

The Thousand Eyes of Dr. Mabuse 1960

Fritz Lang (1890-1976)

Contents

Overview

Story

Themes

Characters

Character Analysis (Dr. Mabuse / Cornelius / Dr. Jordan – Henry B. Travers)

OVERVIEW

Television was an amazing novelty from the future when it was featured in a scene in 1927's *Metropolis*—with the city's ruler keeping an eye on the machine room from a TV screen in his headquarters. The future became now when Fritz Lang made television the centerpiece of *The Thousand Eyes of Dr. Mabuse* (1960). Most of the action of Lang's final film takes place in a Berlin hotel designed for surveillance and bugged with cameras—hence the thousand eyes. An American businessman is in town to sign a deal for nuclear missiles and becomes the target of Mabuse, who orchestrates a conspiracy from a control room with CCTV screens.

Dr. Mabuse. The film was the third appearance of the arch-villain. His cinematic premiere had been in one of Lang's early films, *Dr. Mabuse the Gambler* (1922) in which Mabuse used his powerful gaze to dominate his victims. The director revisited the character in 1933 in *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*. This time the doctor was represented by an omniscient voice.

Lang's Final Film. *The Testament* was to be Lang's last film in Germany until 1959, when he directed his two-part Indian epic (*The Indian Tomb* and *Tiger of Eschnapur*). Together with *The Thousand Eyes of Dr. Mabuse*, these films constitute the last stage of a career that started in the Weimar Republic and developed during his self-imposed exile in Hollywood. In four decades, he contributed to diverse genres such as western, epic fantasy, war drama, and thriller. He directed a progenitor of science fiction and was a leading inspiration to film noir.

Lang's last three films were the products of his return to a prosperous West Germany. The New German cinema would come to fruition within a couple of years, French New Wave was influential, and spectacular Hollywood films were hugely successful—e.g. *Spartacus* (1960) and *Ben-Hur* (1959).

The Source. Like the previous *The Testament*, the film was based on characters created by author Norbert Jacques. The script was inspired by a book in Esperanto, Jan Fethke's (as Jean Forge) *Mr. Tot Buys a Thousand Eyes* (1931). The film paved the way for other Mabuse films in the early 1960s. These were inspired by Edgar Wallace's crime novels and became part of the thriller sub-genre that came to be known as the krimi.

Mid-Century Setting. Lang had shot his previous Indian epics in color and the result was stunningly beautiful compositions. For the black and white Mabuse film, he teamed up with cinematographer Karl Løb whose cinematography would define 1960s krimis. The film's production designer Erich Kettelhut had worked with Lang for *Metropolis*. In *The Thousand Eyes*, the hotel which brings together diverse characters is elaborately decorated with mid-century modern furniture. Characters' personal spaces are customized to reflect their parts. The wealthy American's suite is uniquely decorated with a bonsai tree, oriental vases and wall art. His love interest (an accomplice of Mabuse) is staying in a feminine room with upholstered walls and furry rugs. The enigmatic fortune teller (Mabuse in disguise) has an office located

somewhere else. It has an eclectic decoration with a grandfather clock, carved chairs and neon signs of zodiac star constellations on the walls.

The Three Actors. The leading actors are Wolfgang Preiss (Dr. Mabuse), Peter Van Eyck (the American tycoon) and Gert Fröbe (Inspector Kras). They would later come together again as German officers in the ensemble cast of 1962's *The Longest Day* about the Normandy landings—in which they respectively had the parts of a general, colonel and sergeant. In his prolific career, Preiss was often cast as a military man—three times as a field marshal, portraying Rommel, Kesselring and von Rundstedt. He also played Erich von Stauffenberg in the July Plot story *The Plot to Assassinate Hitler* (1955). Van Eyck was another distinguished actor who was no stranger to portraying officers and was cast as a German in 1940s Hollywood films. After his return to Germany, he appeared as an American character in other films as well. Gert Fröbe would rise to fame playing James Bond's nemesis in *Goldfinger* (1964).

The Cold War. While Auric Goldfinger is a criminal mastermind in league with Mabuse, another Bond adversary, the titular character of *Dr. No* (1962) shares more resemblance with him thanks to their mutual interest in rocketry. In the early 1960s, a full-throttle arms race was underway and the threat of nuclear apocalypse loomed. The reclusive Dr. No's plan to launch nuclear rockets from his base in a Caribbean island would be thwarted at the last moment.

Surveillance. Of the two doctors, No is more directly a product of the Cold War—the James Bond film coincided with the Cuban Missile Crises. Even though Mabuse may have never got as far as Dr. No in terms of causing an international crisis, the Cold War paranoia forms the backdrop of *The Thousand Eyes*' theme of technological surveillance—which places it in a lineage that includes many films in various genres such as *the Conversation* (1974), *Sliver* (1993), *Enemy of the State* (1998), *Minority Report* (2002), *The Lives of Others* (2006), and *Vacancy* (2007).

A Mysterious Hotel. Back to the Hotel Luxor, the hub of action in *The Thousand Eyes*. The question posed at the beginning of Lang's *Spies* was “who is behind all this?”. Similarly, the first Dr. Mabuse film was centered on the supervillain as the originator of the story. With *The Thousand Eyes*, the question is not about a person, but a place. “What's going on at Hotel Luxor?” asks a police chief as he directs his underlings to unravel the mystery.

The Nazi Past. As far-fetched as it may sound, the idea of entirely wiretapping a hotel had a counterpart in recent history. SS bigwig Reinhard Heydrich's (his assassination was the subject of Lang's *Hangmen Also Die!*) SD intelligence agency had operated a high-end brothel in order to collect information about its prominent patrons—which was wildly fictionalized by Tinto Brass in his controversial *Salon Kitty* (1976), a precursor to the Nazisploitation film cycle.

May 1944. Another famous hotel, the Overlook of Kubrick's *Shining* has its caretaker tormented by apparitions in its halls and ballroom. Entangled in a perpetual present, Jack Nicholson's character eventually slips into psychosis. Fredric Jameson suggests that the Overlook is indeed haunted, not by ghosts but by history—specifically by a unique decade, the Roaring Twenties¹. Similarly, a character in *The Thousand Eyes* points out that the Hotel Luxor is doomed because of its past—it was originally launched as a Nazi project. The building's cornerstone was constructed in May 1944, when Nazi Germany had not yet lost the war and its atrocities were far from being over. For that particular month, the outlook was grim—thousand bomber raids on Berlin, German submarines sunk almost daily and Normandy landings just around the corner². Presumably, the hotel began service following the war. Gestapo's project to create a site for surveillance had persevered and even upgraded with the new technology in the post-Nazi era.

Working Through the Past. A year before the premiere of *The Thousand Eyes*, Theodor W. Adorno delivered a lecture that was published as “the Meaning of Working Through the Past”. He warned against “forgetfulness” and urged coming to terms with a dark past by understanding the causes of what happened³. In a similar vein, Lang here is calling his contemporaries to look beyond the paranoia of the Cold War and reflect on the legacy of recent history. *The Thousand Eyes* is a complex film that invites thinking about a dark past, its spillover to the present and the future imperiled by technology.

STORY

Clairvoyant. Inspector Kras receives a phone call from Peter Cornelius, a blind clairvoyant whose previous tips have been helpful to the police. This time he is calling to warn Kras about his premonition. He relates a hazy account of a drive-by shooting and urges the inspector to take action.

Assassination. Evidently, the warning comes a little late. Concurrent to the phone call, a man is seen driving his coupe—unaware that he is being stalked by a black Mercedes. At stoplights, the shady figure in the latter's back seat pulls up a futuristic looking rifle and snipes the man with a silent shot. A traffic policeman notices the dead man moments later, only after all the cars have driven away. The assassin "No. 12" dutifully reports the successful completion of the mission over the car phone—to a mysterious "Doctor". The driver is a tad too inquisitive about the boss as neither man has seen him in person. The hitman warns him that asking too many questions could prove fatal.

An Unusual Weapon. Not before long, Kras is informed about the man found dead at the traffic lights. The victim is a well known television reporter named Barter. There appear to be no visible wounds on the body but the autopsy reveals that he was killed by a steel needle that stuck in his brain. The piece matches the armament of an experimental weapon developed by the US army. Its blueprints were stolen by a soldier stationed in Germany who was later found murdered. The police have no clues about whoever may be in possession of the weapon.

Dr. Mabuse. The reporter had been working on a sensational story but its details are unknown. His home has been ransacked and all of his notes have vanished. At the meeting of the police chiefs, one of them mentions that the assassination appears to be the copycat of a murder case he had worked on many years ago as a young detective. He recounts the story of Dr. Mabuse, "an evil genius" who attempted to "shock the world with terrorist acts and undermine governments to establish a fantastic reign of crime". The other participants are curious why they have never even heard of the name. He vaguely responds that the investigation had coincided with the rise of Nazism. He assures them that the two incidents are merely similar—Mabuse definitely died in a mental asylum in 1932 and he personally saw his corpse. A zooming shot of Mabuse's gravestone solidifies his assertion.

The Hotel Luxor. So much for closure though—next scene shows an ordinary looking van cruising surreptitiously while loudspeakers in the back broadcast a voice that purports to belong to Dr. Mabuse. The two technicians in the communications vehicle attentively decode his message. He is calling them from a control room with high-tech electronic equipment and the camera only shows his clubfoot shoes. Following his instructions, the covert vehicle proceeds to surveil an American tourist staying at the Hotel Luxor.

The Police and the Interpol. The police also focus their attentions on the same hotel because the dead reporter was known to have frequented it. His murder was the last of a series of unsolved homicide cases somehow connected with the hotel. In separate instances, an arms dealer, a bank executive and a corporate attorney were killed shortly after their stays. Consequently, Inspector Kras begins to investigate the goings-on at the Hotel Luxor. It is also mentioned that an unidentified undercover Interpol agent recently assigned to the investigation was staying there as a guest.

A Suicide Attempt. Concurrently, an excited crowd has assembled in front of the Hotel Luxor to watch a suicide attempt in progress. A woman named Marion Menil is standing on a window's ledge and refuses the manager's pleas to step inside. She happens to be right outside the suite of Henry B. Travers, the American businessman that Mabuse was prying on. Travers opens the window and smoothly talks the despondent woman out of jumping down. He persuades her to step inside the suite where he tries to calm her down. Just then, her psychiatrist Dr. Jordan shows up at the suite. Jordan explains that he had heard of the incident thanks to the radio's news broadcast. He praises Travers' tactful handling of the situation and Menil is taken to her own room to rest.

Travers. Travers is a military contractor of the US government who uses an alias to keep a low profile. He is in Europe to purchase ballistic missiles from Germany and is negotiating a deal with the

Taran Nuclear Works in London. The feat of “the multimillionaire American” makes it to the headlines and his identity gets exposed, but that doesn’t bother Travers—he is obviously enchanted with Menil who now takes up most of his attention.

The Three Suspects. The hotel manager informs the police that Menil attempted suicide a couple of hours after she received a threatening telegram from her husband. To complicate things, Kras is tipped by a bartender that the deceased reporter was acquainted with her. He pays her a visit but an agitated Menil evades his questions.

Mr. Know it All. At the bar, Kras meets a nosy figure who is always on the scene at critical moments. Hieronymous B. Mistelzweig introduces himself as an insurance agent staying at the hotel. The chatty Mistelzweig is a horoscope buff and mentions that the hotel’s stars make him uneasy. It has a troubled “birth” chart—its cornerstone was laid in May 1944 when Nazi Germany was not yet defeated. The hotel was a project of the Gestapo which had conceived it as a surveillance site.

Psychic’s Premonitions. Meanwhile, Travers has a seemingly chance encounter with Cornelius after his driver almost hits the seer and his service dog in the street. Subsequently, they have a little chat in the car. Cornelius illustrates his visionary powers by mentioning something no one except for Travers could know—a minor injury that occurred in the suite that morning. He also remarks that Travers’ current business negotiation—the acquisition of Taran—is not meant to have a positive conclusion. When Travers doesn’t look too impressed, Cornelius gives a startling demonstration of his prowess by alerting the driver about a truck that comes out of nowhere and almost crashes with their car.

Kras’ Ruse Fails. Kras thinks he has a promising lead: The driver of Mabuse’s hit squad is no longer just curious; he is afraid and wants out of the crime ring. He has approached the police but not yet come forward. The inspector devises a ruse to test the reactions of the main suspects in the murder of the reporter—he singles out Menil, Cornelius and Mistelzweig. To each one, he mentions a “strange phone call” that he has received. According to Kras’ ploy, the hint of the driver’s desertion would lead the true culprit to panic. Nothing gets revealed by the trick—which only leads to having the driver murdered by Mabuse’s henchman No.12. Kras himself becomes a target and barely survives an assassination attempt—the bomb placed in his office kills his assistant.

Peeping Toms. Meanwhile, the romance between Travers and Menil thickens. She divulges her fear of her abusive husband—whose extreme jealousy, she says, arises from having a clubfoot. They dance in the hotel’s casino under the watchful eyes of Mistelzweig—but he is not the only one spying on them. Someone monitors their every movement and eavesdrops on their conversations by way of hidden cameras and microphones.

One-way Mirror. At the Hotel Luxor, there is more to surveillance than closed circuit television. The slimy hotel detective offers to share with Travers a secret in exchange for his generosity. Together they go to the room next to Menil’s and Detective Berg points to a one-way mirror that offers a full view of her room. Travers stands transfixed, gazing at Menil getting dressed. After a while, he composes himself and tells the detective to reserve the room for him “so that no one else can misuse it”. Unbeknownst to him, someone else is watching both rooms from the video monitors in a control room.

Nuclear Deal Imperiled. A telegram informs Travers about an explosion at the Taran reactor. The nuclear disaster has rendered the acquisition void and he cancels his trip to London, deciding to prolong his stay at the Luxor and concentrate on Menil. On the other hand, he takes note of the accuracy of Cornelius’ earlier premonition about the ill-fated deal.

Séance. Cornelius invites Kras to a séance which turns out to be eventful, although it makes little contribution to the investigation. Sitting with his back to the window, the inspector is saved from a sniper’s shot by Cornelius’ timely warning. The shooter on some rooftop across the street can’t be found. On the other hand, the perceptive Mistelzweig realizes that Cornelius is wearing white lenses to feign blindness, but for the time being he keeps this discovery to himself.

Menil's Husband Appears. Travers proposes to Menil—which leads her to reveal a secret. After putting up with her husband Roberto's abuses for a long time, Menil says that she had tried to poison him without success. Afterwards, she had escaped and ended up in the hotel. The story doesn't deter Travers and he is about to reiterate his proposal—just then the phone rings and Dr. Jordan alerts Menil that her vindictive husband is on his way to the Luxor. Promising to return soon, she goes to her room to deal with the problem. After some hesitation, Travers follows her and takes position in the room with the one-way mirror to see how things will turn out.

Surprise. When the husband arrives, his clubfoot identifies him as the person issuing orders early on as Mabuse. Travers continues watching and Roberto turns violent. When he attacks Menil with a knife, Travers charges through the mirror, grabs a pistol that Menil tosses his way and shoots the frenzied man. As Roberto lies dead, Menil calls her psychiatrist to come over to help. As was the case in the previous instance, Dr. Jordan turns up right away. He has the corpse taken to an ambulance under the pretense of an emergency. He lets Menil know that he will cover up the killing by reporting that the man died on his way to the hospital. With the main obstacle out of their way, the couple prepares to leave the country.

Layers of Deception. The whole scene with the killing of the jealous husband was staged to dupe Travers. The gun fired blanks and Roberto—an underling and decoy of Mabuse—had simply played dead. In the ambulance No.12 shoots him with the needle gun, this time killing him for real. His body is soon found by a patrolman arriving to the scene of a fire. Ballistic analysis establishes that the steel needles which killed him and the reporter Barter are identical—a finding that points to Menil's involvement with the crimes. Tipped about her departure plans with Travers, Kras hastily leads officers to the Hotel Luxor.

Menil Comes Clean. Meanwhile, Travers has suspicions of his own, especially about the psychiatrist materializing so swiftly. As they are about to leave the room, he questions Menil. She confesses to her role in the conspiracy and explains that everything—including the suicide attempt—was stage-managed by Mabuse. He aimed to gain indirect access to Travers' assets by having Menil marry him.

Face-off. Menil persuades Travers that her love is for real and they need to run away before Mabuse's henchmen get to them. "They observe everything" she screams, pointing to the cameras and microphones in the suite. Before they can get off the elevator, the couple is seized by the hotel's detective and engineer who turn out to be Mabuse's minions. They are led through a hidden door in the elevator to Mabuse's control room with the television screens monitoring the entire hotel. Travers tries to fight the captors but is subdued and Menil accidentally gets shot. As she lies bleeding, Jordan arrives. He introduces himself as none other than Doctor Mabuse—or more accurately the person who has assumed the identity of the arch-villain from decades ago. Thanks to the screens, he notices the police surrounding the building and heads out, locking the door behind him.

Mabuse's Demise. Mistelzweig is in the lobby observing the elevator's control panel. He is intrigued by the car arriving vacant from Travers' floor and Jordan vanishing after entering it in the ground floor. Jordan almost manages to sneak out quietly but Mistelzweig spots him and alerts the police. Mabuse makes it to the hit squad's car waiting for him outside and drives away. A high speed chase ensues with Kras in pursuit. Mabuse drives while his crony No.12 sprays the tailing police with a machine gun. The chase comes to end at police's roadblock on a bridge, as a hail of bullets causes the car to roll over and fall to the river. Back at the hotel, Mistelzweig rescues the couple entrapped in the basement and the film concludes with Travers kissing Menil at the hospital.

THEMES

Corporations. Travers' German counterpart asks where the American businessman stands vis-à-vis his state: "just a question of principle: When you take over the entire stock holdings of Taran Nuclear Works... is this happening under the auspices of the United States Government or are you signing as a private citizen?". Travers dismisses the question as irrelevant. The distinction between public and private hardly matters, since he "will test the rockets in military facilities in US under the control of the government". The tycoon is a figure from a new age that will see corporations getting increasingly powerful. The trans-national nature of the business is underscored with the deal extending beyond Germany. The industrialist intends to acquire rockets from German manufacturers but the nuclear reactor of Taran Corp. happens to be in the United Kingdom.

Nuclear Power. Then comes the news of an explosion at Taran's reactor in the UK (perhaps it wasn't deemed a good idea to have Germany as the location of the nuclear disaster). Lives are lost and a residential area within a ten-mile radius is evacuated (it is not clarified whether it was caused by an accident or sabotage). With the news of the explosion, Travers merely cancels his check and his visit to London, sending his secretary alone to assess the new situation. The episode is a timely warning against environmental crises and recklessness of corporations.

Nuclear Weapons. Howard Vernon, the actor cast as the hitman No. 12 had a major part in Godard's *Alphaville*. In this film, his character was an evil scientist named von Braun—an obvious reference to Wernher von Braun, the architect of Nazi Germany's rocket program. *The Thousand Eyes* stops short of alluding to this important figure—which is interesting since von Braun had resumed his work on rocketry in the USA following the end of World War II and came to be a leading figure in the Apollo 11 space program. In any case, the missiles are casually referred to like any commodity—the weapon that gets more attention is the needle gun.

Technology of the Future? "An incredible weapon gentleman, it's a new infantry weapon tested at Fort Benning in the USA". The police commissioner introduces the supposedly state-of-the-art weapon to his colleagues. The air gun that silently fires "needles made from finest iridium steel" is presented as a technological novelty of *The Thousand Eyes*. As much as the gun looks unusual, it is hardly an innovation that belongs to the atomic age. Even No. 12—who is seen flaunting it twice—reverts to using a regular assault rifle in the whirling finale with the car chase. A similar novelty is the door of the secret surveillance room. The girthy vault door makes a superficial sonic sound as one would expect to hear in a B-movie. In both instances, the technologies—an high-pressure rifle firing needles and a thick metal door that opens with a remote device—are retro-futuristic since they evoke the earlier phase of the industrial revolution.

Surveillance, Past and Present. All the rooms and hallways of the Hotel Luxor are bugged with miniature cameras and microphones. The closed circuit television system is controlled in the secret basement where Mabuse/Jordan gathers information about the guests. When he changes hats and becomes Cornelius the seer, he shocks the same individuals with knowledge of their secrets and manipulates them.

When Mistelzweig relates the history of the hotel to Inspector Kras, he mentions that it was built exactly for the purpose of surveillance as a project of the Gestapo. He doesn't talk about the technology in the original plans. That is clarified in a later scene when the hotel's engineer—in fact an operative of Mabuse—brags about "switching the Gestapo plans to television". What began as an eavesdropping project was modified in post-war Germany into visual surveillance. As Tom Golding points out, *The Thousand Eyes* points to historical continuity⁴. The question remains whether the Hotel Luxor is an isolated instance. Is it a memento from a bygone epoch or is it just one of many examples pointing to such continuity?

History. In the meeting of police chiefs, only one participant remembers Dr. Mabuse the criminal from the early 1930s. He also offers an explanation for others' apparent amnesia—"Hitler appeared on the scene, and the whole Nazi nightmare..." His sentence remains incomplete. Was it because the

investigation was covered up—or a much more formidable criminal took to the stage? Golding argues that besides the hotel being rooted in a Nazi past, the new Mabuse emerges as an heir to Adolf Hitler.⁵

Television. During the restaurant scene at the hotel, the camera slowly zooms out from the dining Travers and Menil. Gradually, it is revealed that a television screen at the surveillance center is displaying them. The older technology of cinema briefly coexists in the same frame with the new one, television. According to Jonathan Crary, this is the announcement of a new era “where cinema is supplanted or infiltrated in various ways by television”.⁶

Self-reflection. *The Thousand Eyes* makes references to several scenes and characters from Lang’s other films. It recalls *Dr. Mabuse the Gambler* with an industrialist charmed by a woman under the spell of Mabuse. This film also had a séance scene that was disrupted because of a skeptic (a deceiver in *The Thousand Eyes*). In *the Woman in the Window*, a middle aged Professor’s fascination with a younger woman gets him into trouble. He ends up killing her husband by a weapon provided by her—similar to Menil tossing Travers a gun to kill Roberto. The drive-by shooting at the traffic lights is a homage to *M*, as is the scene with senior police officials holding a meeting amid thick cigarette smoke.

Marking the end of his career, *The Thousand Eyes* is rich with references to Lang’s previous works, but it is more than one big collage. Joe McElhaney considers it to come on top of a list of his films that “distill the very essence of Lang’s cinema”.⁷ It is the director reflecting on his own corpus, parts of which “are threatened to become clichés”.⁸

CHARACTERS

Dr. Mabuse / Peter Cornelius / Dr. Jordan. “Psychiatrist” Jordan was so impressed by Mabuse’s career as a criminal that he assumed his identity. In order to revive Mabuse’s goal of creating chaos, Jordan seeks getting hold of nuclear weapons and using them. His Cornelius persona is a manipulating psychic who pretends to be blind—and Irish, as Cornelius claims that he owes his clairvoyance to his roots in Ireland where “the elementary power of nature” is paramount.

Inspector Kras. Kras reprises Otto Wernicke’s Lohmann character from *M* and *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*. The inspector is seen reading *the Psychology of Crime* and Ed McBain thrillers while smoking his fat pipe. He is intelligent and shrewd but wastes time with things like suspects’ tax returns and employment history. Consequently, the solution of the mystery is hardly his achievement. Insurance salesman / Interpol agent Mistelzweig is always one step ahead of Kras.

Henry B. Travers. The tycoon is an arms dealer and government contractor who is visiting Germany to buy nuclear ballistic missiles. Mabuse engineers a scheme to take possession of his arsenal and uses Melin as bait.

Marion Menil. She starts out as an accomplice of Mabuse and a willing participant in the conspiracy. Her assignment is to get the rich American to marry her. She was hypnotized for the task but eventually her love prevails and she deserts the crime ring.

Hieronymous B. Mistelzweig. The insurance agent is a busybody who pops up in unexpected places. He is in fact an Interpol agent in disguise, assigned to investigate the murders associated with the Hotel Luxor. As a detective, his achievements surpass the Berlin police: Mistelzweig detects that the hotel has a secret basement and Cornelius fakes blindness. At the end, he prevents Mabuse/Jordan from escaping and saves Travers and Menil entrapped in the control room.

“Clubfoot” Roberto Menil. A crook in Mabuse’s gang who plays the part of Marion Menil’s husband and Mabuse’s decoy. The latter stages his mock killing by Travers in order to disorient the American and suck him deeper into his scheme. As soon as he has no more use of Roberto, Mabuse gets him killed.

No. 12. Mabuse's assassin murders the reporter as well as fellow gang members the driver and the "clubfoot". Whereas he uses the fancy needle gun for the assassinations, during the getaway attempt he has a machine gun blazing. He goes down the bridge together with Mabuse. As the henchman who stays loyal to the end, he is in the same league with *The Testament's* Hardy and *Gambler's* Georg. No.12 was played by Howard Vernon, cult actor of Jess Franco films.

Berliners. A recurrent trope in Lang's earlier films was the choreographed crowd, typically appearing as an angry and potentially menacing mob. *Metropolis*, *Gambler* and *M* had featured such large groups. Crowds were less frequent in his Hollywood period with some exceptions—e.g. *Fury* and *Hangmen Also Die!*. A crowd of Berliners has the spotlight in one of the few exterior scenes in *The Thousand Eyes*. As Marion Menil attempts suicide in front of Travers' suite, people gather on the pavement and at the windows of surrounding buildings. A woman cries she can't look at the sight but just a moment later grabs the opera glasses of the man next to him. When Menil safely goes inside, a man pats his belly and says he is relieved because it would ruin his appetite if she had fallen down. The onlookers are enthralled by the spectacle and they watch the incident unfold as if it was horror film.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

DR. MABUSE / PETER CORNELIUS / DR. JORDAN

Character Mabuse's two personas—the scientist and the psychic—function as a team. As the chief of the crime ring, Jordan makes sure that Cornelius' premonitions actually take place. The fortune teller's function seems to be manipulating and confusing the victims as well as the police.

Mabuse/Jordan becomes the dangerous criminal that he is as a consequence of his discovery of two distinct master plans: the original Mabuse's notes and the hotel's designs. Without both of these, it is dubious whether he could have made as much impact.

Illustrative moments

Out of Touch. Cornelius flashes his white eyes to impress others and enhance his credibility as a psychic. This trick seems to work, until the insurance salesman / Interpol agent Mistelzweig mocks the prop, saying that the white eye lenses look like they belong to "an American horror movie". In his attempt to imitate a criminal from decades ago, the new Mabuse sometimes looks rather out of touch with the times.

Wrackful. The financial system was within the scope of the original Mabuse's interests as he would look for ways to manipulate or cripple it. He was a survivor who thrived in the modern world. His imitator cares little about business or even surviving—he seeks total destruction. As he holds Travers and Menil captive in the basement, Mabuse/Jordan has them listen to his game plan: Travers would be murdered after marrying Menil, she would inherit his assets and make them fair game. It amuses the industrialist that Mabuse naïvely believes that he can attain corporate control so easily. However, the evil doctor is only interested in the rockets. He simply wants to "push that button" and unleash nuclear holocaust right away.

Blanched. As powerful a character Mabuse may appear, he has his moments of weakness in all three of the films. In *Gambler* that comes at the end. As he is hopelessly entrapped in the cellar, he wildly throws around counterfeit money. In *The Testament*, he looks feeble in his pajamas doing nothing but scribbling his will in an asylum cell. In *The Thousand Eyes*, there is a comparable scene towards the end, with him (as Dr. Jordan) in the elevator heading for the hotel's door to escape. The police are looking for him in the lobby and he quickly changes his appearance as a last resort to evade them. He removes the hairpiece, goatee and bits of fake skin, while anxiously checking his pale face in the mirror. It evokes *Metropolis'* ending when the master of the city shows up with his hair having turned grey. Frederesen's premature aging was a result of his own actions almost costing him his son's life. In this instance, it implies that the new Mabuse is losing his composure.

HENRY B. TRAVERS

Character Travers is a realist and a pragmatic businessman. He is a positive character but has his darker moments—e.g. his cold reaction to the nuclear disaster.

Illustrative moment

Peeping. *The Thousand Eyes* shares more than a year with Hitchcock's *Psycho* and Powell's *Peeping Tom*. Voyeurism is a central theme in all three. The uniqueness of Lang's approach is in the way that the voyeur himself is the subject of a gaze.

The hotel detective lets Travers have a good look at Menil's room while she is getting dressed and putting on make up. He continues observing as she receives his gift of roses and looks gratified. However, he is not the only one watching, as Mabuse/Jordan is keeping an eye on both rooms from his secret lair. Everything Travers sees is stage managed to deceive and condition him. Just like the suicide attempt and the abusive husband story, the director of the scene is Mabuse/Jordan in the control room.



(1922's Dr. Mabuse was an expert in telepathy and hypnosis, his namesake in 1960 mainly relies on CCTV and wiretapping)



(Lang's final film has lots of references to his own films—such as *Spies*, with an incident staged at a hotel)



(One of Lang's homages to *M* is the scene with senior police officials holding a meeting amid thick cigarette smoke; the séance recalls the one 38 years ago in *Dr. Mabuse the Gambler*)



(Travers is talking with Jordan the psychiatrist while the American businessman's secretary looks on; Hotel Luxor's lobby is an important meeting point. Inspector Kras learns about the hotel's Nazi connection from the mysterious insurance agent at the bar)



(Mid-century modern décor of Travers' suite)



(The hotel detective shows Travers the one-way mirror that offers a view of Marion Menil's room; Travers watches Menil's encounter with her 'husband' which is about to turn violent. *The Thousand Eyes* shares more than a year with Hitchcock's *Psycho* and Powell's *Peeping Tom*. Voyeurism is a central theme in all three)



(Dr. Mabuse always has one fiercely loyal henchman and this time it is No. 12, who is seen using the experimental needle rifle in this scene. No. 12 is played by Howard Vernon, the cult actor of Jesús Franco films; Dr. Mabuse drops the psychiatrist persona and prepares for the final showdown)



(A crowd of Berliners gathers to watch Menil's suicide attempt. The onlookers are enthralled by the spectacle)

¹ Jameson, Fredric. *Signatures of the Visible*. New York: Routledge. 1990, 98

² Wikipedia Contributors. "May 1944". https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/May_1944. Accessed August 24, 2019.

³ Adorno, Theodor W. *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*. New York: Columbia University Press. 1998, 100

⁴ Golding, Tom. *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity*. London: British Film Institute. 2000, 473

⁵ *ibid*, 471

⁶ Crary, Jonathan. "Dr. Mabuse and Mr. Edison". In *Art and Film Since 1945: Hall of Mirrors*. Edited by Ferguson, Russell. New York: The Monacelli Press. 1996, 274

⁷ *Ibid*, 43

⁸ "McElhaney, Joe. *The Death of Classical Cinema: Hitchcock, Lang, Minnelli*. Albany: State University of New York Press. 2006, 42

(McElhaney, Joe. "Dr. Mabuse the Cliché". https://www.academia.edu/12843789/Dr._Mabuse_the_Cliché. <https://www.academia.edu>. Accessed August 24, 2019).