HUMANITIES INSTITUTE
Burak Sevingen, MA

# The Testament of Dr. Mabuse 1933

## Fritz Lang (1890-1976)

OVERVIEW

Following his institutionalization at the end of *Dr. Mabuse the Gambler* (1922), the titular character spends part of the following decade drawing endless pages of zeros. They would have a name for that—'cipheritis' or 'zero stroke' was an alleged psychological condition characterized by compulsively writing rows of ciphers in hyperinflation-ridden Weimar Germany.[1] Mabuse's attack on the German currency was thwarted—he was printing counterfeit bills in order to fuel inflation. The finale of the Fritz Lang's silent film had left him defeated. During a ferocious showdown with the security forces of the state, his stronghold was besieged and followers were killed or arrested. Mabuse had retreated to the cellar that housed the forgery, where he got entrapped and unhinged. He was mute and unresponsive when captured and was subsequently placed in a mental asylum.

**Dr. Mabuse Returns.** Back in his heyday, operating behind the façade of a psychiatric practice, Mabuse would ensnare wealthy individuals thanks to his expertise in hypnotism and mind control. Always craving for more power, he would also organize sophisticated con schemes to exploit the weaknesses of the financial system and wreak havoc. The malevolent doctor returns with the 1933 sequel *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* in a semi-comatose state—hardly the spectacular comeback the viewer would expect from the domineering villain. His endless pages of scribbling at the mental hospital had eventually given way to words and meaningful sentences. Mabuse had become the author of his testament.

**The New Decade.** It is a long shot from Mabuse the criminal mastermind to Mabuse the writer. In between the two Mabuses, the social context changed drastically. *Gambler* had aspired to be a document of its times. Hyperinflation, political assassinations and social tension constituted a depressing background—counterbalanced by the optimism of the Jazz Age. Thanks to international loans, the later part of the decade brought relative economic stability. With the 1929 World Economic Crisis, unemployment soared—one of the major characters in *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* becomes a criminal after losing all hopes for finding a regular job. Parallel to the economic downturn, political radicalism flourished. Adolf Hitler's NSDAP grew to become the largest party in the German parliament in 1932 and he was sworn in as chancellor in 1933. In March, the Enabling Act gave him dictatorial powers and marked the end of the Weimar Republic. Joseph Goebbels' Reich Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda was founded—and banned *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*—the same month.

**Lang's Previous Films.** The period between the two films also saw Lang's filmmaking evolve. In 1924, he directed the epic *Die Niebelungen* (1924) that Goebbels reportedly liked very much. Nazi propaganda, most famously Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (1935) would draw aesthetic inspiration from it. In 1927 came *Metropolis*, the founding film of the science fiction genre that openly tackled questions about class, gender and technology. International espionage thriller *Spies* that premiered the next year was a precursor to the James Bond style thrillers. Another science fiction was released in 1929 with *Woman in the Moon.* It was a considerably realistic take on the genre and depicted a space exploration team with a female member. *M,* which is widely regarded to be his masterpiece premiered in 1931. It featured the underworld and the police contesting for the control of the modern city. It also introduced the character of Inspector Lohmann who would reappear in *The Testament*. All these films were scripted (or co-scripted) by Lang's wife Thea von Harbou. *The Testament* would be the last film of their collaboration, after which they would divorce and Lang would leave Germany.

**Sound and Voice.** Lang's last two films in Germany, *M* and *The Testament* (both produced by Seymour Nebenzal) were his first sound films. Both had voice segments overlapping between scenes. Neither used music as part of the soundtrack except for a whistled melody—"In the Hall of the Mountain King" tune from Grieg's *Peer Gynt* in *M;* "Feuerzauber" from Wagner's *The Valkyrie* in *The Testament. M*

had completely muted sequences and used speech sparingly. *The Testament*'s sound was relatively maximalist with scenes that are marked by loud pumping and cacophonic honking, The viewers who were curiously waiting for the notorious villain's voice are treated with a surprise: co-writers Lang and von Harbou chose to mute him. A voice that allegedly belongs to Mabuse can be heard coming from off-screen, but not for once is the character himself seen talking.

**Cinematography.** Cinematographer Fritz Arno Wagner (*Nosferatu, Westfront 1918, Diary of a Lost Girl* plus Lang's *Spies* and *M*) blends gritty realism with a touch of expressionism, particularly when a character's sanity is threatened. Couple of scenes provides insight into the hallucinations of a minor character named Hoffmeister. After being traumatized, he imagines himself trying to reach Lohmann with a phone made from glass while all around him are nothing but glass objects. When Lohmann enters his cell, Hoffmeister's point of view shows a room with distorted angles and Mabuse's hitmen approaching him menacingly. Similarly, when in his madness Baum races to the asylum, he is seen flanked by two rows of silvery trees.

**The French Version.** *The Testament* came out with a 'twin' version in French. At a time when dubbing technology was not advanced, this was a way to appeal to foreign markets. The original was banned in Germany right away and the French film was screened in the USA. *Le Testament du Dr. Mabuse (The Last Will of Dr. Mabuse)* had mostly the same cast and almost identical scenes. While Oscar Beregi Sr. played asylum director Baum in the original, Thomy Bourdelle was cast for the part in *the Last Will.* In a nod to Mabuse's lineage of villains, Bourdelle had previously starred as Inspector Juve pursuing another infamous arch-criminal in *Fantomas* (1932). Rudolf Klein-Rogge reprised his role as 'Docteur Mabuse'. This would be his last Lang film. He had starred in *Metropolis* as the mad scientist Rotwang, *Spies* as Haghi the spymaster, *Die Niebelungen* as King Etzel—besides playing parts in *The Wandering Image* (1920) and two films from 1921, *Four for the Woman* and *Destiny.*

**Sequels and Remakes.** Lang would revisit Mabuse towards the end of his directing career. When he returned to Germany in the late 1950s, *The Thousand Eyes of Dr. Mabuse* was one of the three films he made with producer Artur Brauner. The other two were his Indian epics, *The Tiger of Bengal* and *The Indian Tomb,* both released in 1959. *The Thousand Eyes* spearheaded a wave of Mabuse films from other directors. These were also inspired by the popular Edgar Wallace crime thrillers. Among these films is a remake of the 1933 *The Testament,* alternately titled *The Terror of Doctor Mabuse* (1962) starring Gert Fröbe as Lohmann and directed by Werner Klinger. Other films in 1960s were *the Return of Dr. Mabuse* (1961) and *The Invisible Dr. Mabuse* (1962) both from Harald Reinl. Hugo May directed *Dr. Mabuse vs Scotland Yard* (1963) and lastly there came Hugo Fregonese's *The Death Ray of Dr. Mabuse* (1964). Later, Jesús Franco and Claude Chabrol shot their Dr. Mabuse themed films respectively in 1972 and 1990.

**Legacy.** "Introduce a little anarchy. Upset the established order, and everything becomes chaos. I'm an agent o chaos. Oh, and you know the thing about chaos? It's fair!" cried one of the best known movie villains Joker in the *The Dark Knight Rises* (2008). Batman's heinous nemesis was perhaps the most Mabusean of all contemporary characters. Nihilism has been part of the legacy of Dr. Mabuse.

1922's *Gambler* had ended with a spectacular gunfight. *The Testament*'s denouement has a huge fire, a particularly toxic one that engulfs the vulnerable chemical plant. Mabuse had nefariously orchestrated the arson, counting on explosions of the factory's flammable stocks and wind to spread the flames to residential areas. Scores of well equipped and well drilled firemen can barely control the flames after several minutes. Another fire destroyed the Reichstag Building in February 1933—a few weeks before *The Testament* was denied permission for release in Germany. With all its unintended allegories and intended allusions to the tactics of the Nazis, *The Testament* is one of Fritz Lang's most complex and politically less ambiguous films.

CHARACTERS

**Dr. Mabuse.** The doctor himself looks nothing like the domineering villain of Lang's first Mabuse film. He is never seen speaking and for the most part writes notes in his hospital room. His writing confirms that his wile ways have not changed one bit. It is through his influence on others that he continues to be a menace.

**Inspector Lohmann.** Otto Wernicke reprises his role as the police inspector in Lang's *M*. In that film, Lohmann was a perceptive and intelligent official of the Weimar era police force but he was a bit of a slouch too. Times have changed and in this film, Lohmann is considerably more agile and daring—he kicks doors and dodges bullets as he runs into gunfire.

**Professor Baum.** From the get-go, the professor of psychiatry shows his dark side by his fascination with Mabuse. He is so absorbed by his patient that he gradually emulates him (or is somehow possessed). How they merge is not clarified, either he is delusional or a metaphysical process is involved. The distinction hardly matters as Mabuse dies and Baum takes over his mission to terrorize the society.

**Kent.** Kent is a former engineer and one of Mabuse's gangsters. He is also an ex-con—he admits to Lilly that he had killed his girlfriend and his best friend who were having an affair. When he is unable to find a job, Kent joins Mabuse's gang as a forger. He disapproves of the organization's methods and strongly objects resorting to murder. When he decides to desert, Mabuse orders his murder. Kent escorts and helps Lohmann during his pursuit of Baum.

**Lilly.** This is the only major female part in the film. Working class Lilly is shy and demure. She is compassionate and fully supportive of Kent and that's pretty much the essence of the character. In contrast, *Dr. Mabuse the Gambler* had featured two strong female leads, Carozza the manipulator dancer and the detached modern socialite Countess Told.

**Hoffmeister.** Disgraced former detective spies on Mabuse's operations in order to restore his reputation. It is not revealed what Mabuse's hit squad does to Hoffmeister but whatever takes place seriously traumatizes him. Only when Baum openly assumes Mabuse's identity and is locked up does Hoffmeister calm down.

**Hardy.** If Lang intended Mabuse/Baum to allude to Hitler, then Section 2B is his SA/SS. Hardy is the loyal and ghastly henchman of Mabuse and Section 2B's hitman. While other gang members are 'professionals' who care primarily about their income, Hardy is truly faithful to the leader. This is parallel to the character Georg in the 1922 film. Both characters willingly clash with security forces and ultimately commit suicide.

**Nicolai.** One of Mabuse's mobsters, Nicolai the jewelry expert is the only figure associated with displays of wealth. He wears a silk robe and bowtie, feasts on caviar and champagne in his lavish apartment packed with silverware, perfume bottles and jewelry. On top of all that he has a girlfriend who goes by the name "Jewelry Anna". This character seems to be someone the audience may unanimously dislike—parallel to the war profiteer Kramm in *Gambler*.

**PLOT**

**Infiltrator Discovered.** A messy storage room is rocked by a machine somewhere close by. Amid loud rhythmic vibrations and throbbing, the camera floats in the seemingly vacant space and reveals someone trying to hide behind a dusty old crate. Suddenly the door opens and the agitated man ducks in panic. Two unsavory looking men enter the room and approach the crate. Not before long, they notice the hidden spy but leave the room without a reaction. The man waits a little to calm down and prepares to get out of the workshop. As soon as he steps foot into a dark and empty street, he is viciously attacked. A stone thrown from the roof barely misses him and then a couple of men roll an oil barrel in his direction. Right after he jumps to safety, it explodes and fills the frame in flames.

**Hoffmeister Calling Inspector Lohmann.** The man's name is Hoffmeister and he is an ex-police detective. He has managed to evade his assailants and phones the office of Karl Lohmann. The inspector is not pleased with the call from his former associate who had been discharged due to dishonest conduct. Hoffmeister quickly explains that he seeks to redeem himself by unraveling a dangerous gang. Just as he is about to share critical information, the room goes dark, Hoffmeister starts screaming and shoots blindly. Moments later, he is back on the line again, but instead of responding he keeps singing senselessly. "He must have gone out of his mind from terror" remarks the baffled inspector. The police trace the call and head out to the address. The apartment is vacant and Hoffmeister is nowhere to be found. Lohmann notices that scratches on the glass of the window resemble lettering. Thinking this might be a message left for him, he has the pane taken to the forensics lab for a closer look.

**Professor of Psychiatry.** Next scene takes place at a packed university auditorium. "Exposure to fright and horror often triggers insanity" explains the lecturer, "the patient withdrew into his own ego, depriving us of any glimpse into his inner life". Psychiatry professor Baum is teaching his students about the effects of traumas on the psyche. At first it sounds like he is talking about Hoffmeister, but the subject of the case study is Doctor Mabuse—Baum's resident patient for the last decade.

**Baum's Resident Patient.** Following a quick recap of *Dr. Mabuse the Gambler*, Baum recounts the final moments of Mabuse as a free man. He gets carried away talking about Mabuse's fierce resistance to the police siege, his entrapment and ultimate delirium. Baum doesn't try to hide his admiration for the master criminal who was eventually haunted and cornered by the apparitions of his past victims.

**Mabuse's Writings.** Baum then summarizes Mabuse's progress at the clinic. After remaining uncommunicative for years, his hand had displayed writing motions. When a pen was provided, he began scribbling. For a while he kept drawing zeros and lines. Letters followed afterwards, which gradually turned into words and complete sentences. Even though Mabuse continues to remain unresponsive, he has turned into a prolific writer. The notebooks basically expound his doctrine of "the empire of crime" in which terror reigns over society. The pages are full of detailed instructions about carrying out sabotage, theft, blackmailing, arson and various other crimes. Baum considers the text to be the "perfect guide for the commission of crimes worked out to the minutest detail". As his doctor and sole reader, Baum is clearly engrossed by the texts and the mind that produces them.

**A Crime Ring.** The contents of the writings mysteriously coincide with the daring exploits of the gang that Hoffmeister had been spying into. This criminal organization has an unusual structure with a network of specialized sections. These are tightly managed by a leader no gang member has ever seen in person. The gangsters are occasionally summoned to a warehouse where the boss receives each section in "the room with the curtain". Words are quickly exchanged and the criminals depart after receiving their instructions. All the while the boss's voice comes from behind a curtain and he does not come into sight. Although the crooks admit to being paid very well, they are puzzled by their chief's strange ways—e.g. the loot is spent on drugs which are then freely distributed to the public; victims are blackmailed with no attempt to extort money. Then again, they are aware that asking too many questions could prove deadly. Those hoodlums that fail to restrain their curiosity would be dealt with by the dreaded two-man assassination squad Section 2B and its loyal hitman Hardy.

**Gangster with a Conscience.** Despite the danger involved, one of the mobsters is particularly vocal about his criticism of the gang's murderous methods. Kent is an engineer in charge of the counterfeiting operation in the organization. He is troubled by his conscience and the fact that he has to keep his job secret from his girlfriend Lilly. The couple had met when Kent was desperately looking for a job and frequenting the employment office that she worked at as a clerk. After getting rejected for months, he finally ended up being enrolled by the crime ring.

**Murder of Dr. Kramm.** The incident which follows demonstrates that the unidentified crime boss and the mental asylum are somehow connected. By coincidence, a colleague of Baum finds out about the substance of Mabuse's extensive notes. Dr. Kramm notices Mabuse's guidelines sounding suspiciously similar to recent well-publicized crimes. He confronts Baum about the copious pages of villainous blueprints. The asylum director rejects the idea that Mabuse might be involved in crime in any way. The

answer doesn't satisfy Kramm and he heads to the police to report his findings. Concurrently, section 2B's hitmen are dispatched by their mysterious boss to intercept Kramm before he reaches the police station. When they catch up with his car at traffic lights, Hardy snipes to kill him and the squad drives away. The police are in the dark about Kramm's visit to the mental asylum in his final hours and the only evidence they can gather is a bullet from the gun that killed the doctor.

**Culprit Identified.** Meanwhile, Hoffmeister is finally found wandering in the streets. Confused and scared, he can contribute nothing to the investigation and is placed in Baum's mental asylum. On the other hand, a breakthrough comes from the forensics work on Hoffmeisters scratch marks on the window pane. It is established that they were meant to read "Mabuse". Lohmann can vaguely recall "the doctor during the inflation crises" of the early 1920s. He researches the name in the police archives and gets hold of a thick file which ends with his hospitalization. He prepares for a visit to the asylum.

**Death of Mabuse.** Just as his name is identified to be the culprit, Mabuse suddenly stops writing. His gaze assumes a menacing intensity and shortly after, he dies. Lohmann briefly interviews Baum and takes note of the doctor's passionate championship of the late master criminal.

**A New Heist.** Mabuse's body may be in the morgue but his system lives on. The gangsters receive a new message signed by him, notifying them of a meeting at the warehouse that evening. As per the instructions they assemble at the stated time. When his turn comes, Kent enters the room with the curtain to learn about his assignment. First, the voice reprimands him for his reckless carping. Kent is then instructed about the forthcoming Overseas Bank sting. The plan is not to steal from the bank but to plant counterfeit bills in its vault.—i.e. turn the bank into a distributor of fake money. The boss wants the raid to have the appearance of a real robbery that went wrong, so the guards are to be killed.

**Kent is Done.** Kent finds the instructions for murder unacceptable and he leaves the meeting in frustration. Later, when he is with Lilly, he makes a full confession to her about his involvement in crime. To his surprise and relief, she is understanding and suggests that they visit Inspector Lohmann who had been nice to Kent when he arrested him years ago.

**Kent and Lilly are Abducted.** When Kent does not show up for the bank operation, Section 2B is alerted. Kent and Lilly are abducted just as they leave the building to meet Lohmann. Hardy takes them to the warehouse, shoves them into the room with the curtain and after stepping out, he locks them in. The man behind the curtain chides at Kent for his disloyalty. He lets the couple know that a time bomb is set to blow up soon. Kent draws his gun and fires several shots at the dark silhouette on the curtain.

**The Couple Reaches Lohmann.** The climactic scene reveals that they were alone in the room all along. The curtain had been concealing nothing more than a microphone and a speaker on a desk. A cutout figure defined the silhouette with the light coming from behind. Brick walls reinforced with steel plates offer no way out and a clock's ticking can be heard. The explosion is imminent and in order to minimize its impact, Kent resorts to flooding the room with water. He punctures a pipe and the room starts to fill with water. Moments later, the explosion takes place beneath the water without harming Kent and Lilly. The blast creates a hole on the floor which drains the room and offers them a way out. They rush to the police station.

**Police Raid.** Meanwhile, police has a new lead about one of Mabuse's cohorts. The girlfriend of jewelry thief Nicolai was spotted wearing a spectacular necklace. Detectives suspect that the piece was stolen from a jewelry shop during the gang's latest heist. When the police show up at Nicolai's door, the two henchmen of Section 2B also happen to be in the apartment. The officers are met with a hail of bullets, reinforcements are called in and a siege ensues. With Lohmann's arrival, the criminals surrender except for Hardy who kills himself.

**Findings.** A critical new lead is that Hardy's gun is an exact match for the one that killed Kramm. In light of this new evidence, interrogation of the driver of Section 2B produces valuable information about the Kramm murder. Particularly interesting bit for Lohmann is the route the killers took to ambush the doctor's car. The vicinity places Baum's asylum in the spotlight.

**Spotlight on Baum.** Lohmann has the asylum director come over to the station to see whether the gangsters held in custody could identify him as their boss. They maintain that they have never seen Baum and he shows no signs of knowing them. Just as Baum is leaving, Kent and Lilly show up at the police station. Kent does not recognize him or his voice but for a split second Baum looks startled to see Kent.

**Sabotage.** After he leaves, Lohmann has a moment of revelation about Baum acting as an agent of Mabuse's will. Together with Kent, they dash for the asylum and find that Baum has given instructions not to be disturbed. When an attendant hesitantly turns the door handle of his office, he is barred by the voice coming from inside. This time, Kent right away recognizes the mechanically processed voice of Baum to belong to the gang boss he knew as Dr. Mabuse. They break the door and enter the room. Inside they find a contraption with one end of a string tied to the door handle and the other attached to a turntable. When the handle is moved, the mechanism plays a recorded message with Baum's command to stay away. Baum is nowhere to be found, but on his desk lies open a map of the city with the location of a chemical plant clearly marked. Lohmann and Kent alert the factory's guards by phone and drive to the address. When they arrive, a huge fire is already underway and scores of firemen struggle with the flames. Thanks to the timely tip from the police, firefighters slowly and arduously get the massive flames under control.

**Doctor Becomes Patient.** Suddenly, Kent spots Baum hiding in the bushes and watching the fire. He runs away and a high speed car chase ensues that ends at the asylum. Baum enters Hoffmeister's room and introduces himself as Doctor Mabuse. When Lohmann arrives to the scene Baum has slipped into psychosis while Hoffmeister is finally able to talk normally. "There is nothing left to do for a mere police inspector here" Lohmann says and the caretaker closes the door on the former psychiatry professor.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Mabuse – **Closed** (Writing)
Baum – **Unconscientious** (Fanatical Orator)

**MABUSE** (Closed)

In the previous film, he would hypnotize and ensnare individuals by his gaze; here, his voice dissociated from his body has a similar effect.

*Writing.* With his striped pajamas, Mabuse looks harmless in his hospital room. He doesn't interact with anyone, is never seen speaking and barely moves except for writing. The pages of writings are crudely embellished with silly illustrations. Yet the text fascinates and transforms his doctor. Baum carries out Mabuse's will to inspire terror. Mabuse's authorship vaguely evokes Hitler dictating *Mein Kampf* in his cell.

Parallels

Horror genre has flourished by exploring two of the film's concepts: A voice alienated from the body and a body possessed by an unknown entity. A malignant psychiatrist as an anti-hero (à la Hannibal Lecter) has been a popular theme. Mabuse has inspired chaos loving megalomaniac characters—Superman's Lex Luthor, Batman's Joker and James Bond's Blofeld are among the many contemporary villains in popular fiction who share common characteristics with the doctor.

Mabuse's men would wonder why their boss cared little about money: "What becomes of it, I ask you? We buy cocaine with it, morphine, heroin, opium, whatever you call all that crap. And instead of making a killing off the dope and fleecing the types who are crazy for the stuff, we practically give it away. What good does it do the boss to pump the world full of dope and not make any money off it?" This sounds

similar to Batman's Joker who sets to flame a huge pile of money just to make the point that he doesn't care about it.

Joker as well as Superman's Lex Luthor are among the many contemporary villains in popular fiction who share common characteristics with the doctor. He has inspired other chaos loving megalomaniac characters, for example James Bond franchise's villains Auric Goldfinger and Blofeld. Goldfinger elevates Mabuse's tactics to a grand scale—and international level. Mabuse was planning to replace the currency in the bank with counterfeit bills and Goldfinger's raid of Fort Knox has a parallel motivation. Instead of stealing the US gold reserves in the vault, he emulates Mabuse's devious plan by trying to contaminate the bullions with radiation to render them useless.

**BAUM** (Unconscientious)

In his office decorated with African tribal masks, Baum reads Mabuse's notes with fascination. The asylum director starts out as an admirer of Mabuse and subsequently merges with his patient to turn into a gang leader.

*Fanatical Orator***.** During Baum's classroom lecture, he gets intense when the subject becomes Mabuse. Students who were idly listening quickly become attentive. Baum electrifies the audience with his hand gestures and verbal skills. The tracking shot shows faces of several individuals, all enthralled by the powerful rhetoric.

When Baum assumes the identity of Mabuse he continues to be captivating. Most of the gangsters have issues with his leadership but except for Kent they all remain docile. He vainly attempts to question the dictatorial boss. "Forget it, he is more powerful than you are" advises a crony—remarkable since they only hear Mabuse speak. At his disposal, he has a coercive unit (the loyal Section 2B) but it is essentially his oration that subdues the gangsters.

THEMES

**Society** – (Modern Institutions and Identity, Collective Behaviour)
**Politics** – (A Timely Warning?)
**Quest** – (Exploring Sound in Film)

**SOCIETY**

**Modern Institutions and Identity.** Life in the modern city revolves around information—how it is stored, disseminated and received. When Lohmann visits the archives to refresh his memory about Mabuse's activities in the very early 1920s, it takes a while to find the relevant file. Mabuse, with all his hubris, spectacular crimes and ambitious plans to terrify the world has been reduced to a dusty file. It is a thick file, obviously full of reports and other evidence but it is just a speck in a vast collection.

Police use the street advertising columns' to announce the Kramm murder. In a way, they function like today's breaking news and tweets. Posters on columns provide the basic information to the public and call for tips about the case. The detail-oriented Lohmann edits the text of the poster and takes care to make it up to date. In one scene, Kent reads it and supposedly everyone else in the city—at least that's what Lohmann thinks. When Baum admits that he has never seen the poster, the inspector is surprised. Baum quickly explains that's only because he hasn't been to the city for weeks.

Telephones are of vital importance in sharing information. Former detective Hoffmeister has a hard time trying to communicate via phone. He calls Lohmann at the beginning to alert him about Mabuse's gang, but for various reasons he can't manage to share the information—he only needs to mention the name, Mabuse. Hoffmeister is a secondary character but he is at the core of the opening and ending scenes. In his analysis of these scenes, Tom Gunning argues that Hoffmeister is a parable for modern life where the subject itself is a "relay" and identity is defined as a result of the individual's position in a system of connections[1].

**Collective Behavior.** Lang distrusts crowds, as he had shown in *Metropolis* in which striking workers had turned into a destructive mob. At a time when the totalitarian regime is solidified, *The Testament* displays skepticism about collective behavior. Early on, Dr. Kramm a colleague of asylum director Baum rushes to alert the police about Mabuse. Unbeknownst to him, the organization's hit squad Section 2B is tailing him. He stops at a stoplight and begins to wait patiently alongside several cars. Then the assassins in the car behind Kramm's start honking. The long, drawn out honk compels other drivers to follow suit. Kramm himself joins the annoying cacophony for no good reason. His smirk indicates his idiotic amusement with the collective honking. Then, Baum's henchman Hardy takes advantage of the clamor and shoots Kramm. Lights turn green and all cars except for his move along. It is only after the honks cease that a police officer notices the dead man. Kramm is tempted to do something pointless just because everyone else is doing it, and it costs him his life.

**POLITICS**

**A Timely Warning?** "The ultimate purpose of crime" declares Mabuse, "is to establish the endless empire of crime".

> "A state of complete insecurity and anarchy, founded upon the tainted ideals of a world doomed to annihilation. When humanity, subjugated by the terror of crime, has been driven insane by fear and horror, and when chaos has become supreme law, then the time will have come for the empire of crime."

In practical terms this means an all out assault on the society: "Along with the destruction of crops, water supplies must be poisoned. Epidemics of every kind must break down any resistance on the part of the people". The purpose of creating anarchy is to "subjugate" the society" … "by seemingly senseless crimes whose only objective is to inspire fear"—so that people willingly obey. Empire of crime created by chaos and humanity subjugated by the terror—if Lang intended these as a caution, it was a timely one with the historic experience just around the corner.

**QUEST**

**Exploring Sound in Film.** "Garbo talks!" was the tagline of of the publicity for Greta Garbo's first 'talkie' *Anna Christie* (1930)[2]. It was aimed for the fans who were excited to hear her voice for the first time. There is a comparable situation when the notorious villain of Lang's silent film *Gambler* returns in 1933 with *The Testament*. The arch-criminal with piercing eyes and a diabolical mind was not yet heard speaking. A long time had passed since the first film but still, viewers of the first film might have been interested to know how he sounded.

Michel Chion underscores the ingenuity of co-writers von Harbou and Lang's strategy in giving their anti-hero a voice. Mabuse's voice can be heard when he communicates with his minions but he isn't seen talking. The voice is transmitted via loudspeakers—but does it belong to Mabuse himself or is that Baum speaking? This ambiguity increases suspense and it is actually not entirely clarified even with the ending. It is an example of the "Acousmetre"[3] Chion argues, "a voice that is not yet visualized"[4]. The voice used in this manner becomes a powerful agent adding to the complexity of the narrative. It also "exposes the very structure of sound film based on an off-screen field inhabited by the voice"[5].

Comparable examples in film are the wizard in the *Wizard of Oz*[6] (1939), the computer Hal 9000 in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) and Norman's mother in *Psycho* (1960). *The Testament*'s profound exploration of the possibilities of using sound in film is in the company of other groundbreaking examples such as Antonioni's *Blow-up*, De Palma's *Blow-out* and Coppola's *The Conversation.*

HORROR GENRE

Horror genre has flourished by exploring two of the film's concepts: A voice alienated from the body and a body possessed by an unknown entity. A malignant psychiatrist as an anti-hero (à la Hannibal Lecter) has been popular with many filmmakers.

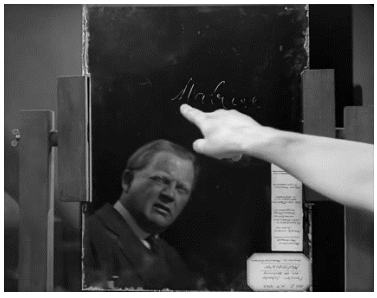
Parallels

Mabuse and his psychiatrist Baum somehow become one. The thin line between doctor and patient has intrigued many since Poe's "The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Feather". Psychiatry has been a recurrent theme in Lang's films.

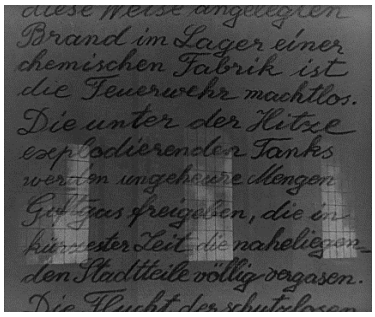
1922's *Gambler* featured it as somewhat of a novelty. Also with mistrust—Mabuse's default identity as a practicing psychiatrist was inseparable from his techniques of malicious hypnotism and telepathy. On top of that he would also double as the conjurer and quack Sandor Weltman performing optical illusions for mass deception.

In *M*, an unidentified psychiatrist comes up with a breakthrough idea in the otherwise deadlocked case. Consequently, the culprit is found thanks to his file in the mental hospital. Psychiatry is indispensable to identify the child killer but the syndicate of criminals acts faster and captures him. They need to decide what to do with him, psychiatry is again central to the 'debate' during their kangaroo court. If he were to be handed over to the proper authorities, institutionalization for life would be a likely outcome (instead of capital punishment) and not everyone is pleased with that scenario.

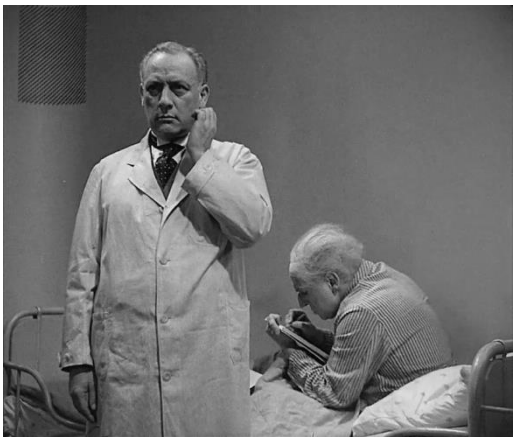
Lang's interest in psychiatry would continue to evolve, for example in two films from 1944: *The Woman in the Window* with its steady and bored psychiatry professor spicing up his dull life with some romance and getting into serious trouble; *Ministry of Fear* (1944) with a shady psychiatrist character who is the author of a book titled "Psychoanalysis and Nazism" and is employed as a consultant to the Ministry of Defense.

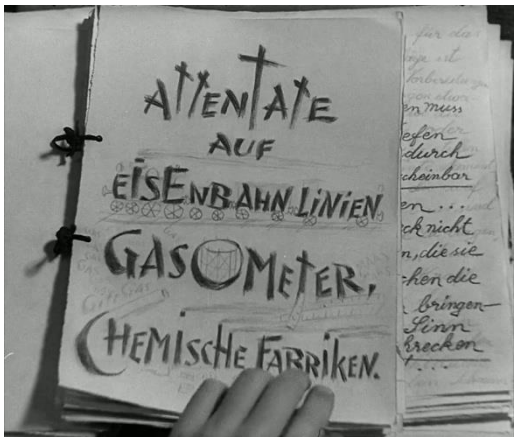


(Thanks to forensic analysis, Inspector Lohmann identifies the word scratched on the glass to be Mabuse but it takes a while for him to remember a long forgotten criminal from the previous decade)




(In the finale, flames engulf a chemical plant and images of the fire are superseded by Mabuse's writings. The arson was preplanned by him as a step towards establishing "a state of complete insecurity and anarchy"—another fire would destroy the Reichstag Building in February 1933)






(Mabuse is a resident patient of Professor Baum and writes incessantly; His output is a detailed guide for establishing an “empire of crime”)





(Expressionist style is used to depict the hallucinations of fear-stricken Hoffmeister: he is talking to Lohmann with an imaginary glass phone; re-experiences the traumatic attack of Mabuse’s henchmen)





(Even after Mabuse dies, Baum continues to perceive him as an apparition; “the man behind the curtain” is known to the criminals as Dr. Mabuse—who turns out to be little more than a loudspeaker)




(Besides the psychiatric hospital, the state archive is another modern institution that plays a key role in the story. Mabuse's thick criminal file is just a speck in a vast collection; a scene takes place in an employment agency which is packed with men looking for work. Kent has become a criminal after failing to find employment)




("He refused to surrender to state authorites, saying that 'I am the state'"—Baum is not the only person fascinated by the feats of Mabuse. His students are almost entranced when he talks him)




(Assassins wait in the car behind Kramm's and start honking. The long, drawn out honk compels other drivers to follow suit; Kramm himself joins the annoying cacophony for no good reason. Just before he is shot, his smirk indicates his idiotic amusement with the collective honking)





(A shot of the police file for Nicolai is followed by a scene showing crook himself in 'Jewelry Anna's apartment looking exactly like his photo)




(Loyal unto death: Hardy follows certain henchmen in Lang's films (Morrier in *Spies* and Georg in *Dr. Mabuse the Gambler* who choose death rather than betrayal. His pistol drops near 'Jewerly Anna's plush toys; Professor Baum's office is decorated with Tribal African and Modern art)

[1] Gunning, Tom. *The Films of Fritz Lang.* London, British Film Institute. 2000: 159
[2] Chion, Michel. *The Voice in Cinema.* New York, Columbia University Press. 1999: 31
[3] 'Acousmatic' coming from the Pythogorean sect whose master would address his audience from behind a curtain (ibid, 19)
[4] ibid, 21.
[5] ibid, 150
[6] The author of the book and creator of the characters was L. Frank Baum, the namesake of the asylum director in Lang's film.