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LOVERS, FILMMAKERS, AND NAZIS: FRITZ LANG'S LAST TWO MOVIES AS AUTOBIOGRAPHY

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In the 1930s, the filmmaker Fritz Lang fled Nazi Germany and remade himself into one of the most successful Hollywood directors, producing hit films for two decades. Then he did something unusual: he went back to Germany to make two peculiar movies, one a two-part remake of a 1921 epic on which he had been a screenwriter, the other a black-and-white sequel to the last movie he had directed before leaving his native land. He then never made another movie, though he lived for sixteen more years, moved back to Hollywood, and received numerous offers, some of which he worked on but none of which he completed. Something in those two last German movies altered Lang; he said that in making them he felt a "circle beginning to close" (qtd. in Bogdanovich 111). The phrase suggests that these films represented to him a way to tie together his whole career, and indeed his whole life: they served some sort of autobiographical function, revisiting and recasting his past.

But to call these films autobiographical, we would usually expect to find in them more than just remakes of earlier aesthetic works: we would expect them to represent real events in Lang's private life. Movies such as *The 400 Blows* and *8 1/2* are considered "autobiographical" in this sense, even though they are fictional works, because they seem to represent moments in the private lives of their directors, one tracing an adolescence bearing similarities to Truffaut's, and the other showing the love life of a film director like Fellini. Lang's last two movies are about a ruler of India and a psychiatrist who aims to conquer the world; they do not seem to reflect much in Lang's private life. However, there is another way to see these movies as an effort to re-envision Lang's most private affairs, and thus another way to see them as autobiographies of a very distinctive kind. To understand this, we need to add in a very well-known fact about Lang's life in Weimar from 1921–1931, the era which these movies revisit: Lang was married to Thea Von Harbou, and she was the

screenwriter for all his movies during that period. Their collaboration and marriage created an intense bond between them, merging the two personalities. As Lang's assistant director at that time, Conrad Von Molo, described the couple, they "were just like one team. It was more than just 'belonging together,' more than love, they were a real combination and the idea was impossible that there would be a row between them. They were absolutely one entity" (McGilligan 162).

Von Molo was wrong about the impossibility of a row between them; in fact, he was partly responsible for the row which finally separated them. His roommate, a young man from India named Ayi Tendulkar, became Von Harbou's lover in the 1930s, and eventually one of the causes of a divorce between Lang and Von Harbou. Another cause of that divorce was the rise to power of the Nazis. Lang claimed he hated them and just barely escaped their grasp in 1931; Von Harbou and Tendulkar remained behind, joined the Nazi party, and after Lang's divorce came through, married. Lang's later public statements about his separation from Von Harbou left out the affair: "our separation was amicable . . . the only thing that divided us was National Socialism" (McGilligan 181).

During World War II, Von Harbou and Lang both made movies—Von Harbou in Germany, Lang in Hollywood. After the war she was imprisoned for her part in the Nazi regime, and in her defense she claimed she had never been a believer, but had joined the party just to "assist Indians in Germany and Indian prisoners of war" (McGilligan 330). Lang vehemently denounced such explanations, saying publically that she had been an enthusiastic supporter of National Socialism. Her view prevailed, she was released from prison, and she went on to make a few postwar films. In 1954 she died, and three years later Lang returned to Germany to make his last two movies. Now we come to the interesting part: those two movies are revisions and extensions of the very first and very last movies on which Von Harbou and Lang worked together.

Lang's last two films thus frame in a very precise way the intense collaboration which was the center of Lang's private life and of his filmmaking career during the 1920s. And if we begin to think of these movies as in some sense "about" the relationship between Lang and Von Harbou, certain elements appear much more directly autobiographical. To give a simple example, the first movie Lang made after his return to Germany, *The Indian Tomb,* tells the story of a German architect, Harald Berger, who falls in love with and rescues a dancer from a forced marriage to an Indian Maharajah. In the original 1921 version of this movie, there is no German architect. The Indian princess has an affair with a British soldier, and the movie ends with both of them dead, the soldier killed by the Maharajah's tigers and the woman leaping to her

death to "atone" for her sins. Lang's remake transforms the tragedy of the princess into a romance, with a German savior who, according to Patrick McGilligan, is "transparently a stand-in for the director; the script makes a point of mentioning that he has studied architecture in Vienna and Paris," as did Lang himself (435). If the architect is a stand-in for Lang, his rescue of a woman from marriage to an Indian suggests the possibility that the movie is in part Lang's fantasy of rescuing Von Harbou from her life after she left him.

Much more in the way this movie is constructed and presented to the public gives the sense that it was a way for Lang to imagine himself restoring his relationship with Von Harbou. Most intriguing are the credits for the movie: though Lang was paid a screenwriting fee as well as a directing fee, he leaves himself off as screenwriter, and highlights the fact that the movie was adapted from Thea Von Harbou's novel. Some versions give the entire screenwriting credit to her. The movie thus appears as one more in the long line of collaborations between Lang the director and Von Harbou the writer, stretching back to the 1920s. The credits create a distinct impression that Von Harbou actually contributed to the 1950s version, and some critics have accepted that appearance as fact: for example, an account on a German film website by the reporters Richard Rendler and Ricore Medien blithely states that "Für das Remake überarbeitiete Harbou ihren eigenen Roman noch einmal" [For the remake Von Harbou revised her own novel once more].

I suggest that by putting a fictional credit on this film, Lang is revealing what he hoped to do: to resurrect a filmmaking collaboration and a personal relationship long dead. In "resurrecting" Von Harbou as a writer in collaboration with him as director, he is performing an autobiographical act that intriguingly mirrors the plot of the film: he is rescuing Von Harbou from the marriage and life as a performer which she had with Ayi Tendulkar. The movie alters the overall shape of the "career" of the filmmaking team of Lang and Von Harbou: all filmographies of their collaborations end with this film. The film creates the impression that it is not just Lang, but the two-person team that is closing the circle by seeming to come back together again; by circling around the era during which Lang and Von Harbou made films separately, it seems to undo the significant disagreements that mark that era. The credits appear to reveal a new chapter in the narrative of a famous married filmmaking team.

The second movie Lang makes after returning to Germany also appears at first glance to be a continuation of that filmmaking team. Lang and Von Harbou had made two movies about a criminal mastermind, Dr. Mabuse, and this new movie, *The Thousand Eyes of Dr. Mabuse,* seems to continue the series. The credits this time do not mention Von Harbou, but the style of the

movie makes it seem that the filmmaking team of the earlier two films has been "resurrected": the new movie is in black and white, and as Tom Gunning notes, "The first moments of *The Thousand Eyes of Dr. Mabuse* unwind as if Lang had never left Germany, so smoothly does he resume the style of editing and sound links that characterized his last German films, *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse,* in particular" (361). As we will see later, the story of this movie does make autobiographical allusions, but as in *The Indian Tomb,* the autobiographical effect is created by much more than the story. In these two movies, the credits and styles make them appear to be continuations of the filmmaking collaboration between Lang and Von Harbou. Lang thus manages to do what many people who have lived through failed relationships wish they could do: by outliving his partner, and thereby becoming the only "autobiographical" source for the story of their relationship, he can retell it in a way that makes it appear that the relationship had a sequel which never occurred.

But if all these movies do is provide Lang the fantasy of his wife returning to him from her "exotic" lover, it would not be of much interest to anyone other than Lang's aging fans. There is another theme of much greater importance which is connected to the lives of Von Harbou and Lang which also appears, allegorically, within the fictional world of the films, and that theme is Von Harbou's work for the Nazi regime after Lang left Germany. In *The Indian Tomb,* the act of rescuing the dancer from marriage to the Maharajah also ends up rescuing the entire Indian regime from being taken over by a corrupt ruler. This result emerges from a secondary subplot which was added in the remake, the story of an evil competitor, Ramigani, half-brother to the Maharajah, who believes that if the Maharajah marries the dancer, thereby defiling the royal court, the people will riot and put Ramigani in power. To produce this result, Ramigani captures the German architect and threatens to kill him unless the dancer says she will marry the Maharajah. The architect escapes his captivity, rescues the dancer, and in effect leads the Maharajah's army against Ramigani. I suggest that this subplot of a regime threatened with a corrupt ruler as a result of public riots is a subtle allusion to the rise of Nazism.

Lang's last movie, *The Thousand Eyes of Dr. Mabuse,* also has the same double structure, in which the rescue of a woman from a bad marriage at the same time saves a regime from public riots which could lead to a dictator. In that movie, the man seeking dictatorial power seems to be the supercriminal psychoanalyst from pre-war Lang and Von Harbou movies, Dr. Mabuse, who in the last pre-war movie appeared to have died. What eventually is revealed in this new movie is that a psychiatrist, Dr. Jordan, had read about Mabuse and "resurrected" him by pretending to be him and attempting to

carry out Mabuse's grand scheme of fomenting riots worldwide to lead to a public outcry for a world dictator. The savior in this case is a very rich American, Henry Travers, who comes to postwar Germany and is tricked into falling in love with a young woman, Marion Menil, by the fake Mabuse. Jordan's plan is to have Travers marry Marion and then be killed so that she inherits his resources for Jordan to use—particularly a nuclear rocket. But Dr. Jordan's/Mabuse's plan fails because Marion really falls in love with Travers, which breaks Jordan's hypnotic control over her. In both Lang's last movies then, we see an outsider coming into a country to save a woman from a bad marriage and simultaneously saving the country from mass chaos and mass riots which would lead to an evil dictatorship.

The intertwining of two kinds of rescue—saving a woman from a bad marriage and saving a regime from dictatorship—points to what was so compelling in the years from 1921 to 1931 that Lang felt he had to revisit those years and remake the films that bracket his relationship to Von Harbou, and that was her support for the Nazi regime. It might seem odd that he would seek to recover any relationship with Von Harbou after he repeatedly denounced her and separated himself from her during the Nazi years. But we can make sense of the peculiar autobiographical elements in these movies if we realize that it is not just Von Harbou that he is trying to rescue: it is the two-bodied entity which created those early films, because that entity is partly him. During World War II, Lang tried to disentangle himself from Von Harbou and her politics—from Nazism—but his efforts never succeeded. All his life, as Lucy Fischer notes, there was a "debate between Lang and his critics over the political implications of his work" (20). His early collaborations with Von Harbou seemed to many viewers to have foreshadowed and even to have contributed to the success of the Nazi party. So, by creating what appeared to be new Lang-Von Harbou collaborations after the Nazi regime had disappeared, Lang sought to alter the overall arc of their career together. Their movies no longer "lead up to" and end with the rise of Nazism; rather their collaborations transcend the Nazi years.[1]

To see how important it was to Lang to convince the world that he was not a Nazi, I want to examine one autobiographical anecdote which Lang told over and over again, and which has become the centerpiece of all Lang biographies: the story of his "escape" from Nazi Germany. The story is constructed as a bit of suspense. Lang said that his departure occurred immediately after a meeting with Joseph Goebbels in which Goebbels asked Lang to take charge of filmmaking for the Nazi regime. Goebbels alludes to some of Lang's films with favor, but then explains that *The Last Testament of Dr. Mabuse* had to be banned by the Nazis. Lang describes his increasing fear as

he listened to Goebbels, and then narrates his leaving the country as a hairbreadth escape under extreme time pressure, getting a train out the very night after that meeting with Goebbels.

This anecdote first appeared in 1943, while Lang was working on an overtly anti-Nazi movie, *Hangmen Also Die,* with a screenplay by Bertholt Brecht. The anecdote was included in all the publicity surrounding that movie when it was released, as proof of Lang's political credentials. That same year, an English-language version of *The Last Testament of Dr. Mabuse* was released, accompanied by another autobiographical anecdote: Lang said that he had surreptitiously put Hitler's words in the mouth of Dr. Mabuse. The banning of that film, then, appeared to be a result of Goebbels' having recognized what Lang had done.

But Lang had trouble getting people to believe his stories. His anecdote about escaping Goebbels was challenged during his life by other emigrés from Germany, who felt that Lang had actually been very slow in resisting Nazism. Patrick McGilligan notes that "even the director's closest friends and defenders grew doubtful and weary of the gussied-up story, which Lang trotted out at gatherings public and private" (180). After Lang's death, facts came out that show fairly conclusively that the anecdote was wildly exaggerated or even false. His passport reveals that he went in and out of Germany several times after the date he gave for the crucial final meeting with Goebbels, and there is evidence for earlier meetings with Goebbels during which Lang seems to have seriously considered working for the Nazis.

So it seems that during World War II Lang was driven to create false autobiographical details to enhance his public image. But the factual errors in the story are not the biggest problem with its believability: even if the anecdote had been true, it would have had a big hole in it, a shadow narrative simply left out, and that was his relationship with Von Harbou, his wife, who did not leave with him and who had become an active supporter of the Nazi party before she and Lang made *The Last Testament of Dr. Mabuse.* If he wanted his later anti-Nazi movies such as *Hangmen* to provide the basis for judging the politics of his early movies, wouldn't the later pro-Nazi movies which Von Harbou made undermine any such claims? How could Von Harbou, the screenwriter and pro-Nazi, have put words from Hitler into the mouth of the twisted, ugly criminal Mabuse, as Lang claimed? Was her pro-Nazi sentiment so much less powerful than his anti-Nazi sentiment that their films should be seen as basically his?

Lang's desire in the 1940s to prove that he had been an anti-Nazi even before they came to power was in part a reaction to what the Nazis were doing with his early films. *The Last Testament* was banned, but others were quite

actively promoted in Germany, and one was even incorporated into Nazi propaganda. In 1940, the Nazis made an anti-Semitic "documentary," *The Eternal Jew,* in which they used a clip from what has become known as Lang's and Von Harbou's greatest masterpiece, *M.* The new propaganda film uses the confession of the child-killer Hans Beckert in *M* as a representation of a Jew making fraudulent excuses for his evil acts. The 1940 propaganda film implies that *M* is not just the story of a strange maniac killer, but rather a work revealing the diseased mentality of the Jews, and so a call for a group like the Nazis to come to power.

The Nazis' use of *M* implies that Lang and Von Harbou were part of the groundswell of anti-Semitism which led up to the Nazi regime. Lang's 1943 anecdote about himself was then in part an effort to counter a kind of "biography" of him being constructed by Nazis and by others (including Von Harbou) who read his early films as proto-Nazi works. Some details of the anecdote show that Lang understood that the Nazis saw him as a fellow anti-Semite. Lang quotes Goebbels as explaining why the Nazis banned *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*: because the movie "needed a Führer to defeat Dr. Mabuse in the end and save the world from those who would destroy it by perverting the true ideals" (Taylor 45). Those whom Nazis viewed as perverting the true ideals were, of course, the Jews, so Lang's anecdote presents the Nazis as seeing his films as containing their core vision of the "Jewish problem" and lacking just the solution to that problem: the Führer.

Lang strenuously opposed such interpretations: his story about inserting Hitler's words into Mabuse's mouth implies that he "meant" Mabuse to be a representation of Hitler himself, not a representation of the Jewish threat Hitler would cure. We might be tempted today to ignore the Nazi interpretation, to say that Nazis could see Jewish threats in anything. But recent critics have also interpreted this movie and several other early Lang-Von Harbou movies in similar ways. Peter Dongelos in 1997 argues very much what Goebbels and *The Eternal Jew* imply, that Mabuse and other evil figures in Lang-Von Harbou movies represent corrupt Jews—or could plausibly have been read that way in Weimar Germany by persons not steeped in Nazi ideology. Mabuse, Dongelos argues, was probably based on Svengali, a hypnotist/criminal specifically identified as Jewish by Trilby in the original story; and Mabuse has an occupation, psychoanalyst, identified with Jews (74). Dongelos finds the strongest evidence for interpreting an evil figure in a Lang-Von Harbou movie as a representation of a Jew in *Metropolis*: an evil scientist named Rotwang in that movie lives in an odd little old-fashioned house with a star on the door (rather like a Jewish ghetto in the hyper-modern Metropolis), and his main evil act is creating a false robot copy of a Christian

leader, Maria. In other words, he gets his minion to "pass" as a Christian. He creates the robot to foment riots which will lead to the dictatorship of the "master" of Metropolis, a plan very similar to Mabuse's.

But just as Lang argued that Mabuse was meant as a condemnation of Nazism, not of Jews, we can read Rotwang as a representation of something like the Nazi threat rather than a "Jewish" threat: Rotwang misleads the masses through a kind of hypnotic mind control exerted by a charismatic leader, and at the end his plot is defeated by someone seeking to install a more caring and seemingly democratic regime. The savior is the son of the Master of Metropolis, a young man who has fallen in love with the true Maria, and has learned from her to care for the workers. If Rotwang represents the Jewish threat, then the triumph of the son represents the final installation of the Nazi regime; if Rotwang represents the Nazi threat, then the triumph of the son represents the restoration of good relations among masters and workers.

The movie *M* can similarly be interpreted in opposite ways. If we consider the child-killer Beckert a Jew, as the Nazi propaganda film does, then the violent group in the movie which organizes itself to capture Beckert could be a representation of a group like the Nazis. The leader of that group, Schranker, seems quite directly an evocation of early Nazism. He dresses in leather, and speaks of Beckert as a "non-member" who must be "eliminated." The language suggests that Beckert is not simply a maniac, but a type, someone beyond the "membership" of this society, as Nazis considered Jews. And Schranker seems a paramilitary contrast to the rather sloppy police inspector Lohmann, who only captures the childkiller by following Schranker's minions. So *M* could be a movie about the Jewish threat and the need for tougher policing, a proto-Nazi theme. But Schranker is himself a murderer, and the gang he leads to capture Beckert are all criminals, so the movie could also be an effort to undermine the Nazis by putting their words and behaviors in the mouths of disreputable characters, as Lang suggested he did later in putting Hitler's words in Mabuse's mouth.

So are the Lang-Von Harbou Weimar movies pro or anti-Nazi? Maybe both. In Weimar, Germany, there was a sense of public chaos and numerous theories of mysterious hidden manipulators—Jews, Nazis, Communists, Industrialists—who were creating that chaos. Movies about evil figures who manipulate the public to bring down the government could function as free-floating allegories, able to be used by people on all sides of such debates. To eventual anti-Nazis such as Lang, maniac criminals who sneakily disrupt the state to create dictatorships for personal gain could represent Nazis; to eventual Nazi party members such as Von Harbou, these same maniac criminals could represent Jews.

So Lang could have truly believed when he made the Weimar movies that they were anti-Nazi (though there is room for serious doubt about such belief), and yet these movies could then have been used to promote Nazism. Lang's last two movies are an effort to unravel the strange circles in which his career was entwined—they are allegorical "explanations" of how he could have been decidedly anti-Nazi and yet have ended up serving the Nazi cause.

To see the last movies as serving this "autobiographical" function, we have to see how they revise the key controversial element of those early movies: the hypnotic manipulator who can control other people's minds, Mabuse/Rotwang, the figure who could be either Jew or Nazi. The first thing to note is that in the remakes, Lang much reduces the charisma and magical power of his criminals. In the 1921 version of *The Indian Tomb,* a man with supernatural powers, a Yogi named Ramigani who can control people's minds, is forced to work for the Maharajah by a mystical requirement that once awakened from his meditative sleep buried in the ground he has to grant the wishes of whoever wakens him. While he provides the mystical powers that the Maharajah needs, the Yogi clearly is presented as morally rejecting everything the Maharajah wants to do, and also as predicting that the Maharajah's plans will end in disaster. In the 1958 remake, there is no mystical Yogi Ramigani, but instead the name has been transferred to the Maharajah's half-brother, a man trying to gain power though military force and murderous threats. The Yogi in the early film is a figure of great fascination and potentially the moral center of the movie—and as such, could be seen as contributing to the fascination with powerful hypnotic figures which slips toward Nazism. In the remake, Ramigani has no great personal charisma, no magical powers; he is simply an evil man with an army. So the moral ambivalence of the original Ramigani is removed.

Lang's last movie still has a man with hypnotic power, Dr. Jordan, but most of his seemingly magical power turns out to be due to his having borrowed technology from the Nazis. The thousand eyes of the title refer to movie cameras installed in all the rooms of the Luxor Hotel by the Gestapo, cameras that are still in place after the war and are discovered by Jordan, who decides to use them to gain worldwide power—in effect, to carry through the failed Nazi plans. Jordan presents himself as a "clairvoyant," and calls himself "Dr. Mabuse" to his gang members, but his mental powers turn out to derive from his spying with the Nazi cameras. This movie seeks to "demystify" the strange powers Mabuse has seemed to have, to reveal that what had seemed supernatural personal qualities are just products of technology.

To suggest that Mabuse's powers derive from movie cameras is to make the movie autobiographical in another way than I have been suggesting.

Besides being a fantasy of rescuing Von Harbou (and Lang) from Nazi influences, this movie is a meditation on what happens to individuals when they are surrounded by an extensive film industry that permeates even their private lives, a problem Lang felt acutely in Weimar when the film industry and his marriage could not be separated. Lang could easily have felt that his love of Von Harbou had in a sense "seduced" him into collaboration with the Nazis in his filmmaking, but his last movie suggests a much larger problem in his life: that movies and politics may have shaped his feelings even before he met Von Harbou, so that his love for her was itself in part a product of the social forces that were leading the Nazis into power. Both of Lang's last two movies focus intently on the question of whether or not seemingly private love affairs can be manipulated or even created by outsiders seeking political ends. In *The Indian Tomb,* Ramigani tries to get the dancer to fall in love with the Maharajah, or at least to fake that love, because Ramigani believes that such a love and the ensuing marriage would lead to regime change. He fails to create even the illusion of love, and the true lovers—the dancer and the architect—escape to live happily ever after. That movie is a fantasy about love triumphing over outsiders' efforts to control it.

The last movie is much more disturbing. In it, the good love affair that the movie makes us wish would triumph is the one created by the evil manipulator, Dr. Jordan, as part of his political plot. The movie does show that this love grows so strong that it breaks Dr. Jordan's control and wrecks his plans. But the lovers do not then live happily ever after: though the movie ends with the couple's last kiss, the woman has already been shot by Jordan, and she dies as the kiss ends. In other words, the movie does not show the lovers actually being extricated from Jordan's plots: the end of those political plots is the end of their love affair. The sad ending suggests that the love could not be separated from the fake plots which created it. Is this Lang's admission that he could never rescue his love affair with Von Harbou from her involvement with Nazis, because in some sense their love was a product of that involvement? The movie suggests that their collaboration was so successful—and their love so intense—because they were tapping into large "plots" going on around them which fueled the emotions in their films and in their private lives. In terms of the autobiographical allegory I have been constructing, the movie suggests that Von Harbou was already "hypnotized" by something like Nazism when she and Lang fell in love. Lang and Von Harbou then both were caught up in the story of the rise of Nazism, and their love affair was partly a product of that larger story. We could say then that Lang fell into a movie already in progress when he fell in love.

The Thousand Eyes of Dr. Mabuse goes to great lengths to show precisely that conclusion, that when the hero Travers falls into love, he is falling

into a movie directed by someone else. Travers watches through a one-way mirror as Marion is abused by her awful husband, and when the husband finally threatens her with a gun, Travers bursts through the mirror, snatches up the gun, and shoots the husband. It appears exactly as if Travers is breaking through the screen into a movie and changing its plot. Later we discover that this entire scene was a fraud—the gun is a fake, the husband is a fake, the woman is not married to anyone, and Travers was set up to break through the mirror in order to get him to fall in love with the woman. The rescue of Marion from a vicious lover was in effect a Hollywood movie staged for Travers, and he falls for it and into it. When he jumps through the screen, he is then not disrupting a plot, but just fulfilling his assigned role in a movie in progress. We even see that the "screen" he breaks though—the mirror—is just a stage prop in a larger movie, because just after he breaks through the one-way mirror, the camera pulls back and we realize we have been watching everything on a TV screen, the screen from which Dr. Jordan, the man who thinks he is Mabuse, is directing this entire plot.

Falling into someone else's movie: Travers (Peter Van Eyck) "rescues" Marion (Dawn Addams) from *The Thousand Eyes of Dr. Mabuse.*

There are cycles inside of cycles here. My allegories begin spinning on themselves. If the story of a rescue of a woman from an evil man is a fraud, what do we make of the allegory I have said Lang is fantasizing in making his last movies, the story of rescuing Von Harbou from Hitler? Is this movie saying that even that allegory is a fraud? Is Lang worried in some strange way that his very desire to rescue the memory of the dead Von Harbou is corrupt? Is that desire itself being created by some kind of Nazi manipulation, perhaps the residues of Nazism still in Lang and revived by his being back in Germany and remaking films that once contributed to the rise of Nazism? The American Travers thinks he is disrupting a plot just as Lang, if the allegory were true, would be thinking he is disrupting the history of Von Harbou's relation to Nazism, but actually Travers and Lang are just filling roles in another movie that may be serving the purposes of some evil Nazi-like movement after World War II is over. In other words, this movie redounds on its creator, suggesting that Lang is in someone else's movie even as he tries to make a movie about people being seduced into other people's movies. The movie implies that there is no space in any person's life which is not in a movie already in progress and written by someone else.

This movie has numerous lines in it about the sense that everything is under surveillance, subject to public display and control. For example, there is one exchange where Marion says to a policeman, "this is my personal life and none of your business," to which the cop answers, "when the police are involved, there is no personal life." It is precisely this interchange of dialogue that I think finally gets at the core of the issue which haunts Lang's last movies and turns them into very strange autobiographies. These movies—and perhaps all movies—imply that private life is subject to policing, and that such policing is carried out by the action of movie cameras. This policing is much more than simply catching people after they have committed crimes; rather, it operates by creating the scenery of private life in the first place so that people find their own desires leading them into plots that subject them to public control. Lang's last movie implies that people are acting out stories they have been provided, "autobiographies" which they end up writing by performing acts shaped by such things as the movies they watch.

There is a small visual trick that Lang uses throughout his career to represent the discovery that one is already a part of a movie, the discovery that one is as much an image of oneself as one is a "real" person. This visual trick happens when a character looks into a slightly darkened window; at that point a shadowy reflection appears and the person is momentarily doubled on the screen. Lang uses this effect to indicate moments when people find they are in stories they did not write and wish they could escape. In that early

Weimar movie, *M*, this effect is used when Beckert, the child murderer, sees his next victim: he sees her in a mirror in a store window, so he is looking through several layers of glass. When he turns from her reflection to pursue her, we see his semi-reflection in the window turn with him. He is divided: there are two Beckerts, a "real" one and an image, as there are two girls, one real and one an image, and it seems that the images are moving the "real" bodies about. This division fits with Beckert's confession which the Nazis excerpted in their later propaganda film. In that confession, Beckert says that he kills because he is divided, because one part of him is calling him a murderer and the other part has to kill to silence the accusation. He kills to stop voices inside him which are telling a story about him, writing an "autobiography" or providing a voice-over of the movie of his real life. He kills to escape being caught up in that movie. After killing the voices are gone: he no longer hears himself speaking as a "character" he does not wish to be in a movie he does not wish to live out. But of course by killing he is making what the voices say true, and so eliminating the split within him by becoming entirely the killer.

Similarly, in Lang's last movie, after Henry Travers has jumped through the mirror and killed Marion's fake husband, he embraces her in front of a window and both end up doubled. At that moment they talk about hiding the body, and Henry says he has never had to hide what he did before. Henry is thus feeling for the first time that he is caught up in the split between a public image he will henceforth project and his "real" self—or, we might say, he is split between two different stories, two movies, both of which he will henceforth live out. He is no longer just himself, but also an image of a criminal in a movie directed and written by someone else.

Lang also uses this technique in some of his Hollywood movies; for example, in *Fury,* there is a moment when the main character Joe Wilson is about to succeed in a manipulative plot he has set up which would cause the legal system to kill many people. He sees the heads of these people all around him as he looks in a store window, and hears voices pursuing him. As a result, he runs back to stop what he has done, confessing his plot in court, and then supposedly is free of this divided self. But while he may have recovered his "self" from the illusions he was enacting by confessing in the court, his confession is accompanied by the statement that he has lost all belief in the justice of the state. He cannot believe in both himself and the social order at the same time. This movie suggests what permeates almost all Lang films, that the private and public stories in which people find themselves inserted are at odds, and that to eliminate this division, to have one "autobiography," is impossible.

Let me unpack all this in terms of Lang's relationship to Von Harbou. What I am suggesting now is that their real love affair and their real working relationship were embedded in plots that mirror the plots they ended up writing. In particular, they both believed that love stories could be used to make engaging movies so that the desires stimulated by love stories could move people to care about social issues. But the social issues they sought to influence were already influencing their own love story. Once, when asked about the "role of love in his films," he answered, "Love! Tell me, if a man is a Communist and his wife is a Nazi, what happens to love?" (Gunning 204). He may have been discussing his movies, but his answer was clearly a reaction to his own life.

Lang's last movies are attempts to revise the stories he found himself living out by remaking the stories he had created. They are attempts to police himself, to undo the crimes his earlier movies had committed. Those early movies were deeply involved with the Nazis; we might say that the movies themselves had a love affair with the Nazis, and Lang's last movie is an attempt to convince himself that his early movies had been hypnotized into participating in that love affair with the Nazis, and could still be rescued. The movies did not "intend" to respond to the Nazis; they were distorted by unconscious forces. But unfortunately, to rescue those movies, to extricate them from their involvement in the larger plots of history, would probably be to kill them, just as Marion is killed by the effort to extricate her from Dr. Jordan's political plot.

Lang's last movie is then an allegory not only about his own life, but about his sense that everyone's life is already an allegory. The love stories people act out in their real lives are already entwined with other narratives, and all these narratives and love stories function in very real ways to determine the shape of the societies in which we live and the kinds of governments which come to power. Autobiographies are not just stories constructed in retrospect. Rather they are narratives we are all given to live out, and in so far as our lives make any sense at all, it is because we have managed to wrench real events into the movies we have been provided.

NOTES

1. Tom Gunning, in *The Films of Fritz Lang: Allegories of Vision and Modernity,* sees all three Mabuse movies as tracking the history of Germany: "the spectre of Mabuse, the persistence of his criminal legacy . . . brood over a trilogy that embraced the history of Germany in the twentieth century" (460).

If a man is a Communist and his wife is a Nazi, what happens to love? Lang and Van Harbou prior to their divorce.

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