. 123.
- 62 Quoted by Bernard Eisenschitz in his valuable essay 'Le Production, le tournage' in *M le Maudit un film de Fritz Lang* (Paris: Le Cinéma Francais/Editions Plume, 1990), p. 35.
- 63 Dadoun, p. 20.
- 64 The most complete version of this anecdote is told by Lang in Bogdanovich, pp. 126–7.
- 65 Kracauer, p. 219.
- 66 Bogdanovich, p. 20.

Chapter 8: You Ought to Be in Pictures: *Liliom* and *Fury*

- 1 Bertolt Brecht, 'On Thinking about Hell', trans. Nicholas Jacobs, in *Poems 1913–1956*, p. 367.
- 2 *Ibid.*, trans. Frank Jellinek, p. 131.
- 3 The weighing of evidence is done well in Patrick McGilligan, *The Nature of the Beast*, pp. 174–81.
- 4 Curt Riess, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 191.
- 5 Lang's divorce is detailed in *ibid.*, pp. 181–3.
- 6 *Ibid.*, pp. 157–8 and 169–73.
- 7 Noel Burch, *Fritz Lang: German Period*, p. 30. Burch's later reflections are on p. 31.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 3.
- 9 Kristin Thompson, 'Early Alternatives to the Hollywood Mode of Production: Implications for Europe's Avant Gardes', *Film History*, vol. 5 no. 4, December 1993, pp. 386–404.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 388.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 395.
- 12 Lang tells stories of his adjustments to Hollywood procedures in many places. See, for example, Charles Higham and Joel Greenberg, *The Celluloid Muse: Hollywood Directors Speak* (Chicago, IL: Henry Regnery, 1969), p. 106; Peter Bogdanovich, *Fritz Lang in America*, p. 32.
- 13 Theo Lindgren speaks of these detailed 'scenarios' being used during the Berto of *M* and *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*. Quoted in Alfred Eibel (ed.), *Fritz Lang Trois Lumières*, pp. 72–3. Lotte Eisner quotes Lindgren on the same topic, p. 144. A wonderful selection of these diagrams that Lang prepared for *The Big Heat* has been published in Gerard Leblanc and Brigitte Devismes, *Le Double Scénario chez Fritz Lang* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1991). Several related plans are reproduced in Bernard Eisenschitz and Paolo Bertetto (eds), *Fritz Lang: La mise en scène, for The Woman in the Window*, p. 281; *Clock and Dagger*, p. 306; *Rancho Notorious*, p. 357; *The Blue Gardenia*, p. 371; and *Moonfleet*, p. 396.
- 14 Such sketches, some in Lang's hand, some in those of his art directors, are reproduced in *ibid.*: *Die Nibelungen*, pp. 78, 82, 84; *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*, pp. 90, 152–8; *M*, 149–51; *Man Hunt*, pp. 232, 237; *Ministry of Fear*, p. 267; *The Woman in the Window*, p. 281; *Clock and Dagger*, p. 307; *Rancho Notorious*, pp. 347, 349, 351; *Moonfleet*, pp. 394–5. The art directors' sketches for *Man Hunt* have been published in Bernard Eisenschitz, *Manhunt de Fritz Lang* (Paris: Editions Yellow Now, 1992), pp. 147–253.
- 15 Such accounts are numerous. For a sampling, see McGilligan, pp. 243–4, 265 (Henry Fonda); p. 254 (Syvia Sidney); p. 311 (Edward G. Robinson); p. 338 (Lilli Palmer); p. 359 (Michael Redgrave). Perhaps most vivid is Marlene Dietrich's description in the interview film, *Marlene* (1983) by Maximilian Schell of Lang chalking her marks in *Rancho Notorious*, but doing it based on his six foot stride rather than her considerably smaller one.
- 16 Manny Farber, 'White Elephant Art vs Termite Art', in *Negative Space: Manny Farber on the Movies* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), pp. 134–44; Lang is quoted in Bogdanovich, p. 20.
- 17 Walter Benjamin, 'Commentaries on Poems by Brecht', in *Understanding Brecht*, trans. Anna Bostock (London: NLB, 1977) p. 60.
- 18 Brecht, 'Jan 19, 1942', *Journals 1934–55*, trans. Hugh Morrison, ed. John Willett (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 193.
- 19 Lang, quoted in Bogdanovich, p. 38.
- 20 Brecht, *Poems 1913–1956*, p. 131.
- 21 See details of the pre-production for *Liliom* in McGilligan, pp. 193–6.
- 22 *Ibid.*, p. 197.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p. 199.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 201.
- 25 Bernard Eisenschitz, 'Le Production, le tournage', p. 23. McGilligan, p. 190, seems to cast doubts on whether this script actually dated from this earlier period, which the reference Eisenschitz turned up in *Kinematograph* from 1929 should settle (McGilligan, following Eisner