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## Narrative and Intermedial Functions of Sound in the Films of Fritz Lang

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**Abstract** – This paper examines the role of sound as a narrative device in the films of Austrian-American director Fritz Lang. Incorporating several methodological treatments of audio, as well as classic literary narratology and media studies, the acoustics and spatial landscapes of Lang’s filmography and its narratives are analysed, establishing ways in which sound helps Lang build theme, mood, and meaning. After his early intermedial avant-garde experiments, the director’s technique of constructing complex sonic environments gradually evolved into a more simplified, and at times even mundane, auditory landscape that can be observed in his later films. This shift is indicative of the overall development of sound usage in cinema, but it also relates to Lang’s career trajectory as he fled Germany for the U.S. to be at the forefront of establishing film noir. Despite these later developments, Fritz Lang remains one of the first directors to achieve a meaningful unity of sound and image, reinventing the film experience.

**Keywords** – Fritz Lang; Sound Cinema; Radio; Intermediality; Narrative.

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## 1. Introduction

Fritz Lang is one of the most significant figures in cinema history. Numerous studies and biographies have been written about the Austrian-American filmmaker, most notably by Lotte H. Eisner in 1976 and Patrick McGilligan in 1997. These works credit him with, among other things, establishing conventions in special effects and set design for science fiction cinema, developing and advancing German Expressionism, revolutionizing storytelling through the exploration of psychological themes using imagery, and becoming one of the founding fathers of American film noir. However, what is often overlooked is his role in developing a new cinematic language that explored the possibilities of the emerging medium of sound. Lang was one of the first directors to use audio as a narrative device, not only to create mood and atmosphere but also to generate meaning. This made him one of the earliest filmmakers to truly master the medium of sound cinema.

This paper will examine how Lang's approach to sound was coined in the late Weimar Republic, refined in Hollywood, and later stagnated after his return to Germany when sound in cinema had become the industry norm and avant-garde experimentation of the 1920s and 1930s was largely abandoned. In his first sound picture, *M - Eine Stadt sucht einen Mörder*, Lang already demonstrates a conscious use of a highly varied spectrum of narrative and medium-specific tools to create a completely new type of film experience. Even in the highly experimental and diverse cinematic landscape of the late Weimar Republic, Fritz Lang stands out. Over the next 29 years, Lang continued to refine his approach as he became a household name in the noir genre. However, when examining his later movies, such as *The Tiger of Eschnapur* and *The Indian Tomb* in 1959, and *The Thousand Eyes of Dr. Mabuse* in 1960, after the early intermedial experiments, his technique of using sound as a method of creating meaning and building complex spatial sonic environments changed. After many years of navigating the Hollywood studio system and being relegated to a B-tier director, Lang's soundscapes became simpler and shallower. This shift is indicative of the overall development of sound usage in cinema – from innovation and experimentation to expectation and stagnation. Nonetheless, Fritz Lang was one of the first techniques to achieve a meaningful unity of sound and image, forging an audiovisual contract with the viewer and using it to reinvent the medium of film and the way it represents narrative.

To describe Lang's approach to sound this paper will focus on analysing the most significant audio works of the legendary filmmaker, namely:

1. *M - Eine Stadt sucht einen Mörder* (1931)
2. *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* (1933)
3. *Lilliom* (1934)
4. *Fury* (1936)
5. *Hangmen Also Die!* (1943)
6. *Scarlet Street* (1945)
7. *The Tiger of Eschnapur & Indian tomb* (1959)
8. *The Thousand Eyes of Dr. Mabuse* (1960)

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Incorporating several methodological treatments in audio, as well as narrative cinema studies and media studies, this paper will chronologically analyse the acoustics and spatial landscapes of Fritz Lang's filmography and its narratives. The audial analysis methodology of Michel Chion, introduced in his book *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen*, concepts of ocularisation and auricularisation, introduced by Sabine Schlickers, the concept of intermediality, refined by Wolf and Rajewsky, as well as several other, will also be utilized.

When talking about any sort of artistic approach, we should acknowledge that the director (real, not implied) is not the sole creator of a movie. When it comes to even decently sized productions, dozens or even hundreds of people may be involved. Lang was never personally credited for sound production; however, it is also true that Lang never really worked with the same people for long, often collaborating with local talent when moving to a different country or studio. This can be seen when comparing the sound crews from his films, with only a few exceptions (Adolf Jansen, for example, worked with Lang on both *M* and *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*) – each new film had a new crew. His style of sound-making, however, remains consistent and homogeneous throughout his career, with steady, linear development. Based on that fact, we can indeed talk about a consistent artistic approach, a cinematic language that Lang developed, advancing the art form.

## 2. Sound as an Essential Part of Cinematic Storytelling

Cinema is a narrative medium because it represents changing events over time. Even in experimental non-narrative films, elements like framing, editing, and movement create a sense of eventfulness. Thus, cinema represents experience through dynamically changing states and has been part of narratological discourse since the emergence of film narratology.

There are two main approaches to narrative analysis in film: classic narrative (*strictu sensu*), that views film through literary narratology as an entity not entirely unlike literature with similar categories of representation (Fludernik), and medium-specific, that sees film as a unique medium that works with its own categories outside of those established in literature and other arts (Chatman). When discussing sound, we must lean towards the latter viewpoint, as the sound coexists with picture in a constant dynamic interaction, unique to cinema (and videoart in general). Sound is one of the most powerful tools in a director's arsenal, capable of achieving characteristic cinematic effects, playing an important role in narrative representation: "The sound of a film is one of its most versatile signifiers, as it contributes to field, tenor, and mode as a powerful creator of meaning, mood, and textuality" (Fulton 108).

### 2.1 Plurimediality and Medium Specificity

The key concepts to understanding sound film are plurimediality and medium specificity. Cinema encompasses many other different media, both visual and audio based, as film integrates two channels: picture and sound. In silent films, sound is absent, but still implied, as most viewers mentally perceive it when interacting with the visual world. Thus, sound works in conjunction with the picture, interacting with it. The picture in cinema functions as a representation of visual media, borrowing elements from art, architecture, graphic design, and more. Similarly, sound draws from audio-based media like radio, musical theatre, and voice recordings. Cinema essentially manipulates these two channels to create a unique narrative space – the cinematic space of the screen and what surrounds it. Cinema is not homogenous, but rather a mixture of the two channels and many different media (Gaudreault and Jost 45-63).

Medium specificity can be interpreted differently. Vivian Sobchack, from a phenomenological perspective, views cinema as an anthropological medium – a representation of sensory

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experience through motion. For her, cinema is a communicative system reflecting someone else's experience (Sobchack 3-6). Christian Metz describes cinema as a uniquely perceptive medium that engages multiple sensory channels simultaneously, although it only imitates them, like shadows on a wall. In his "apparatus theory," cinema is a literal representation of human perception, akin to life seen in one's mind (the cinema room) through one's eyes (the screen). This creates a zone of identification for both character and viewer (Metz 42-57).

Consequently, cinema creates and represents sound, forming an auditory field that is being translated through the speakers. Sound serves as a crucial component that helps films achieve believability, closely aligning them with human experience and bridging the gap between the screen and the audience, thereby enhancing and strengthening their identification with the film.

### 2.2 Acousmatic, Ocularisation, Auricularisation

Due to the nature of film being a mix of two channels, it exists in a space between audio and visual media. Werner Wolf describes a medium as a cultural communicative system and defines intermediality as the interaction between these systems (2-3). When a new medium emerges, such as film or sound film, it often draws from others. Irina Rajewsky identifies three methods of intermedial interaction in diachrony (when one medium dominates over another): transposition (adapting specific information or a text into a different medium, such as adapting a book into a film), combination (a co-existence or full synergy, inter- or multimedia), and reference (a specific approach or method adapted from a different medium) (51-3). Sound film, for example, borrows heavily from radio, and Lang's films exhibit numerous examples of intermedial references, showing a gradual shift from co-existent media to a fully integrated cinematic synergy.

In analysing sound construction in Lang's films, the works of Michel Chion and Sabine Schlickers will be used, as they represent the sufficient methodological basis to interpret how sound is positioned, constructed and received, both in technical (Chion) and receptive (Schlickers) narratological terms.

Chion, a leading theorist in the field of sound usage in cinema, in his book *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* establishes categories to identify sound in relation to the screen and diegesis, based on its source of origin:

1. Acousmatic (diegetic and non-diegetic) / non-acousmatic
2. On-screen / off-screen
3. Ambient (territory sounds)
4. Internal sound, "on the air sound," voice
5. Pit music / screen music
6. Passive / active off-screen sound
7. Null / vast extension

Schlickers, on the other hand, in her article *Focalization, Ocularization and Auricularization in Film and Literature* categorizes sound in more narratological terms, focusing on how the sound is perceived. Specifically, by focusing on the point of audition (POA, analogous to POV) and by adding visual (ocularization) and audio (auricularization) elements to the situation of focalization. Her terminology includes:

1. Focalization (POV) (zero, internal, external)
2. Ocularization (zero / internal)
3. Auricularization (zero / internal)

Based on these categories, we can analyse how sound is constructed, what it represents, and how filmmakers can utilize it to achieve certain effects or convey specific concepts, built using the interplay between the visuals, audio and language.

### 3. Genesis of Fritz Lang's Sound (Weimar era, 1931-1933)

Fritz Lang began his career with the so-called “silent films,” but no film is truly, fully silent. Indeed, even in these pictures, Lang continuously evokes sounds through imagery. For example, a close-up of a clock in *Dr. Mabuse the Gambler* (1922) creates a rhythmic sensation in the opening scene—the ticking of the clock seems to synchronize with the gambler's devilish actions, evoking the sound of clockwork as pieces fall into place. In *Metropolis* (1927), the image of factory pipes emitting steam disrupts a tranquil dialogue scene with the sudden implication of a loud, violent sound. Although these films lack an actual soundtrack, they contain dormant suggestions of sound, akin to the image of Moloch lurking behind the machines in the underground factory of *Metropolis*—another scene that evokes auditory sensations.

With the advent of synchronous soundtracks, sound could no longer be merely implied but could actively support or counter the image. This is exemplified in one of the most important sound films of the 20th century, *M - Eine Stadt sucht einen Mörder* (1931). A major achievement and Lang's first sound film, it is frequently cited in historical analyses of the evolution of sound in cinema (Chion, *Audio-vision*; Kracauer; Eisner, *The Haunted Screen*; Ryan).

#### 3.1 *M* and Media Transposition

*M* began its life primarily as a silent film, with only certain sections featuring synchronous sound (as noted in Criterion Collection commentary, released in 2017). This production approach, along with budgetary constraints, rendered it a transitional piece existing in a space between sound and silence. Since any movie is a synchronous presentation of picture and sound, it never fully exists as a singular entity. A sound film includes two elements – video, which engages the sense of sight, and audio, which engages the sense of hearing. These elements never truly converge completely; plurimediality is at the heart of any sound film. However, with the development of technology, viewers have grown accustomed to this arrangement and forged what Chion calls an “audiovisual contract” – an understanding of film as a unified space where both media channels of sound and screen coexist in synergy (Chion 222). The director, or the implied author (and narrator), becomes a sort of conductor, using video and sound to manipulate both channels and create tension or harmony, to build a narrative.<sup>1</sup>

The most effective scenes in *M* are those where all sound disappears. In the crucial scene where the murderer is identified and chased (01:03:00-01:05:00), a radical shift occurs. Suddenly, after the audience has become accustomed to the bustling sounds of a metropolitan city (cars, crowds, numerous voices) we are thrust into the absolute silence that mirrors the horror experienced by the character. While sound in film is usually consistent and integrated, providing atmosphere and context, this scene defies expectations by immersing us in a complete and deafening silence for two whole minutes.

In this sequence, the fugitive child killer (Peter Lorre as Hans Beckert) is pursued by a group of vigilantes. By removing all diegetic and non-diegetic sound, Lang creates focalization through the absolute nullification of the audio landscape. We hear nothing, as if the world has shrunk to a single point of focus on the character's mind. It is as if we are holding our breath with him until the inevitable resolution – his eventual capture. This approach adds a layer of significance to the scene, transforming what might have felt mundane into a profoundly

<sup>1</sup> “From this perspective we have proposed a model where the primary narrator, responsible for communicating the filmic narrative, could be said to manipulate the diverse modes of filmic expression, to orchestrate them, make them function, and regulate their play in order to provide the spectator with diverse narrative information” (Gaudreault and Jost 57).

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impactful moment. While the audio-visual contract generally implies a unity of the diegetic world, it is never wholly complete. Instead, it is more of a juxtaposition, a combination that can be disrupted. Chion describes this disruption as a “spasm” – a moment of interruption resolved by a heightened synchronization (188).

In *M*, the coexistence of sound and picture (intermediality of coexistence) is evident in this moment of de-synchronization, with one medium sometimes overtaking the other. In these scenes the sound film momentarily becomes a silent film. Conversely, sometimes sound precedes the image, leaving us in suspense, as seen in the opening scene where we hear children singing even before we see them. Lang occasionally leaves us in the dark, but only for a few seconds (where the picture dominates over the audio track). This might initially appear as a technical limitation – film lacking audio because the scene wasn’t shot with synchronous sound due to its complexity or production costs, an example of zero auricularization. However, if interpreted as the subjective experience of a frightened murderer, it reveals an example of internal auricularization, which Schlickers describes as “auditory subjectivity” (Schlickers 250). Lang utilizes his technical constraints to enhance the narrative experience, not restrict it, by leveraging the plurimedial nature of film. This use of internal auricularization is more nuanced and compared to Lang’s later oeuvre, even though it was his first sound film. Filmmakers in the 1930s aimed to merge sound and picture channels, but Lang’s exploration of their discrepancy, of their ability to counter one another makes *M* particularly compelling.

*M* not only employs sound as a medium-specific tool to create affect but also integrates it thematically into the story. For instance, the killer is ultimately identified by the deaf characters who recognize the song he hums (56:33-58:20). The children singing is the first sound we hear after the opening title, and the film begins with the sound of a gong. These elements were not created in isolation but borrowed from the medium of radio.

Lang employs intermedial transposition, particularly from radio dramas and news broadcasts, integrating their characteristic qualities into his film. The character of the blind man, the opening gong sound, and other elements were drawn from contemporary radio (through medium transposition). Ryan’s article, *Fritz Lang’s Radio Aesthetic: M. Eine Stadt sucht einen Mörder* maps these influences: from radio dramas featuring blind characters to the use of the gong as a news broadcast announcement, and the experimental audio films of Walter Ruttmann (Ryan 264-7).

The sound of the gong, for instance, conveys a sense of timely social commentary. The killer in the film is based on a real figure, Peter Kürten, known as the Monster of Düsseldorf, who murdered nine people in the late 1920s before being executed. Instead of portraying the manhunt as a rational police decision, Lang critiques societal responses, mental disorder, and the death penalty, situating the film within the contemporary discourse on law and crime.

This critique is further supported by Lang’s use of sound bridging, where sound carries over from one scene to another. This technique not only connects scenes but also serves as a metaphor. For example, a voice commanding the crowd is initially misattributed to an individual in the crowd, later to be revealed to come from a group of elites in a separate room (09:20-10:30). The sound ellipses in the chase scene force viewers into internal focalization and auricularization, while maintaining internal ocularization and zero ocularization to preserve narrative distance. This technique is reinforced by the famous monologue where the killer admits to his disturbed state and lack of control over his actions (01:35:45-01:44:00).

In summary, Lang meticulously orchestrates the two channels of representation to create new meaning, reinforce themes, and build tension. Although these modes of representation often exist separately, Lang’s innovative approach highlights their plurimedial nature. This interplay begins to evolve in his subsequent film, *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*, a direct sequel to *Dr. Mabuse. The Gambler* and an indirect follow-up to *M*, with the character of Commissar Karl Lohmann returning as the protagonist.

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#### 3.2 *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* – Evolution of Sound

In this next film, released in 1933, Fritz Lang employs sound in a more subtle, nuanced, and varied manner. Audio in this production operates on both a diegetic level (creating the spatial background of a busy metropolis of Berlin) and a non-diegetic level (using a more traditional soundtrack).

With the *Testament* Lang continues to integrate the two distinct channels of film into a unified space. The film's opening scene serves as a prime example. We begin with the thunderous sound of a printing machine that vibrates through the entire frame (2:00-3:00). This sound directly impacts the diegetic space, causing furniture to shift with the rumble of the machines. *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* is a fully sound film, and Lang advances his technique of selective sound usage through internal auricularization. In one of the most evocative moments, the murder on a busy street, we hear a cacophony of cars that completely drowns out the sound of the gunshot (33:20-35:30). The camera closely follows the gun (zero ocularization), yet the point of audition changes, and we experience the murder from a pedestrian's perspective, hearing only the sounds of traffic (internal auricularization). This tension is effective because it creates a narrative separation between the object and subject of focalization, something that literature and theatre cannot achieve (Verstraten 147). This technique of selective sound recognition, where one sound is omitted or obscured by another for dramatic effect (like someone uses a volume dial), becomes a signature of Lang's style and is employed numerous times in his future work.

The radio aesthetics in this film also reach a level of thematic meta-reflection. Similar to *Singin' in the Rain* (1952), Lang uses the motif of acousmatic deception. Throughout much of the movie, the titular Dr. Mabuse appears behind the curtain like a non-corporeal evil spirit, influencing the nation from beyond the grave. The plot revolves around ghostly possession and the spread of an ideology of violence that cannot be conventionally seen or touched. This connects with the main narrative thread of the movie – evil corrupting even beyond the realm of the mundane. Mabuse transforms into an idea, reflecting the emerging Nazi regime (Kracauer 333). Thus, the voice transcends to the realm of on-the-air sound (Scion 76), while its true nature remains concealed. Lang draws a curtain before our eyes (and those of the characters) to demonstrate how easily we can be deceived and to highlight the dangers of technology as a weapon for ideology.

#### 4. American Film Noir – Theme, Mood and Meaning

After the second Mabuse film was banned in 1933 and following his meeting with Goebbels, where he refused to lead the cinema of the Reich (Kracauer 329), Lang leaves Germany and migrates to the U.S. However, on his way he passed through Paris – a transit city for many German refugees fleeing the Nazi regime. During his time in Paris, he spent a few years making his third sound film, a remake of a French adaptation of a book about a thieving, abusive scoundrel with a good heart who goes to heaven, hell, and back: *Lilliom* (1934). Lang made this film while barely speaking French and did not work on the script. Although *Lilliom* is not especially complex or noteworthy, it does introduce new narrative themes and sound design elements.

In this film, Lang continues to blur the line between diegetic and non-diegetic sound. This is evident in the scene where Lilliom ascends to heaven (01:24:00-01:27:50). The pit music aligns with his rise to the skies, and then we see an angelic orchestra performing, shifting the sound to realize zero ocularization as internal.

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Lang also introduces the concept of the movie theatre as a court of law, where film footage is used as an undeniable representation of reality – our life. In a scene where angels rewind footage to show the character and the viewer parts of his life he had forced himself to forget (01:40:30-01:41:30), the movie projection acts as a duplication of human perception. The projection here has sound, since it doubles as a human perception apparatus it must be as close as possible to be believable. This method is used to review the previous actions not from the viewer's perspective but from the character's perspective (camera and screen on the intra- and hypodiegetic levels). These themes will be further developed in his next that will bear the name “noir”.

#### 4.1 *Fury* – Intermedial Picture-Audio Integration

In 1936, after securing a directing position with MGM in the U.S., Lang directed his first American motion picture, which can be considered his first noir film. This genre, although a natural evolution of German expressionism, operates within a different cultural code.

In *Fury*, sound plays a crucial role in creating mood and atmosphere, as it helps emphasize the film's narrative beats. Unlike his previous works, this film truly synergizes picture and sound to create a unique artistic expression of despair, rage, and fury of the wrongfully accused main character (a thematic echo of *M*). Here the media do not just coexist, but achieve meaningful intermedial cohesion, a synergy of equality between elements.

Lang also further develops his technique of sound bridging. In a crucial court scene, we first hear a dialogue spoken in a private room before the beginning of the proceedings. With a cut, the scene shifts into the courtroom itself (53:45-55:05). However, the soundtrack of the voice recording continues without interruption, making the point-of-audition shift almost imperceptible. This effect strongly cements the audiovisual contract between the viewer and the film, creating a unified narrative field where the characters and themes develop in synergy, without drawing specific attention to either the audio or the visual elements.

Lang also continues to use an approach that can be described as a “volume/sound dial” technique. In the scene depicting the lynching of the main character, we see his fiancée walking among a crowd, looking at the fire that supposedly killed him (40:00-43:15). The only sound present is that of the fire burning; nothing else is heard. We see a close-up of Sylvia Sidney in complete shock (internal ocularization) as she focuses on the fire, which for her (and the viewer) drowns out everything else. This not only imbues the scene of the murder with a sense of sacral importance and heightens the tension surrounding the protagonist's fate, but also reinforces the main theme – a cautionary tale about the destructive consequences of blind rage (the protagonist becomes obsessed with vengeance) or the dangers posed by rage fuelling an entire nation (another metaphor for Nazi Germany).

The film's editing is synchronized to emphasize the sound and music, creating a dynamic, captivating experience. The seamless integration of sound and picture in *Fury* produces a strong solid atmosphere, where the addition of sound is not highlighted but rather acts as an inherent quality of the diegetic world. This film exemplifies what many consider unique to the medium of film: the complementary relationship between picture and sound or their use to counterpoint each other.

#### 4.2 *Hangmen also die!* Sound as a Framing Device in Film Noir

After *Fury*, Lang directed only one film based on his own script – *Hangmen Also Die!* (1943), a noir war drama. This film was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Sound Recording



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by Jack Whitney and Best Music for *Piano Sonata No. 3* by Hanns Eisler. Indeed, the sound in this film is both poignant and specific.

One of the main signatures of noir is the selective framing of dramatically significant objects to imbue them with new meaning. A gun becomes more than just a weapon; it transforms into a symbol of fate, a sword of Damocles. A clock ceases to be merely a timekeeping device and becomes an embodiment of the inevitability of fate, and so on. Lang employs this technique not only through camera framing but also through distinct sound effects. The point of audition shifts to directly reference certain objects – the click of a radio switch, the snap of a Gestapo officer's fingers, the tick of a clock. These objects, through internal ocularization (distinct from zero ocularization, allowing for a different point of audition than point of view), gain significance for both the characters and viewers.

In his subsequent Hollywood films, Lang gradually became relegated to a B-tier studio director for hire, making westerns, swashbuckling adventures, and war dramas, but predominantly noir. His films grew flatter over time, and fatigue became increasingly apparent. While there are still important and well-crafted pictures, they largely rely on established methods, such as framing, “sound dial,” and sound bridges. For example, in *Scarlet Street* (1945), the sound of a fight is obscured by the passing train (08:00-09:12) – a use of internal auricularization and internal focalization.

### 5. Auto Reference, Recontextualization, Nostalgia (1959-1960)

After returning to Germany, Lang departed from the film noir genre and created a colourful oriental adventure love story – a remake of one of his older works, *The Indian Tomb*. This film was adapted from a novel by his second wife, Thea von Harbou, who remained in Nazi Germany. After her death in 1954, Lang decided to remake this Indian epic as a two-part film: *The Tiger of Eschnapur* and *The Indian Tomb* (both released in 1959). Despite declining health, Lang made a film without Hollywood producers overseeing it a large epic with creative control, financed in Germany.

As is common with many auteurs in the later stages of their careers, Lang turned to self-reflection and nostalgia. He chose to return to Germany, a place he missed but that never truly existed for him, to remake a project he had worked on previously. He had been a scriptwriter for the original 1923 adaptation of *The Indian Tomb*. By shooting the film in colour (and his preferred letterbox format), he revisited a simpler, adventurous time before the war and emigration. Lang incorporated iconic scenes from his earlier films, such as the dance of False Maria from *Metropolis*, and remade them with more edge (the actress is almost naked, dancing in front of a topless statue in *The Tiger of Eschnapur*, 36:20-39:20), though with less thematic depth.

Lang also revisited techniques he had developed earlier, such as the “sound dial,” but applied them at the level of pit music external focalization. In one scene, after the protagonist is set up for a trap, he approaches a door that turns out to be locked (01:21:30-01:24:30). The orchestral music crescendos and then dies out. The scene continues for several minutes in silence, with the protagonist walking into a trap, the silence only broken by the reverb of his footsteps (internal auricularization). The special landscape, due to technological advancements, is more fully realized here, but it primarily serves to build tension.

Lang's last movie, *The Thousand Eyes of Dr. Mabuse*, introduces themes of auto-reference, nostalgia, and change but almost entirely abandons the audio play. This film is a rather simplistic monotone “talkie”. There is no “sound dial,” elaborate sound bridges, or specific framing. Instead, the sound serves only a basic thematic function. Lang revisits his early audio drama characters (the medium who channels Dr. Mabuse) but finds them to be frauds and criminals. There is no unseen evil here; instead, bandits use remnants of the war era (a secret

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bunker) to gain power and money in a post-war world of disillusioned Germany. Lang critically reevaluates his old story of *Dr. Mabuse*, proclaiming it a relic of the past. The sound in the film is relegated to merely existing as a necessity, a remnant of the audio-visual, of the picture, merely supplementing the sound, instead of engaging with it.

### 6. Conclusion

Fritz Lang pioneered the era of sound cinema by boldly incorporating the medium of radio into film, using it to manipulate viewer expectations and perceptions to create tension and meaning. Over time, he refined his techniques to blend the two channels of film, sound and image, into a cohesive audiovisual experience, forging what is known as the audiovisual contract and reinventing narrative cinema. Through his innovative use of sound bridges, music, internal auricularization, and precise sound editing, Lang developed mood, theme, and textuality in his films. He used these elements to create and reinforce meaning, build tension, and enhance the experience of watching a film. His approach was particularly influential in film noir, where his techniques contributed to a richer, more immersive storytelling experience.

However, in the coming years Lang faced relegation to B-tier director and experienced fatigue from being stuck in the Hollywood system. His style became less nuanced over time, relying more on established methods, rather than pioneering new ones. This trend is especially evident in his later post-war German films, where the aging director reflects on his past work in a self-referential and meta-ironic manner.

The simplified auditory reality in *The Indian Tomb* and *The Thousand Eyes of Dr. Mabuse* reflects both Lang's career trajectory and a broader trend of diminishing innovation that coincides with the development of an established medium. In contrast, his earlier works, such as *M – Eine Stadt sucht einen Mörder* and *Fury*, stand out as exceptionally avant-garde. These films were instrumental in shaping the language of sound cinema, making Lang's contributions crucial to the evolution of the industry and the art form itself.

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