

M: Leading the Blind



*This article derives from a long association in which, separately and together, we have explored Lang's interest in what George M. Wilson describes, in his remarkable discussion of *You Only Live Once*, as 'the ways in which film may enhance and complicate our difficulties of seeing the world accurately by leading perception and conviction astray' (1986: 38). Iris Lippa's Ph.D research on Lang's German films, which began in 1996, led us into an extended dialogue about these matters. Douglas Pye's original article on *M*, intended for the *MOVIE* book on Fritz Lang, was written at this time; in returning to the film after a decade it seemed logical to revise the article collaboratively for publication here. What follows is a companion piece to work in which we have individually pursued related concerns, including Pye's articles on *The Blue Gardenia* and *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt* (1988; 1993) and Lippa's study *Weimar Cinema* (2009).*

Lang's first sound film – long celebrated as a classic of world cinema – remains enigmatic and troubling. Child murder drives the narrative yet we see more of its effect on the public and the criminal underworld than on those most immediately affected. The film follows a police investigation, some of which is presented in quasi-factual, procedural mode, but parallels this with the underworld's pursuit of the

murderer, an aspect of the film which owes more to the world of *The Threepenny Opera* than to any plausible representation of contemporary criminality. The mix of dramatic modes is accompanied by an unusual variety of film styles and extraordinary shifts of tone, including satirical and even broadly comic incidents that are unexpected in a film dealing with such crimes. The dramatic structure, described by Anton Kaes as 'an accumulation of autonomous scenes' (1999: 35), denies us any consistent involvement with characters: Tom Gunning comments that 'The film's lack of an immediately identifiable protagonist who organizes the point of view of the film marks its greatest difference from previous Lang films' (2000: 164). Strikingly, when in its final sections the film does give us reasonably extended access to a character, it is to the child murderer. When he is put on trial it is by the criminal underworld and it is here that arguments about guilt, punishment and diminished responsibility are heard; orthodox judicial process is no more than glimpsed in the remarkable ellipses of the film's ending. A further significant factor in one's experience of the film is that it is the most formally adventurous and stylistically self-conscious of Lang's German films. *M* delights in its own modernism and its exploration of the possibilities of synchronised sound, so that the spectator is constantly aware of views, juxtapositions, sound bridges, shaped for

his / her perception. Stylistically, it is an extraordinarily playful film.¹

This curious mixture poses significant questions about the kind of film *M* is and how it wants to be taken. Gunning begins his chapter on *M* by noting ‘The complexity and originality of its structure, the studied ambiguity and ambivalence of its themes ...’ (2000: 163). Indeed, the challenges of understanding the film’s relationship to its material can be observed as early as the reviews that followed its opening in May 1931. Gabriele Tergit in *Die Weltbühne* described *M* as ‘A song of praise to the antisocial, a song of praise to men of violence’, and accused it of ‘The most insidious romanticisation of the criminal milieu! Taking the law into one’s own hands is depicted as right and proper’ ([1931] 2001: 148). She also reported the ‘thunderous applause’ (150) from spectators that greeted objections from the assembled criminals in the film to Beckert’s plea of diminished responsibility. Others deplored what they saw as a lack of moral responsibility: in the left wing *Arbeiterbühne und Film*, Karl Tölle wrote ‘He immediately engrosses us in the ghastly atmosphere of murder, creating excitement for his unsuspecting audience [...] no moral or ideological standards anywhere’ (1931: 251).² Herbert Ihering argued that the romanticised representation of the criminals, so much at odds with the sober presentation of police work, made it impossible for the film to debate the topical issue of the death penalty seriously, and he commented laconically on the film’s equivocation: ‘For or against the death penalty? Sometimes for, sometimes against’ (1931).³ Rudolf Arnheim, while particularly criticising Tergit’s response to the film, accused the filmmakers of indifference to their subject: ‘the tastelessness in Lang’s film is not to be found in the chosen theme [...] [but] in the fact that one senses how little these filmmakers were moved by the theme [...] Their earnestness and their work do justice to the craft [...] but never to the subject’ ([1931] 2001: 152).

Yet at the centre of the film are events to which our responses are likely to be entirely unambiguous and that provide a baseline of revulsion and moral outrage on which the whole film rests. Less straightforward, as the reviews imply, are the film’s dramatisation of and attitudes to what follows the murders, notably the juxtaposition of police and underworld pursuits of the murderer, his extra-judicial trial, the claims of diminished responsibility and arguments for capital punishment. In the film’s world, as often in our own, feelings run high on such matters but Lang and his collaborators embed this morally and emotionally fraught material in a dramatic structure and a mixture of style and tone that seem designed to destabilise, to make it difficult to keep one’s bearings.

Robin Wood, among others, associates the film’s methods of ‘interruption, juxtaposition, irony’ with the pervasive influence of Bertolt Brecht, implying the disruption of conventional relationships between spectator and drama for particular ideological ends (2000: 5). We will touch on the influence of Brecht later but suggest that in significant ways Lang’s appropriation of Brechtian practice was critical and questioning, that while his interest in the relationship between film and spectator parallels Brecht’s concern with challenging conventional viewing habits, their methods and the beliefs that underpin them are very different. Thomas Elsaesser’s perceptive observation that ‘[...] where Brecht sharpens the conflict until a contradiction is produced, Lang is determined to demonstrate the inevitable fallibility of the seen’ (1997: 30), points towards some of the potential hazards for the spectator that are embedded in the material and methods of the film.⁴ Our approach to the challenges of *M*

centres on the film’s serious play on the complex and sometimes conflicting dynamics – cognitive, moral, aesthetic, emotional – of audience response.

Our initial focus, however, will be on the motif of blindness – not the ‘fallibility of the seen’ but the absence of sight – for its metaphorical force both within the film’s world and in relation to Lang’s view of spectatorship. This is in some respects an oblique approach, at first paying little attention to the aspects of *M* that are likely to dominate our early responses – the murders, the murderer, the paralleling of police and criminals, the ‘courtroom’ drama.

We first encounter a blind man – the balloon seller (Georg John), a placard reading ‘Blind’ round his neck – early in the film when Elsie Beckmann (Inge Landgut), on her way home from school, is bought a balloon by the man whom we will come to know as Beckert (Peter Lorre). We are shown only Beckert’s shadow and his back at this stage, and of course the balloon seller is unable to see him at all,



though he hears – and will later crucially recall – the tune Beckert whistles. It is in fact a major conceit of the film to make a blind character the crucial witness and to give him, later in the film, the key function of identifying Beckert. In an early sound film there is a splendid appropriateness in identification through an audible clue (one of many examples of Lang’s inventive use of sound in its relationship to

image) but there is nothing inevitable about the link to blindness.

Two other scenes which focus directly on blindness occur in the section of the film illustrating the underworld's plan to place members of its beggars' branch on every street and in every courtyard of the city as an unobtrusive surveillance network intended to trap the child murderer. In the first of the two episodes, near the beginning of the section, there is a cut from money dropping onto the ground near a barrel organ to a shot of feet (apparently those of a man and a girl) pausing near the outstretched legs of a beggar and a coin being tossed into a cap on the pavement. The next shot shows us the upper body and head of the beggar, his blindness signaled by dark glasses and a placard reading 'Blind', as he thanks the passers-by. He then lifts his glasses and stares intently out of frame left after the man and girl. Lang cuts to a tracking shot which, although not the beggar's optical point of view, shows us the off-screen space into which the beggar was looking, and we follow the man and girl to a school, outside which another beggar is stationed, where they kiss each other goodbye and the girl moves towards the school's entrance.



The second incident comes a little later, after intervening scenes which illustrate the police's parallel plan to check on all recently released mental patients, and that show Beckert leaving the building in which he lives, then a policeman searching his room, and Inspector Lohmann (Otto Wernicke) identifying a possible link between Beckert and one of the murders. Lang cuts from Lohmann to the blind balloon seller. He is framed in medium shot, the left side of the frame filled with his wares, the right side initially with a woman buying a balloon. Out of frame, sometimes quite audible, at others almost fading away, we hear the same whistled tune from Edward Grieg's 'In the Hall of the Mountain King' (part of his incidental music for *Peer Gynt*) that earlier accompanied the buying of the balloon for Elsie and the writing, apparently by the murderer, of a letter to the press. The balloon seller stiffens as he appears to register the whistling. He says to himself, 'That's funny, I've heard that somewhere before', the camera moves towards him as he simultaneously steps forward and we infer from his body language that he has made the link to when he previously heard the whistling. The camera moves left ahead of him as he feels his way along the pavement and calls out 'Hello ... Heinrich ...'. A young man (Carl Balhaus) appears, ducks under a wooden guard rail in the foreground, joins the bal-

loon seller, and there is a rapid dolly in as the balloon seller asks the young man whether he can hear whistling and both turn their heads intently frame left. Heinrich reports that he sees a man approaching a little girl and walking up the road with her and the balloon seller urges him not to lose sight of them: 'The day little Elsie Beckmann was killed, a man bought a balloon for a little child he had with him' (Heinrich runs out of frame left) '... he whistled just like that one there'. On this occasion there is no cut to show us the off-screen space. Lang holds the two men in matching profile – the sighted man looking out of frame, the blind man straining towards the source of the sound – but denies us a view of what the young man sees by maintaining the single long take in which the whole scene is presented.



The two scenes seem deliberately paralleled and contrasted. There is the contrast between fake and authentic blind men, plus an accompanying visual emphasis on the signifiers of blindness (placards and dark glasses), the appearance of which in the first of the two episodes is sufficient to convince passers-by (and initially to convince us?) but turns out to be no guarantee of sightlessness.

Before developing the contrasts between the two episodes, one other incident involving the balloon seller is worth mentioning as a further variation on the relationship between sightlessness and sound. In the section of the film

that introduces the beggars' organisation, there is a cut from the process of allocating individual beggars their surveillance areas across the city to a man turning the handle of a barrel organ and producing a tuneless cacophony. The balloon seller, sitting at a table drinking beer, covers his ears against the painful noise and the sound also stops on the soundtrack; he uncovers them, it starts again; he covers them and it stops; he uncovers them and the barrel organ is now playing a tune, to which the beggar responds delightedly. As the only example of obviously subjective sound in the film, this is striking, but can seem little more than an amusing, if rather heavy-handed, foregrounding of the new medium. Without overburdening it with significance, we can note that this is another moment in which the film plays with and draws attention to restrictions of perception. The blind beggar cannot choose to see but he can choose not to hear.

The sequences with the fake and genuine blind beggars are contrasted in their visual organisation, as we have seen: in one we follow a gaze into off-screen space, in the other we don't; in one Lang allows us to see what there is to be seen, in the other he doesn't. Conventions that order the relationships between on- and off-screen space are central to narrative cinema: it is one of its fundamental conditions that, as V. F. Perkins writes in his discussion of fictional worlds, 'There is always an out-of-sight just as there is always an off-screen' (2005: 22). Here Lang plays on that basic fact: we follow the look of the sighted beggar but – perhaps because a blind man cannot see – 'off-screen' in the second scene remains 'out-of-sight'. Of a moment from Lang's *You Only Live Once* in which we observe two characters looking out of frame at a car leaving – action that we hear but do not see – Perkins observes that it is 'an innocent example of our being led to understand more than we have seen' (23): we accept that in the film's world there is a car and that the characters are looking at it. We can say something similar of the 'innocence' of these moments in *M*. From their manner together and fond parting outside the school we may infer that the man and girl are father and daughter and that the fake blind beggar's initial suspicion is unwarranted. In the other scene, there is a gap between what is heard and what is seen, or rather between what we hear and what we do not see. Heinrich reports that he sees a man with a young girl and the whistled tune encourages us to imagine the man as Beckert. Neither of these scenes makes inference and interpretation at all problematic; they draw on habitual processes by which we attempt to make sense of what we are shown in movies.

In his discussion of the sequence from *You Only Live Once* Perkins shows how, on the basis of 'the innocent example', Lang develops 'a variation on the film's themes of perception and prejudice' (23) as we observe the different attitudes of Father Dolan (William Gargan) and the lawyer Whitney (Barton MacLane) to the action that they are witnessing. Although the differences in our spatial orientation to the two scenes in *M* remain relatively unemphatic, what gives them significance is that differential visual access forms the basis for variations in what the film seems to require of us. Lang anchors the scenes in the imagery of blindness and makes of each a little illustration of how sense is made – the relationship, structured here in contrasting uses of on- and off-screen space, between predisposition, the evidence of our eyes or ears, and the assumptions invited or drawn. Understanding 'more than we have seen', at its apparently most innocent and unavoidable, can become the baseline for exploring more problematic processes of making sense.

It is significant in this connection that the effect of one of the founding sequences of the film – the celebrated elliptical treatment of Elsie's murder – is rooted in inference ('the classic example of violence by inference in Lang', as Elsaesser calls it [2000: 163]), shots of the rolling ball and released balloon caught in the telegraph wires evoking an act which is left to our imaginations. Clearly, it was not part of Lang's purpose (even if censorship had allowed) to show the slaughter of children. Some kind of oblique treatment is therefore essential. But it is part of the strength of the design that this basic condition of the production should also become part of a wider complex of meaning and point of view. Elsie's death is a fundamental fact of the film but Lang creates this establishing event for the plot and for our relationship to the film's world by requiring us to infer from fragmentary images the nature of an act we do not witness. Such processes are essential to our grasp of the world offered to us by the film (and of the world in which we live), but they are also vulnerable to the vagaries of imagination, suspicion, fear, prejudice and desire. This is not to argue that the film invites us to doubt either Elsie's death or Beckert's guilt but that care is taken to establish a gap between evidence and conclusion. It is in the nature of these processes that we and/or the characters could be mistaken – too ready to fill perceptual gaps or draw conclusions that turn out to be insecurely founded. Lang's variations on this theme hint at possible dilemmas for the spectator. What can we be said to *know* and how is this 'knowledge' founded?

These are questions that are central to any narrative of investigation (which is what *M* is, at least in part). Detection is a matter of accumulating evidence that will eventually point unambiguously to the guilty person: there should finally be a minimal step from evidence to conclusion. Lang tackles a cluster of subjects here that were to recur frequently in his work: investigation; judicial process; evidence and argument; the seductive but inconclusive nature of circumstantial evidence; prejudice, persuasion and proof (see, for instance, *Fury*, *You Only Live Once*, *The Blue Gardenia*, *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*). The painstaking work of detection is the major subject of the third section of the film, the police commissioner (Ernst Stahl-Nachbaur)'s description of police procedure in a telephone conversation with an irate government minister (Franz Stein). Significantly, as we will see, the investigative processes are presented as systematic and scientific, and illustrated in a style akin to documentary. It is a strong convention of detection narratives, though, that there will be moments at which the investigator makes a breakthrough – suddenly 'sees' through the tangle of evidence and events – and it is characteristic of Lang's rigour that in *M* these conventional moments should be treated with scepticism.

Two episodes are juxtaposed. In the first, Inspector Lohmann is listening to a subordinate reading out a list of items found in searches conducted in the homes of recently released mental patients, part of the police's desperate trawl to trace the killer. At the mention of an Ariston cigarette packet found in the waste bin of Hans Beckert's apartment, Lohmann, framed in medium shot at his desk, gestures for the reader to stop, slowly repeats the word 'Ariston' and traces it in mid-air with his finger. The camera moves to a tighter framing in three stages, the movement accentuating Lohmann's mental struggle to find the connection that Ariston has triggered, until the moment of realisation signalled by a change of expression from furrowed concentration to sudden recognition. As Lohmann then 'phones for the file on the Marga Perlkamp murder, Lang cuts to the blind balloon seller in the scene already discussed and moves into



Lohmann makes the connection between 'Ariston' and the killer.

closer framing as the beggar reaches for and finally makes his connection.

The juxtaposition of the two moments performs key narrative functions – police and criminal underworld almost simultaneously link Beckert to the murders and the film moves from detection to pursuit. While the parallel actions can appear to validate both the apparently systematic procedures of the police and the city-wide surveillance operated by the underworld, Lang's treatment highlights – even demonstrates – that these are precisely the necessary, conventional, moments of insight, rather than revelations of truth. On the one hand the links seem deliberately thin: a popular cigarette brand found in two locations, a tune whistled twice in the street, add up to ... what? A fingerprint, for instance, might have appeared more decisive. Anton Kaes observes: 'From a strictly legal point of view, Beckert is prosecuted for a crime for which there is no conclusive evidence. We never see him commit a crime, there are no witnesses, we do not even see a victim. [...] The identification of a blind man based on a few whistled fragments of music has nothing to do with the murder per se and the cigarette butts and pencil shavings are, at best, circumstantial evidence' (1999: 72).

The direction of the actors and staging of both moments for the camera are also striking. The actors externalise in graphic gesture and facial expression the mental processes involved in ransacking the memory and capturing the fugitive link, while Lang parallels the visual treatments using extended takes and camera movement – the camera's three part approach to Lohmann timed to his dawning realization, the balloon seller drawn into closer framing by a combination of the camera advancing and his movement forward. The grading of performance accentuates the struggle to recall and, particularly in Lohmann's case, the camera underscores – quite heavily – the significance of what we are witnessing. In the context of Lang's remarkable overall control of tone, this rhetorical enhancement, together with the neat paralleling of the episodes, suggests not endorsement but a quizzical – even ironic – attitude towards these moments of insight.

The hazards of perception and their potentially tangled relationships with knowledge, evidence and inference are more overtly dramatised in a number of scenes. Towards the end of the long section structured by the telephone conversation between the police commissioner and government minister we are shown two members of the public in a police office violently disagreeing on the colour ('Red!' / 'Green!') of the hat worn by a child they had seen in the street. It is offered by the commissioner as an example of the difficulties the police labour under but Lang plays up the absurdity of the episode by the intensity of the disagree-

ment, the certainty of the men in the reliability of their memories and by intercutting close-ups of each man vehemently asserting his favoured colour directly into camera. The scene ends with a reference to another form of visual impairment when one of the men responds to the policeman's 'It's hopeless' with, 'Of course, inspector, if you listen to a colour-blind man ...'. Lang dramatises both the unreliability of eye-witness testimony and the total confidence of each man in what they saw. This scene is echoed and generalised later, in the section of cross-cutting between the meetings of police and criminals, when Lohmann contemptuously dismisses the public as a source of any useful information: 'What the devil have we gained so far from public cooperation? Piles of letters with the most unbelievable slanders. They call the murder squad whenever a chimney sweep walks by'.⁵

Rather more enigmatically, an earlier episode in the commissioner's narration poses related problems of what can be made of what we see. As the commissioner mentions that a graphologist is examining the murderer's letter to the press, we see the expert at work. The graphologist, who wears very dark glasses, examines the letter and dictates his conclusions to a secretary while he paces from side to side in the frame against a background of endless filing drawers. As we hear his account of the sexual pathology he believes to be revealed by the killer's handwriting, Lang inserts a shot of Beckert looking at himself in a mirror – our first view of his face. While the graphologist's voice talks of his 'exhibitionism', 'indolence' and 'lethargy', Beckert gradually changes his expression, finally contorting his face by pulling down the corners of his mouth as the voice describes





how the letter gives an overall impression of ‘profound insanity’.

The commissioner’s narration places all the episodes he describes in what appears to be a factual context (the style draws on the contemporary *Neue Sachlichkeit* [New Objectivity] movement). As Lotte Eisner, among others, suggests, the whole section has a ‘documentary’ feel to it (1976: 116): we are presented with apparently objective accounts, guided by the Commissioner’s voice-over, of scrupulous police searches, the scrutiny of fingerprints, the attempt to trace the purchase of a bag of sweets that might lead to the murderer – the systematic apparatus of contemporary policing. If we understand what the film is offering us in this way, there is no need to raise questions about the status of what the commissioner says or what we are shown. But perhaps ideas of objectivity and documentary need to be cautiously invoked.

The shot of Beckert is the only one in the whole section that breaks with the system whereby what we see appears to illustrate what the Commissioner is describing. Presented in visual juxtaposition with the graphologist’s interpretation of Beckert’s letter, the insert has an entirely different status to the rest of the section. Is it intended to illustrate the conclusions drawn by the graphologist – Beckert as actor, for instance? Or even to confirm, as we watch Beckert’s facial contortions, the insanity of which the graphologist speaks? This would tend to validate the skill of the graphologist. The immediate context of the commissioner’s account, with its various ‘documentary’ accompaniments, make this at least a possible, and perhaps a likely, reading, in our early encounters with the film. Understood in this way, we might find in Beckert / Lorre’s face, accompanied by the graphologist’s guiding voice, a confirmation of what a child murderer *ought* to look like, the logical extension of the film’s earlier evocations of the murderer – the children’s chant about the bogeyman with a meat cleaver as the film opens, Beckert’s shadow looming uncannily over Elsie, the public panic after reports of Elsie’s death.

A more sceptical interpretation is also possible. Lang’s other insert, as the graphologist paces up and down, is a close-up of the letter itself – one of several documents presented in close-up during the film. The purpose of the insert could be purely illustrative, but it also implicitly poses the question of what the letter might be made to mean. Can it sustain the elaborate claims made by the graphologist? This episode comes much earlier in the film than that involving the fake blind beggar, but in relation to the images of im-

paired vision already discussed the dark glasses worn by the graphologist also take on suggestive force.

A sceptical response to the episode might be that we should be wary of the graphologist’s apparently remarkable talent. Instead of deriving his conclusions from the evidence of the note itself, might he, for instance, be interpreting the handwriting in the light of the crimes, projecting onto the letter his prior knowledge of the murders and constructing a plausible image of the person responsible? How can he (and we) be sure that this is *not* what he is doing? Such scepticism might also lead us to be careful in responding to the shot of Beckert and to resist the temptation to see in his face what the graphologist claims to find in the letter. Breaking the systems of the section overall by inserting the shot of Beckert / Lorre carries an implicit challenge to examine what we see and what we hear and to be cautious as to what we make of them.

The purpose of juxtaposing these episodes by wrenching them out of their place in the film’s narrative flow has been to argue the role of blindness as the extreme embodiment – and a potent image – of disabled perception, in a film that connects blindness to pervasive but less immediately obvious forms of impaired ‘vision’. Thomas Elsaesser’s discussion of Lang’s German films does not extend to *M* but as he argues: ‘To see, to know, to believe: this is the triad whose contending claims on perception and reason the radical sceptic in Lang never ceases to play off against each other’ (2000: 150).

An overview of Lang’s work suggests that these are among his recurrent concerns. Blind people and those who feign blindness appear in other Lang films: fake blind men in *Four Around the Woman* (1920), *Spione* (1928), *Ministry of Fear* (1944) and *The 1000 Eyes of Dr. Mabuse*; a blind pencil seller next to the bank during the robbery in *You Only Live Once* (1937) and a blind flower seller who hears the sound of a taffeta dress in *The Blue Gardenia* (1952). However, as we are finding in *M*, these representations of blindness or pretended blindness form only part of a wider network of concerns with the limited perception and understanding of characters whose various forms of not seeing are a major subject of his films. Studies of some of Lang’s American films have shown how their systems of point of view extend such challenges to understanding and judgment to the spectator. *You Only Live Once*, *The Blue Gardenia* and *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*, for instance, use seemingly unproblematic access to the film’s world to lure us into judgements based on an illusory sense of epistemological and moral security. (Wilson 1986; Pye 1988 and 1993).

Such methods are not to be found in every Lang movie but they provoke questions about spectatorship that need to be asked of all his films. In these American films Lang seems intent on creating positions for the spectator which parallel the fallibility and insecurity of characters within the film – interrogating, in effect, the secure viewing position which narrative films often seem to provide. But it is of the essence in each case that our security should not, for most of the films’ duration, be overtly undermined and that it should be all but impossible to achieve a viewing position which could lead us to perceive and therefore escape Lang’s traps. In *M*, the epistemic and inferential dimensions of the film are accompanied by a range of other decisions (some obvious, others less so) designed to challenge our responses.

In *M*’s second section, as news of Elsie’s murder spreads, a crowd gathers around a poster offering a reward for information about the killing of eight children in the city and public alarm and panic are dramatised in four brief

scenes, each linked by a sound bridge carrying words from one scene to the next. A group of middle-aged and elderly men sit around a table drinking beer while one of their number reads from his newspaper the continuation of the poster's warning to parents; one of the listeners vehemently accuses another of being the murderer because he has been seen looking at a girl upstairs in his apartment block. A couple's flat is being visited by the police because of an anonymous letter. A respectable-looking man in the street is asked the time by a young girl and rapidly surrounded by an accusing crowd. A pickpocket arrested on a tram complains that the police should be busy catching the murderer but his words are misheard by passers-by who move in threateningly, thinking the murderer has been caught. Each scene dramatises the slender basis of the suspicions, and the first, third and fourth emphasise the irrational leaps to accusation. While the issues dramatised are clearly serious, not least in the potential consequences for the falsely accused, Lang chooses to satirise public responses and deploys broad comedy by creating the men in the bar as grotesques and intercutting high and low angle POV shots which offer us the respectable man in the street and a burly accuser as diminutive and gigantic extremes.

This is a startling change of tone and dramatic method from the film's opening movement, which begins with children chanting a gruesome playground rhyme (the film's first – but purely aural – evocation of the murderer, 'The man in black' with his 'Little chopper') and ends with the two shots – of the ball rolling out of a bush and of the balloon trapped in telegraph wires – that signal Elsie's death. Intercut with Elsie's journey from school we see her mother (Ellen Widman) preparing lunch as she awaits her daughter's return: a world of family and domestic routine that is about to be brutally disrupted. For the domestic and street scenes the film draws, as it does in the police procedure episodes, on the *Neue Sachlichkeit* style, depicting in a sober, factual manner details of the everyday. Frau Beckman herself is not created as a particularly appealing or attractive figure. Yet we can observe and are encouraged to respond to her smile as she anticipates Elsie's return and the love that eloquently suffuses the routine preparations for her daughter's meal. The cross-cutting from Frau Beckman to Elsie also generates anxiety, a strong sense of pathos, and ultimately dread as Lang invokes a quite different stylistic register with Beckert's ominous shadow falling across the poster telling of children abducted on which Elsie bounces her ball.

Then, abruptly, this individual focus is displaced: scenes that are implied by what follows and could have formed plausible developments of the narrative – the discovery of Elsie's body, police response to the crime, Frau Beckman receiving news of Elsie's death – are withheld. The opening movement is charged with the horror of a child's murder and knowledge of family tragedy, but the sudden shift of mode and focus seems calculated to make this personal dimension of response difficult to sustain. As the film begins to dramatisate first public panic and then the fascinating spectacle of police and criminals pursuing the murderer, one challenge to the spectator is to remember Elsie and her mother.

In ways that parallel the opening section, the episodes illustrating public panic detach us spatially and cognitively from the people we observe – for instance by the use of overhead shots and yoking incidents together through sound bridges and cutting between disparate locations. The effects here, however, are very different. We may have been, like the public in the film, transfixed and caught up in extreme emotions provoked by Elsie's murder but these scenes are

designed to induce ridicule and repudiation, not fellow feeling. In some of the episodes both the comic / grotesque construction of character and absurd nature of the suspicions voiced make it only too easy to feel morally superior to the limited specimens Lang presents. Implicitly encouraged to feel a smug detachment from what we witness in these scenes, we have already been 'innocently' involved in processes of inference that are satirised in much more extreme forms in these episodes. As the film goes on our ability to respond more rationally than the public will be severely tested.

Some of the reasons for not regarding the police procedure section, structured by the Commissioner's telephone conversation with the minister, as 'documentary' have already been discussed. Looked at in the wider contexts of the film we can also see how material circumstances inform what the commissioner says. The minister is putting intense political pressure on the police; the commissioner's account is not simply a description but a justification (with more than a hint of complacency about it) of police action in the context of their failure to find the murderer. We will see shortly how normal criminal business for the underworld is severely disrupted as a result of the murders. It is clear that for both the police and criminals moral outrage is far from the dominant motive in their drive to catch the murderer. However, by seeming un-rhetorical the 'documentary' methods themselves carry powerful persuasive force. This section is much less obviously loaded in terms of viewpoint than the episodes representing public panic but both appear to offer unproblematic viewing positions. One effect of our seemingly unrestricted viewpoint, the moral superiority we have been encouraged to feel, and the way in which we are drawn into the intricacies of police procedure, is to discourage suspicion of the film's narration. Although *M* behaves in some respects unlike many narrative movies, we have no immediately obvious reason to mistrust the journey on which the film is taking us.

The raid on the Crocodile Club flows seamlessly from the Commissioner's descriptions: extensive police activity is initially described in voice-over, which gives way as the raid sequence develops to several almost silent shots of police gathering in the streets and then to increasing diegetic sound. The views of police activity prepare for parallels to be drawn with the criminals and the systematic way in which the underworld sets up its surveillance network. There is also a further change in the film's style to incorporate more extended scenes and continuity editing. The scenes are correspondingly more character-based, with the introduction of Lohmann in the raid on the Club and his structural opposite, Schränker (Gustav Gründgens), in the next sequence, as well as other individualised policemen and criminals. Although Lang's *mise-en-scène* and editing are by no means transparent, we are led into closer association with characters and action.

A key effect of this process once the raid starts is to encourage us to engage more with the underworld than with the police, who are made to seem an oppressive presence by their sheer numbers – far more than seems justified by a local raid. By contrast the criminals, after initial attempts to escape from the basement club, are on the whole good-natured in their responses to the police, reacting with humour and resignation rather than aggression. The sequence ends in dialogue between a police sergeant and the bar's proprietress (played by the popular actress Rosa Valetti, who had been Mrs. Peachum in the 1928 production of *The Threepenny Opera*) in which she complains that the nightly raids are ruining trade and dissociates the criminals from the



murderer by asserting their humanity: ‘... the girls may walk the streets – that’s business – but each one shares a mother’s feelings ... and plenty of crooks go sappy when they see kids playing’. This dialogue is immediately preceded by a pan along a large display of weapons and property confiscated in the raid. The whole scene seems designed to discourage a censorious attitude to the criminal activities represented by this array; the culminating dialogue – given added weight by the casting – more specifically asserts the underworld’s essential difference from the murderer, humanising the criminal fraternity while demonising the killer.

While police and criminals are clearly differentiated, the film has established a basis for one of its central aims – a gradual erosion of the conventional moral distinction between underworld and law enforcement, a process which intensifies in the sequences that follow. Instead of remaining largely with the police, as we might expect in a story of the pursuit of a murderer, the film balances the previous police sequences with scenes of underworld characters and action, so that police and criminals begin to receive equivalent weight in the dramatic structure. The normalising of the criminal world continues in the meeting of ‘section heads’, another continuity sequence, in the first section of which four men – a card sharp (Fritz Odemar), a pickpocket (Paul Kemp), a con man (Theo Lingen) and burglar (Friedrich

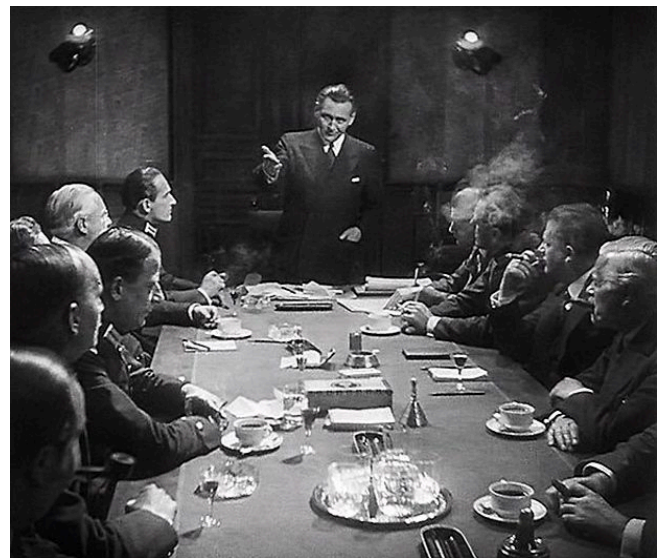
Lang intercuts between the meetings of criminals and police.



Gnass) – wait for their chief to arrive. As with the proprietress, the section heads are played by actors popular with the contemporary audience, and their dialogue and action disarmingly suggest petty bourgeois professionals proud of their crafts. When the notorious Schränkler (Gunter Gründgens) arrives – ‘The best man between Berlin and Frisco’, according to the card sharp – he calls the meeting formally to order as though in a company boardroom. The underworld is revealed as a business empire as organised as the police and as capable of taking co-ordinated action in defence of its interests, which are threatened by the police pursuit of the child murderer.

The paralleling of the two organisations is probably the most remarked-upon formal feature of *M*, and there is a strong consensus among critics that Lang intends, in Nicholas Garnham’s words, ‘to equate these two groups’ (Garnham 1968: 9).⁶ The image of a world dominated by two huge organisations or power blocks recurs frequently in Lang’s films and from its earliest versions in his master criminal movies the two are seen to have a good deal in common. But the significance of the relationship between parallel and opposition varies from film to film and context to context. In *M*, the fact that a child murderer intervenes as a third force provides a moral extreme guaranteed to produce revulsion in the audience and to qualify the conventional moral opposition between the ‘ordinary’ criminals and the police. In Lang’s final American film, *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*, the ethics of capital punishment are central to the plot of having an innocent man convicted for a murder he did not commit but the death penalty functions to provide the most extreme possible focus for the film’s more central interests.⁷ Child murder in *M* works similarly in this respect, not as the film’s central subject but to create a context in which the familiar moral landscape can be destabilised. This is the heart of the trap which the film sets for its audience.

It is sprung in the bravura passage of intercutting between the meetings of criminals and police, in which Lang uses direct cuts between increasingly smoke-filled rooms, matching movement and position, sometimes accompanied by sound bridges with lines begun in one room and completed in another, to create parallels between the two groups, while building the two dialogues in similar stages from the initial request for suggestions, through deadlock, to Schränkler’s and Lohmann’s proffered solutions. From the





cut by which the police commissioner appears to complete Schränker's expansive gesture and line as he opens the discussion for suggestions, Lang initially alternates shots – all static and of similar scale – of speakers in each room standing to propose courses of action. The action in the two spaces diverges to some extent but the intercutting is sustained and in the build up to the courses of action proposed respectively by Schränker and Lohmann high angle shots underline the parallels between the hazy, silent rooms of frustrated men. The rhetoric of the sequence implies that the two organisations are virtually indistinguishable. If anything, the contrasting ways in which Lang stages the solutions being arrived at gives Schränker dramatic precedence – he is on-screen, his proposal ('We have to catch him – we ourselves') startling and decisive, whereas Lohmann's more discursively outlined suggestion (to investigate records of all released mental patients) is only heard, the assembled company all gradually turning to look towards him out of frame. Lang's accumulated strategies, from casting to intercutting, seem calculated to obscure the fundamental distinction between a legal and extra-legal organization.

As with the section devoted to police procedure, however, the sequence allows for a more measured and cautious view. In the police discussion it is recognized that the murderer is a 'pathological case'. Schränker, however, articulates the attitudes to the murderer that later re-surface when the criminals put Beckert on trial: 'The monster has no right to live. It must disappear, be eliminated, exterminated'. The close-up of Schränker's gloved hand on the map of the city as the criminals develop their plan, is also a sinister enough image to give us pause, while the shadows of the criminals on the wall echo the first appearance of Beckert in the film.

Crucially, the film then stays with the underworld after the cross-cutting sequence, introducing the beggars who will perform Schränker's city-wide surveillance in long camera movements which guide us through their headquarters, linking individuals and groups in a fascinating spectacle of varied activities within the co-ordinated enterprise. Eisner (114) cites real-life parallels of beggars' exchanges, but the film seems less concerned with authenticity than with creating a fictional structure to parallel police and underworld. Indeed, the appropriation of Brecht and Weill's *Threepenny Opera* as a contemporary model for the presentation of the beggars suggests that a plausible representation of the underworld was far from Lang's mind. Although the film evokes Brecht, not only in the representation of the beggars and of the criminal section heads as petty bourgeois businessmen but also in its wider methods of 'interruption,



juxtaposition, irony', Lang's purposes, as we suggested earlier, are very different. Brecht developed epic theatre to challenge what he saw as the passivity of spectators in 'Aristotelian' theatre and to construct a more alert, critically active and socially engaged audience. In his 1931 'Notes to *The Threepenny Opera*', however, Brecht himself comments on the power of theatre to 'theatre it all down', to



'stage anything', and to involve the spectator in the passive, culinary fashion he worked to combat ([1931] 1992: 43).⁸ He had seen how bourgeois audiences of *The Threepenny Opera* had proved only too ready to be charmed by its characters and songs and to ignore its political intentions.

In creating a sequence constructed to amuse and disarm, Lang may well have had these things in mind. It might indeed be understood as part of a sceptical response to Brecht's belief in the possibility of creating a critically alert and reflective audience. This lesson about how audiences can be seduced would surely have struck a filmmaker whose work is informed by a growing awareness of the power and inherent danger of the various forms of rhetoric that film can offer – notably when it seems innocent of persuasive intent.⁹ It is difficult not to be charmed by Lang's creation of the beggars' world and correspondingly easy to be impressed by the ensuing efficiency of the underworld's surveillance plan. A convincing case can be argued for the social criticism implied by the paralleling of police and underworld and by the emphatically satirical tone of whole stretches of the film. But we need to complement such readings by emphasising the strange and fascinating ways in which Lang builds the spectator's part in the drama not simply to enable us to grasp particular perspectives but to implicate us in the moral and emotional confusions of the film's world.

The return to the police juxtaposes the watching beggars with Lohmann's developing plan to investigate the records of mental patients. Although the section up to the murderer being cornered by the beggars is not organised in terms of regular crosscutting, we follow both organisations as they close in and identify him in different ways but at virtually the same moment. (A further complicating element as we follow the progress of both pursuits of the murderer is that the film now also follows Beckert himself, so that the narrative has three strands and Beckert becomes increasingly individualised – an issue we shall return to.) Both strategies for finding the murderer succeed: the question of whose side we should be on hardly seems relevant when the shared aim is apprehension of a child murderer.

There are nevertheless significant differences in our orientation to these events. The organisation of point of view continues to favour the underworld, not in screen time or overall efficiency but in more dramatic terms. Showing Beckert leaving his apartment and on the street makes him accessible to the beggars posted across the city, creating suspense by increasing their chances of spotting him, while we know that he is not about to return to the apartment where, eventually, the police wait for him. Once spotted, the immediacy and excitement of the beggars' identification and pursuit contrasts with more plodding police procedures. The major drive of the narrative towards Beckert's capture is generated by the underworld. This is intensified as Schränker's men search the office building in which Beckert has taken shelter. Lang's montage of co-ordinated activity condenses time and action to produce a powerful momentum, building to a peak of suspense when the alarm goes off and the searchers have only five minutes to find their quarry. Lang's treatment emphasises the sheer bravura of their operation. After the criminals capture Beckert, the police are left chasing the game.

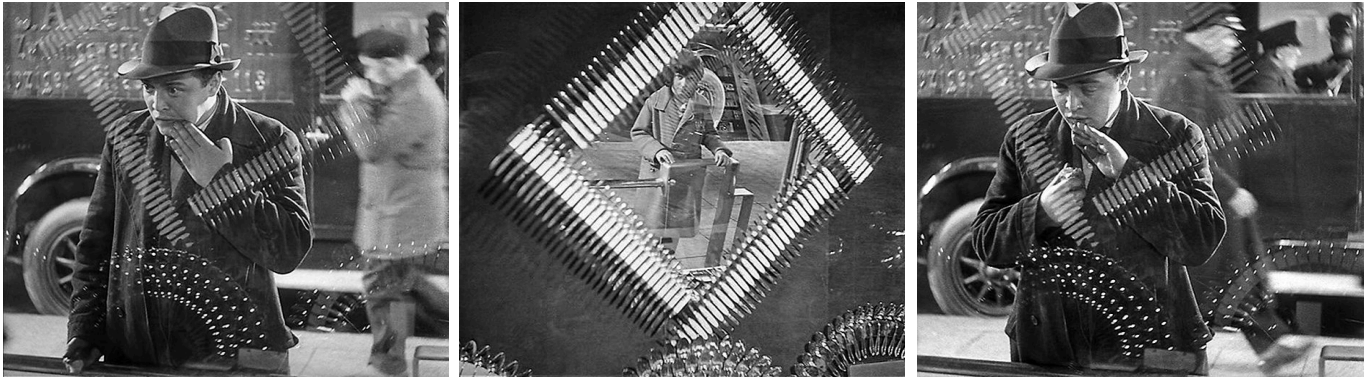
The argument being developed here hinges – as so often in Lang – on a tension between rhetoric and reason, between what we can be persuaded to accept or induced to feel and what logic, good sense and evidence might lead us to conclude, if only we had time to reflect. The film's rhetoric is the more insidious for being embedded in methods

that distance us in a number of ways from the fictional world and do not seem unduly restrictive. Focusing the plot on child murder is the key to the film's central strategies. If the crimes function in one way to qualify the conventional moral opposition between underworld and police, their horror also eases the path to treating the murderer as 'other'. If he is less than human, a monster, justice may seem irrelevant; the logic of extreme solutions for extreme cases can imply that 'He has no right to live ... he must be exterminated, without pity ... without scruples'. Of course this is Schränker's argument, but we do not need to assent to its chilling implications for the film's rhetoric to take effect. Being carried along in the exhilaration of the underworld's pursuit and triumphant capture of Beckert in itself implicates us in Schränker's grand plan.

This argument begs the question of Beckert's part in the film. We are given extended access to him just as the police and underworld begin to close in – the most sustained involvement with a single character in the whole film. Lang cuts between Beckert in the street and the first police search of his apartment, then shows him being followed by the beggars and, once cornered, trying to escape from the attic storeroom. We have the opportunity, in other words, to begin a process of complicating our response to Beckert, using what we are shown to develop a view which will prepare us for the implications of the trial scene.

The murders, of course, remain the decisive factor that holds us at an emotional and moral distance from Beckert. Indeed, Lang brings the nature of the crimes forcefully into play again at this stage by showing Beckert following one young girl and then accompanying another, so that an element of suspense is introduced – will he be caught before another child is murdered? These are fundamental obstacles to the development of 'sympathy' or 'empathy', words used in some accounts to name what happens to the audience's orientation in these sequences, and particularly in the trial.¹⁰ But Lang and Lorre's extraordinary creation of Beckert is crucial here. He is first evoked as the bogeyman of children's playground rhymes, physically introduced by means of a shadow that is almost a caricature of villainy and associated with a tune that could well be taken to link him with the trolls referred to in Grieg's music. In these respects he seems to belong to a register of melodramatic nastiness. He is developed, however, as a complex amalgam: sad, pop-eyed fat boy – a solitary and unhealthy overgrown child; self-dramatising performer (the faces in the mirror), who enjoys playing games with the police (his letter to the newspaper); victim wholly at the mercy of uncontrollable urges; self-conscious adult desperately trying to control overwhelming desire; anonymous man in the street.

The casting of Lorre is the film's most tangible link to Brecht: they had first worked together in the late 1920s and while *M* was being shot Lorre was playing the lead in Brecht's *Mann ist Mann*. That Lang's casting decisions were informed, at least in part, by an interest in the evolving performance methods of Brecht's Epic Theatre is further suggested by his use of other actors – Fritz Gnass, Rosa Valletti and Theo Lingen – who had performed in Brecht's plays (though only Lorre and Lingen had worked under Brecht's direction). Lang did not need to share Brecht's politics to recognise that methods aimed at creating through performance 'the most objective possible exposition of a contradictory internal process' (Brecht [1931] 1992: 54) could be appropriated for what he hoped to achieve in *M*.¹¹ Beckert is a character with minimal dialogue before the trial scene; Lorre and Lang find images, gestures, actions, that – in the mode of the epic actor – externalise Beckert's contra-



Beckert reacts to a girl's reflection.

dictions, letting the 'character grow before the spectator's eyes out of the way in which he behaves' (56).

Details from a single scene can suggest something of what is involved. When Beckert stops to look at the display in a shop window he is carelessly munching an apple. He sees a girl's reflection and is transfixed: the arm he is using to eat the apple drops to his side. When we return to Beckert after another shot of the girl the arm is half raised, as though he has attempted to begin eating once more, but his other hand, previously pulled across his lips, gestures downwards, as though to refuse the apple – his two arms seemingly at odds with each other – and he drops it, finally using both arms to steady himself on a railing. As we witness the compulsion that overcomes Beckert and what seems to be his struggle against it (both here and a little later in the café), we are given an insight into his condition that provides a basis for understanding the crimes as something other than acts of conscious will. Such moments need not induce pity in order to qualify a residual sense of Beckert as simply 'other'; they challenge us to examine the nature and basis of our responses to the 'monster'. Lorre gives us a character who embodies in extreme form the uneasy relationship between what is consciously willed and rationally ordered and the less conscious (or unconscious) dimensions of human motivation and action. In this respect, the way Beckert is created acknowledges the confusion of rational control and murkier motivations which the police and the criminal community – dedicated as they are to their various forms of order and control – implicitly deny.

Lang's presentation of Beckert, however, is held within the rapidly developing narrative of the pursuit and he gives us little opportunity to stand back. Beckert's capture by the underworld is followed by the relatively long section of police interrogating the burglar captured when the police belatedly arrive at the office block, sequences which are

mainly light in tone and embellished with overtly comic moments: the cut to the guard tucking into a huge meal as Lohmann implies to the burglar that the man has died after being attacked; Lohmann's cigarette holder dropping from his mouth as the burglar confesses that he and his colleagues were after the child murderer.

The full logic of the position to which Lang has led us becomes clear only with the trial. Through the complex dynamics of the sequence – much the longest sequence of continuity editing in the film – we are confronted with the implications of the undermining of moral and legal order that is inherent in the paralleling of police and underworld. At first it can be disarming to find, as Beckert is brought into the cellar, that the criminals have formed themselves into a court and intend to try rather than summarily to execute him, but the nature of the trial and its pre-ordained outcome are rapidly made clear by Schränker in his combined role of prosecutor and chair of the tribunal. Judicial process is in the hands of criminals, and legal procedure is all but abandoned as they prepare to act as judge, jury and executioner. The sequence is pervaded by the threat of mob action, particularly after Beckert is violently hauled back from the door and individuals in the crowd scream for his death. We are now far from the earlier comedy of the incidents in the street. Here real violence is threatened and, crucially, the crowd's feelings are orchestrated by Schränker's demagogic power and focused will.

Important distinctions in the sequence turn on questions of self-control, choice and responsibility. Beckert himself distinguishes between his accusers' deliberate choice of criminal lives and his own uncontrollable urges. His agonised account of his murderous compulsions, which compels reluctant recognition in some members of the assembly, qualifies the nature of his guilt. The 'defence counsel' (Rudolf Blümner) not only exposes the perversion of reason in

The trial: prosecutor, defendant and defence counsel of the underworld's criminal court.



Schränker's claim that Beckert's confession condemns him to death but also the moral absurdity of one murderer standing in judgement on another. In the absence of a sanctioned judicial framework, however, reason is wholly unable to restrain the crowd's outrage, and only the arrival of the police prevents a lynching.

Yet what follows is distinctly un reassuring. From a shot of a hand descending on Beckert's shoulders, accompanied by the words 'In the name of the law', there is a dissolve to empty chairs on the judicial dais; robed judges enter, and one intones, 'In the name of the people'. We might infer that



this is about to introduce Beckert's sentence, but the shot denies us any context. Once again Lang uses elision to extraordinary effect, instantly expelling all the major characters and excluding all the intervening action from our sight. The narrative gap might signify that law and order have prevailed and Beckert has been tried in the sanctioned way, but we hear no evidence, see no process of law – nothing to replace, to stand as a corrective, to the trial we have just witnessed. Standing outside the main trajectory of the narrative in an epilogue that could hardly be more compressed and abstracted, this is, of all the elisions in the film, the one that most overtly signals the dangers and temptations of inference. If we can find reassurance in that, the film seems to suggest, we are easily satisfied. The final shot is equally



strange, the transition from the judges equally enigmatic. Mrs. Beckman, flanked by two other women in poses of grief and dejection, addresses the camera directly, her challenge to take better care of our children uttered in a tone of utter defeat and leaving us with no sense of how, in the world the film presents and analyses, this desirable objective might be achieved.

This account of *M* leaves aside a range of issues that others have rightly seen as significant, and it makes very selective reference to the wonderfully inventive detail of performance, sound, editing and staging for the camera that give the film such density and life. Our intention has been to suggest that the ways in which the film addresses and attempts to work on its spectators are central to Lang's achievement. Such matters are important in the discussion of any film, but especially so with Lang, whose concern with the power of film to seduce and deceive originated in the political confusions of Weimar Germany but became a recurrent motif through his career. Because of its context (produced two years before the Nazis came to power), *M* seems to invite political interpretation, and it is tempting to see Lang's creation of Schränker's brilliantly organised criminal empire as unnervingly prescient in the light of the demonisation of minorities and the collapse of judicial process in Germany that was to follow only a few years later. But given the insidious way in which the film works on the spectator, its 'politics', in the widest sense, need to be defined with some caution. In Lang's words, as reported by Eisner, the film 'argue[s] for a democratic procedure' (112-113). But this is a bland gloss on a film which presents a far from reassuring picture of the police and the public – of which, Lang never forgets, the film's audience is part. The film challenges us, not just in the speeches of its final scene but in its whole method. Brilliantly analytical, it embodies the workings of subtle, reasoned discrimination. But in its complex dynamics it simultaneously dramatises perversions of reason and invites us to collude in them. If the film can function in this respect as a warning, it also seems profoundly sceptical of the audience's willingness to take heed and to remain un seduced or undecieved.

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- ¹ Noël Burch analyses the formal and stylistic variations of the film in *Cinema, a Critical Dictionary: The Major Film-makers* (1980: 583-599).
- ² Translation I. Luppa. The original reads: 'Er führt uns gleich hinein in die grausame Mordstimmung, die er in gewissenloser Weise zum Nervenkitzel des ahnungslosen Publikums ausbeutet. Jeder weltanschauliche oder moralische Maßstab fehlt'.
- ³ Translation I. Luppa. The original reads: 'Für oder gegen die Todesstrafe? Einmal für, einmal gegen'. Ihering associates the representation of the criminal underworld in *M* with 'Verbrecherromantik', the term commonly used to describe the literary tradition that romanticises the lives of criminals.
- ⁴ See also Anton Kaes: 'While the film's structure in its presentational *gestus* and epic sweep (not fixated on characters, but focused on the context that shapes them) resembles Brecht's Epic Theatre, Lang's project is ultimately a different one. Less interested in leftist political matters than Brecht, Lang probes the status and function of visual communication in a modern urban environment which is dominated by an insatiable hunger for news and information' (1999: 36).
- ⁵ In relation to an overall strategy that implies a continuum between the public in the film and the film's spectators, it is significant the Lohmann here refers to the general public as 'Publikum', a term generally used to refer to an audience (people watching a spectacle of any kind). Though Lohmann's use of the word is not incorrect, the people on the street (the general public) would normally be referred to as 'Öffentlichkeit'. In Beckert's letter to the press he refers to the public as 'Öffentlichkeit'.
- ⁶ See for related views: Chang 1979: 302; Cook 1996: 350; Gunning 2000: 182.
- ⁷ See Pye 1993.
- ⁸ The full passage reads: 'The necessity to stage the new drama correctly – which matters more for the theatre's sake than for the drama's – is modified by the fact that the theatre can stage anything: it theatres it all down'.
- ⁹ It may be, as Heike Klapdor suggests, that even in its early movements the film touches enigmatically on the fascination and seduction of gripping drama for the spectator. She argues that the strange incident in which Herr Gehrke (uncredited), the seller of serial fiction, comes to Frau Beckmann's door as she waits for Elsie, offering 'A thrilling new chapter, Mrs Beckmann! Passionate, moving, sensational ...' alludes reflexively to the spectator's investment in the unfolding drama of Elsie's fate: 'As much as the director ennobles the spectator into an observer through the use of a documentary *gestus* [...] he also tempts the spectator into becoming a voyeur by presenting him with a crime that is 'thrilling, exciting, sensational' – a kind of self reflexive commentary in the film through the character of Gehrke, the trader in serial novels' (2001:35). The original reads: 'So sehr der Regisseur den Zuschauer zum analytischen Beobachter nobilitiert [...] durch den dokumentarischen Gestus, so sehr verführt er ihn als Voyeur, dem er ein "spannendes, aufregendes, sensationelles" Verbrechen präsentiert – eine Art des Selbstkommentars im Film durch die Figur des Zeitschriftenhändlers Gehrke'. (Translation I. Luppa)
- ¹⁰ See, for instance, Eisner 1976: 112; and Chang, 1979: 306.
- ¹¹ The key concepts in Brecht's famous essay 'The Street scene' (published in 1950) in which he elaborates the demonstrational aspect of epic acting and the actor's ability to detach himself from the character portrayed, were developed as early as 1930 and are discussed in his notes on Peter Lorre's performance of Galy Gay in the production of *Mann ist Mann (A Man's a Man)* at the Staatstheater, Berlin, in February 1931.