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Tausend Augen des Dr. Mabuse, Die (The 1000 Eyes of Dr. Mabuse)

West Germany/Italy/France, 1960

Director: Fritz Lang

Dist—BFI. p.c—CCC Filmkunst (Berlin)/CEI-Incom (Rome)/Citéria (Paris). exec. p—Artur Brauner. p—Fritz Lang. unit managers—Richard Oehlers, Joseph Tuls. asst. d—Walter Wischniewsky. sc—Fritz Lang, Heinz Oskar Wuttig. Based on an idea by Jan Fethge and the character created by Norbert Jacques. ph—Karl Löb. ed—Walter Wischniewsky, Waltraud Wischniewsky. a.d—Erich Kettelhut, Johannes Ott. m—Gerhard Becker. song—Werner Müller. cost—Ina Stein. sd—Eduard Kessel. l.p—Dawn Addams (*Marion Menil*), Peter Van Eyck (*Henry B. Travers*), Gert Fröbe (*Inspector Krass*), Wolfgang Preiss (*Dr. Jordan/Cornelius*), Werner Peters (*Hieronymus P. Mistelzweig*), Andrea Checchi (*Berg*), Reinhard Kolldehoff (*Roberto*), Howard Vernon (*No. 12*), David Cameron (*Travers' Secretary*), Christiane Maybach (*Pretty Blonde*), Nico Pepe (*Hotel Manager*), Werner Buttler (*No. 11*), Linda Sini (*Corinna*), Rolf Möbius (*Police Officer*), Jean-Jacques Delbo (*Bartender*), Bruno W. Pantel (*Barter*), Marie-Luise Nagel (*Blonde*), Albert Bessler (*Hotel Engineer*), Maria Milde, Manfred Grote, Renate Kuster, Rolf Weih, Lotti Alberti. 3,725 ft. 103 mins. (16 mm.). Subtitles.

Mystified when the blind clairvoyant Cornelius proves correct in predicting the murder of TV reporter Barter, Inspector Krass is further puzzled by the fact that the murder, involving a secret weapon whose prototype was stolen by a GI deserter, parallels one committed by the long-dead Dr. Mabuse. Meanwhile Interpol, aware that the common denominator in the assassination of several international financiers is that they visited Berlin's Hotel

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DR Mabuse cont
Luxor, have infiltrated a secret agent; and arriving at the hotel under a pseudonym, American atomics millionaire Henry Travers is just in time to save pretty Marion Menil from suicide. Marion is restored to the care of Dr. Jordan, the psychiatrist at whose clinic she has been undergoing treatment. Suspicious of three people—Cornelius, because of his foreknowledge; Marion, because she knew Barter; and insurance salesman Mistelzweig, because he is ubiquitous at the hotel—Krass sets a trap by telling them he expects a phone call about the missing secret weapon. The inconclusive result is two attempts on his life. Travers, his love for Marion clearly reciprocated, is upset when she reveals she is married and terrified of her sadistic, clubfooted husband Roberto's jealousy. Told by the corrupt house detective Berg about a one-way mirror between his room and Marion's, Travers bursts through it and kills Roberto after seeing him torturing Marion. Roberto, an agent of the mastermind, is not really dead, but is promptly killed in the ambulance sent by Dr. Jordan, who had agreed to shield the lovers by removing Roberto's body. Told by Marion of the TV circuit in the hotel basement that covers every room—a legacy of the Nazi era—Travers investigates and is trapped there with Marion by the mastermind using Mabuse's name, who reveals that he wants Travers' atomics empire to further his goal of international chaos, and that Marion has been under his hypnosis all along. Leaving them to die, "Mabuse" casts off his disguise (he is both Jordan and Cornelius) and walks out unrecognised. But Mistelzweig, the Interpol agent, having partly deduced the truth, has Cornelius' seeing-eye dog to hand. The dog identifies his master, whose car, pursued by Krass while Mistelzweig rescues Travers and Marion, crashes over a bridge into a river.

At first not enthusiastic about the idea of revisiting Mabuse, Lang apparently changed his mind when he heard about the secret plans for hotels to be built in Berlin after the Nazi victory, designed to house diplomats from subject states with bugging devices controlling every room. Subsequently, influenced no doubt by its rather more than mixed reception, Lang had little enough to say for the film; and in one sense he was right, since it can do little plotwise other than repeat the 1932 Mabuse's gleeful vision of total, wanton destruction. On the other hand, the way Lang incorporates the notion of the hotel of a thousand eyes, not merely as a plot device or metaphor but as a visual motif that irradiates the entire film, makes *Die Tausend Augen des Dr. Mabuse* one of his supreme masterpieces. On a thriller level, it is both impeccable and irresistible from the opening assassination onwards: the little white car waiting at the traffic lights, the sleek black limousine pulling alongside with the killer in dark glasses, the white car left marooned on its own as the traffic lights change. Immediately we are plunged into a familiar yet still disquieting world of shadowy hints and half-truths where seers prophesy and financiers vanish, where dead men walk and nothing is as it seems, where the glimpse of a clubfoot and a command overheard in a mysterious van makes one think (all too wrongly) that light is dawning. At intervals, for instance when the lovers are in intimate tête-à-tête at a restaurant table, the camera suddenly pulls back to reveal that we were really seeing a screen within the screen along with the anonymous mastermind in the basement. Echoed in their voyeuristic effect by the one-way mirror angrily denounced by the hero as an obscene invasion of privacy, these screens uncannily suggest a world in which, somewhere, undetected if not unsuspected, a finger lies waiting for the propitious moment to push the destruct button; and furthermore, that since it is impossible to probe the protective shroud of delegations and disguises sufficiently to determine whose finger is poised, any attempt to do anything to avert the moment of doom will be as illusory and ineffectual as the hero's gallant leap through the mirror to rescue his girl from the wrong danger by killing a man who doesn't die. The bleak apprehension of apocalypse implied here (as abstract in its despair as Lang's demolition of justice in *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*) is not lessened by the absurd happy ending heralded by the superb sequence in which the suddenly significant presence of both Jordan's ambulance and Cornelius' dog outside the hotel indicates that the moment of truth is approaching. Admittedly absurd in its wild flurry of revelations and dénouements, this ending should perhaps be described rather as derisory, since it is precipitated not by official logic (the appropriately named Krass) but by airy fantasy (the equally appropriate Mistelzweig) in a slapstick rush that deliberately invites disbelief. Nothing, perhaps, has been solved after all: in the very last shot, the conventional scene of the hero at the heroine's hospital bedside, he is holding her hand with loving reassurance, but she is staring blankly into space. She is, one remembers, presumably still under Mabuse's hypnotic influence, and presumably therefore still a ticking bomb.

TOM MILNE

(This film was reviewed in a dubbed version in the M.F.B., No. 345, p. 137.)