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Gender and the City: *Lola rennt*

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This paper considers Tykwer's 1998 film *Lola rennt* in relation to the mythological constructions which have been applied to Berlin in the twentieth century. While *Lola rennt* appears to project a distinctly contemporary picture of life in the new German capital, it in fact operates through a complex network of mythical and historical references. A key part of this network lies in the treatment of gender. I see the gender performances in the film as conditioned by hysteria, which afflicts both male and female leads. This hysterical conditioning is related in its turn to the histories and mythologies of German and international film traditions, principally Sternberg, Fassbinder, and Hitchcock. Gender in *Lola rennt* is understood as produced through citational practices, after the model developed by gender theorist Judith Butler, and the performance of Lola as a mythical fantasy of the new woman running the new city is accordingly shown to be a continuation of old forms of gender trouble in Butler's sense.

One of the ways in which cities are figured in consciousness and in ideology is through forms of myth. Berlin in the twentieth century has been subject to a particularly varied range of mythological constructions, both in terms of the radical political contradictions and confrontations of its official history and the more slippery, subcultural trends of its unofficial history. The mythology of Berlin rests not least in its function as film-city, a one-time world centre of film production and an ongoing site for film scenarios. The cinema has served as a prime register of the city's mythologies, from the Berlin films of the Weimar period, through Riefenstahl's Olympiad films, via Wilder and Cold War thrillers, to the new Berlin films of the post-*Wende* period. Mythologies always have a tendency to resist historical change, to posit themselves as timeless, notwithstanding the evidence of history – in the case of Berlin the transitory succession of empires which have contested control over the city in the twentieth century. Berlin is a site of mythical projections, but also, and in tension with this, its topography is intensely marked by the particular processes of its history.

My discussion of *Lola rennt*, the film which, more than any other, has put Berlin back onto the international screen, will be focused on this relation between mythology and history, or more properly between competing versions of history and mythology. *Lola rennt* is a film

which plays with the conventional stations and monstrous obstacles of mythical quest structures, as ironically introduced by the voice of Hans Paetsch, the narrator of fairy-tales as 'Mythenverwalter' (Töteberg 1998: 130). It is an archetypal story-line produced with new means; as Tykwer has it: 'LOLA RENNT funktioniert nicht anders als die Suche nach dem Gral. Nur, daß es sich bei unserem Gral um 100.000 Mark handelt' (Tykwer et al. 1998).¹ With its tortoise, its blind seer, its Cerberus, its Cyclops, its sirens, its Charybdis, and its Circe,² it is a film that is figured more particularly as a reconstruction of Classical myth-narratives, not least as a latter-day mock version of Homer's quest epic, *The Odyssey*.³ While the film thus adopts a relation to a model form of grand narrative, it does so in a way that is eclectic and synthetic; in *Lola rennt* the topoi of archaic mythology are syncretized with a multilayered, fast-forward picture of urban modernity.

Tykwer's film emerges at a time when a renewed version of the 'junger deutscher Film' is freeing itself from the often morbid fixation upon history which was the legacy of the 'Neuer Deutscher Film' of the seventies and eighties. The new German Comedies and Thrillers are generally prepared to release themselves from the need to frame their pictures with the historical attachment to the Nazi period and to follow more international guidelines. To adopt and adapt the title of the earlier film scripted by Tykwer, German film culture is now figured as 'Baustelle', as a site of new constructions, and nowhere does this apply more closely than to 'Baustelle Berlin', where physical reconstruction operates in tandem with ideological and socio-cultural reconstructions.

In *Lola rennt*, Tykwer certainly releases his film from historicizing conventions. This is Berlin shot in the style of a globalized media revolution and in the globally transferable and readily exportable genre of the thriller. As we are reminded by the key site of the 'Deutsche

¹ In the sequence where Lola almost collides with the camera lens, Tykwer is quoting the same effect in the Hollywood version of this quest, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

² These presences are more or less oblique. Cyclops appears most explicitly in the name given by Manni to the jewel dealer; Cerberus would be the dog on the stairs who represents the first obstacle to Lola's quest; the sirens are the urban version on emergency vehicles; Charybdis is the whirling spiral figure which runs through the film; and Circe is encoded in the book of the film, where in the first variation on the future of bicycle-thief Mike, the cashier at first 'läßt sich nicht becircen' (Töteberg 1998: 37) but then falls for his charms.

³ *Winterschläfer*, with its manhunt organised around a scar motif, also refers to the primal mark of identity in *The Odyssey*. The idea of the mock-Odyssey is adopted from Bakhtin, who discusses the

Transfer Bank', it is part of a global exchange of bankable film productions, the bank heist being a key example of such international currency. The film avoids the more obvious memorial sites of the city, adopting instead a montage of unlikely angles on secondary postcard settings and of more or less unglamorous local territory, recognisable as Berlin to those in the know, but not in the established form of the angst-ridden, post-Imperialist cityscape. It is telling that where landmark sites are used for the film, they are appropriated as places of play, with Lola running across the giant chequerboard of the Gendarmenmarkt and the museum building on Unter den Linden transformed into a casino for Lola to play. And the splits still inherent in the post-unification capital are effaced by Lola's cab-ride to the wrong 'Grunewaldstraße' on the Eastern side of the city;⁴ the East and its historical specificity is thus merely, perhaps playfully, incorporated as a misdirected detour.

Notwithstanding the film's self-conscious, philosophical experimentation with spatial and temporal framing, then, its fixation upon clocks and appointments, it in fact effaces the political significance of time and place in order to retell a sort of new Odyssey, a time-less story taking place, as the publicity booklet has it in 'Berlin. Jetzt'. If *Lola rennt* is indeed, as Stefan Arndt of the production company X-Filme claims, 'der absolute Berlin-Film' (Tykwer et al. 1998), then it is a Berlin which is largely freed of its history. Tykwer claims that the historical experience of the late twentieth century is released from its binding to the past or the future, that it is fundamentally 'situativ', defined by contemporary situation; and in 'Baustelle Berlin', caught between 'Moderne und Abbruch', this experience is at its most intense: 'Keine Stadt ist so synthetisch und lebendig wie Berlin' (Tykwer et al. 1998). The most politicised city of the twentieth century is thus converted into a place open to the production of contemporary spectacle, seen by Tykwer as a sort of film studio where anything goes. While the mock-biographical entry for Lola in the book of the film tells us that she has three 'Vorbilder', Pippi Langstrumpf, Madonna, and Sophie Scholl, it is the

pantomimic, carnival performances of such mythical protagonists as Odysseus as forms of cultural dialogism, militating against the singular logic of master narratives.

⁴ As Margit Sinka (2000: 4) has pointed out, none of the three streets of that name in Berlin are in the East.

fantasy powers of the first and the performance glamour of the second rather than the historical political resistance of the third which determine her role.⁵

The unlikely trio are brought together as a provocatively synthetic group of active female role-models. I propose to approach the relation between mythology and history through the particular aspect of the film's treatment of gender, and its relation thereby to the histories and mythologies of German and international film traditions. A key question will be whether the image of girl power which Lola projects, on the model of her 'Vorbilder', represents a historically specific emancipation of the female role, or whether it is rather part of a more deep-rooted and controlling mythology of the feminine, and thereby of a gender order which is anything but free.

The incongruity of Lola's role models is characteristic of the styling of the film as a whole. Part of the film's appeal to the exchange values of international postmodernism lies in its eclectic incorporation and recycling of styles and its foregrounding of the idea of style, not least the international style of MTV and fashion publicity. Like adverts or pop videos, *Lola rennt* formulates its aesthetic not least by way of the free mixing of a variety of audio-visual media and methods (incorporating standard 35mm stock, handheld camerawork, video, animation, black and white, heightened colouration, graining, split-screen in seventies Hollywood fashion, and postcards in the 'Daumenkino' style). As 'ein romantisch-philosophischer ActionLiebesExperimentalThriller' (Töteberg 1998: 129), it makes an appeal to a wide range of generic conventions from cinematic melodrama to interactive computer game and DVD. And it operates through the citation of multiple filmic and other cultural references, as programmatically introduced by the disjunctive quotations from the high-cultural poet T. S. Eliot and the national football coach Sepp Herberger in the introductory sequence. In its citation of film types and techniques it is designed as a centennial showcase for the historical variants of cinema's aesthetic technology, from the *laterna magica* to the *Domino Compositor*.⁶

⁵ Tykwer talks of his films' attraction to the childlike projection of imagination into reality: 'Auch Lola agiert aus irgendeinem irrationalen Impetus heraus und macht sich wie eine *Pippi Langstrumpf* auf ganz kindliche Weise die Welt, wie sie ihr gefällt' (Kremski & Wulf 2000: 35).

⁶ Stefan Arndt describes the film as 'eine Zusammenfassung der Wunder, die hundert Jahre Filmgeschichte entwickelt haben' and Tykwer compares the 'Ur-Kinohaftes' of its dynamics to the

A key part of the film's multilayered citational network lies in the specification of the female protagonist. Apart from her biographical 'Vorbilder', Lola also appears to 'quote' many screen models; her identity as body and as cartoon is a confabulation of roles from Marlene Dietrich to Lara Croft and Tank Girl. Lola is a compelling new screen presence, but she is also a fabrication of styles, not least indeed a hair-style, as indicated by the *reductio ad absurdum* of the credits where 'Lola' is the name given to the protagonist's patent hair-design. Lola is thus also a 'look', set, along with the running gear, the Doc Martens, and the tattoo, to become a fashion statement to be quoted by self-styling followers of the film. Specifically, the Lola look seems designed to become a foundational icon for the new Berlin. The picture of the running Lola has provided, in the shape of Franka Potente, a frank and potent new figuration of the New Germany at the millennium, in particular of a dynamic, reconstructed Berlin, and not least Berlin as a city of film.⁷

One of the ways in which Berlin has been figured as twentieth-century metropolis is as the sort of feminised figure which is the focus of many metropolitan and state mythologies. Mythologies need icons, and, as Sigrid Weigel (1987) has pointed out, the female figure is the preferred form for the foundational, mythic image of states and cities. Weigel describes how these mythologies typically project an ambivalent image of the feminine, as monster or Babylonian whore on the one hand and succouring mother or virgin on the other. Lola (like Tykwer's other key female protagonists, Sissi from *Der Krieger und die Kaiserin* and the eponymous deadly Maria) is figured as both redeemer and criminal, child-like innocent and daunting femme fatale, and in this she corresponds to the sort of ambivalence which Weigel describes. As we shall see, the alluring surface of her film image incorporates darker aspects of threat. My intention here is to twist Weigel's analysis in the direction of psychoanalysis, which leads us to understand the foundational mythical structures of both personal and cultural development as marked by trauma. If the ostensibly timeless and totalising structures of myth do indeed incorporate a genetic core of traumatic experience, then their control over both personal and cultural histories is destined to be neurotically

laterna magica. Tykwer sees the synthetic use of the repertory of the medium as following the model of Méliès' original box of cinematic tricks (Töteberg 1998: 131).

⁷ The marketing potential of the Lola image was revealed in the attempt of the Berlin CDU to advertise the now deposed Regierender Bürgermeister Eberhard Diepgen in that image, running for the new Berlin. Tykwer had the 'Diepgen rennt' posters banned by court order.

distorted, specifically to show symptoms of hysteria. This is the version of myth, hysterical at base, which I would argue is at work in *Lola rennt*.⁸

When Tykwer describes the origination of the *Lola rennt* project, he talks of an iconic image – the head of a female figure caught running in profile – which provokes the film’s scenario and comes to function as its leitmotif. Friedrich Kittler (1995: 228) has pointed out that, as the etymology in both German and English bears out, the ‘Hauptstadt’ or capital city is conceived as the head of the body politic, and in the figuration of Lola as the film’s template, the capital is rendered energetic and mobile, endowed with a new physicality and style. The idea of the frantically racing figure appeals to Tykwer as embodying the fundamental drive of the cinematic: ‘Dieses Bild ist Kino: Bewegung und Emotion, kein anderes Medium kann das so transportieren’ (Töteberg 1998: 129). Here, however, the generically male function is appropriated for the female figure which is designed by film convention to be waiting or pursued rather than in pursuit. As Tykwer (1998) has it, women are suited to a more actively emancipatory role than is conventionally their typecast lot: ‘Frauen sind für Befreiung einfach der bessere Part – Männer sind da eher immer die Problemmacher’.

In practice, the film is substantially shaped by its following of the body of Lola, running or halting, panting and screaming, an energetic body which performs the impossible acts which are required of it in the fantasy resolutions of the opening scenario. The idea of free movement is always, though, reliant on the dialectical energy that can be gained from resistance to it, from the freezing of frames, the interruption of one narrative strand and form of technology by another, the impacts and accidents which affect the circulation of people and traffic in the city. *Lola rennt* at once projects a fantasy of speed which seems to emancipate it from the heavy weight of Tykwer’s earlier films, and yet also interrupts the dynamic with scenes of hold-up and accident which invest it with indications of the sort of traumatic load which characterises both *Die tödliche Maria* and *Winterschläfer*.⁹ Here

⁸ The review of the film by Richard Falcon (1999) may seem to make a somewhat incongruous judgement, when it describes it as setting ‘new standards for the cinema of hysteria’, but there is indeed a hysterical energy behind what he calls ‘its Teutonic version of *cinéma du look* stylisation’.

⁹ Tykwer describes *Lola rennt* as a counter-model in this sense: ‘*Winterschläfer* war ein Film mit epischem Atem und Schwere, *LOLA RENNT* war eine Art von Befreiungsschlag’, but he also

again, the road accident and the intervention of emergency services are emblematic for the impact of trauma. And this sense of trauma is extrapolated into the collisions or near collisions of bodies with bodies or other objects, most dramatically vehicles and bullets, the smashing of the ambulance into the pane of glass, and the near collision of the desperately running Lola with the glass of the camera lens. Lola's superhuman ability to shatter glass with her scream and to talk to Manni through glass is countered by the threat of trauma which glass represents as unseen obstacle. While the urban space of Berlin and other metropolitan centres has been seen by Walter Benjamin and others as programmed for the shock and collision of traffic and crowds, in Tykwer's production of Berlin as a semi-evacuated studio-city, these traumatic coincidences are abstracted from the normal flow, their dangers highlighted.¹⁰

If the idea of the running figure becomes a leitmotif for the film's structural development, then the blaze of red which is Lola's hair has a more particular directive, signalling function in what Tykwer calls the 'Farbdramaturgie' of the film (Töteberg 1998: 134). The fashion statement of the 'Lola' look represents at once the physical energy of this body and its attachment to danger. It is correlated with the stop-and-go dynamics of the diegesis, as marked by the circulation of traffic and by street furniture: the emergency vehicle, racing and braking, the traffic-lights which signal a halt or are raced past. Lola appears as three-speed colour machine, in the red, blue, and green of her hair and clothes, a transmogrification of the iconic 'Ampelmännchen' into a new red-headed and green legged body which runs against all traffic and pedestrian regulation, halting traffic and pedestrians alike, hitching lifts, and provoking collisions. The scenes in the bed are as if bathed in the stop-light, and thereby lifted out of the helter-skelter dynamic of the film. As carnal scenes of death as much as of love, coloured as if by the seeping bleeding first of Lola and then of Manni, they are attached to the idea of the traumatic accident, of a threat of total interruption which hangs over the myth of total love. The red arrows which help to impel

stresses that the formal exhilaration of the film does not make it less complicated, at least in a retrospective sense: it is 'eine wilde Jagd mit Nachwirkungen' (Tykwer et al. 1998).

¹⁰ In *Die tödliche Maria*, *Winterschläfer*, and *Der Krieger und die Kaiserin*, the road accident is figured as traumatic in the sense that it embodies the return of a previous experience of trauma, a personal history which is psycho-somatically disturbed. Lola seems to have no such pre-history, though her father's revelation that he is not her biological father belatedly introduces an archetypal form of childhood trauma.

Lola's race against time are thus countered not only by the red lights, but also by the red spiral as an emblem of the race of life into death.

Lola and her red hairstyle are constructed in counterpoint to a whole series of the hallowed icons of the city's past. In filmic terms, this involves both the Maria of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (with Lola fashioned as an action doll and an animated 'Wundermaschine')¹¹ and more especially the Lola Lola of Sternberg's *Der Blaue Engel*. Both of these embody the ambivalence of Weigel's foundational female figures, as redeeming angel and destructive vamp. If the iconic image comes first in the origination of the film, then the name comes second. When Tykwer describes the generation of the film out of the fascinating image, he fails to mention how the figure was given its name (simply saying in the English commentary on the DVD 'it was there and I liked it'). Lola has many resonances, from the precocious sexuality of Lolita to, inevitably, the vampish cabaret act of Marlene Dietrich. Her performance of an action film form of femininity stands in a complicated relation to a network of female performances which, after the model of Dietrich, have adopted the name of Lola.

Dietrich's Lola Lola, one of the archetypal images of what Mulvey (1989: 19) has famously called the 'to-be-looked-at-ness' of the female body on screen, is an artist who, with her changes of costume and repertoire of stage characters, performs the performance of femininity. Her performance on screen is also a highly self-conscious performance on stage, a *mise-en-abyme* of the film spectacle. It is a show based on artifice and add-on, showing and hiding, fantasy wigs and pantomime costumes (such as the half-dress, which reveals all when she turns round). It corresponds to the sort of performative principle which Judith Butler identifies as the basis of gender identity, a repetitive citation of acts over time in order to pass as male or female. At the same time, Dietrich's Lola Lola is a sort of drag act of femininity, excessive and staged, an impersonation and in this akin to the other early screen diva Garbo, as described by Butler (1990: 128) after Tyler: 'Garbo "got in drag" whenever she took on some heavy glamour part'. According to Butler (1990: 137), drag exposes the unnaturalness, the arbitrariness, and the trouble inherent in all forms of gender

¹¹ Tykwer describes Lola as a miracle machine of her own creation, without the intervention of a magician like Lang's Rotwang: 'Das Radikale an der Konstruktion von LOLA RENNT ist, dass

performance: 'In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency'.

As an alluring figure of performativity, a diva rehearsing an act ('die fesche Lola' performing the seductive repetitions of her mechanical pianola), she is designed and destined to be reproduced and replayed. The doubling of her name is programmatic in this sense.¹² Dietrich's Lola Lola becomes the embodiment of the performance culture of Weimar Berlin and is then reproduced in a whole host of filmic reprises from Fassbinder's *Lola*, to Visconti's *The Damned* and Fosse's *Cabaret*. The Dietrich image as performative of a kind of fetishised hyper-femininity is thereby ready to be rehearsed in travesty acts.¹³ It is primed to be subjected to forms of impersonation and gender-bending and -blending in Dietrich's own later films (notably *Morocco*) and in the queer attendants and accessories of Fassbinder's *Lola*, of *Cabaret*, and *The Damned*, which expose the performance as camp.¹⁴ Dietrich's performance of Lola Lola also turns the performance of the manly Professor Rath (interpellated by her song as 'einen Mann, einen richtigen Mann') into a travesty, donning a wig and playing a transsexualized cock laying eggs. This suggests a model of performative agency for the female star which, in line with Judith Butler's analysis of gender performativity, serves to expose trouble. This applies as much to Fassbinder's empowerment of female figures like the remade Lola as to Sternberg's construction of Dietrich.¹⁵

kein Zauberer auftritt, der das Wunder bewirkt und kenntlich macht, sondern dass Lola selbst kraft ihrer eigenen Dynamik eine Wundermaschine aus sich schöpft' (Kremski & Wulf 2000: 35).

¹² The name Lola Lola, which is one of the ways in which the film departs from Heinrich Mann's novel, marks an attachment to an older tradition. A key example for the performative femme fatale is the sphinx-like title figure of Sacher-Masoch's story 'Lola', who embodies the obsessive interdependence of desire and death, pleasure and pain, which is the trademark of his narratives.

¹³ While Mary-Anne Doane (1992: 766) describes the excessive femininity of Dietrich, Gaylyn Studlar (1992: 779) points out that her acts are arguably most notable for their androgynous quality. The understanding of the acts as already a form of the drag that came to imitate them allows for this contradiction to be squared.

¹⁴ For a discussion of some of these developments, see Marjorie Garber (1993). Garber's review of Madonna's replaying of Dietrich has a special significance for the modelling of Tykwer's Lola on Madonna.

¹⁵ Fassbinder's challenge to prescribed roles, and specifically to the social and cinematic 'Objektfunktion' of women, is profoundly ambivalent in its effects, always circumscribed by the performative imperative (melodrama, stage acts etc.). See Fassbinder (1978) for the director's position on the objectification of women.

While *Lola rennt* is seemingly a film free of gender trouble of this kind, closer scrutiny reveals a relationship to such models, and encourages a reading against the apparent grain. Tykwer's films seem to operate within a conventional binary and heterosexually secured structure of gender, but this is in fact always open to question. The focus in the opening scene on a collection of dolls can serve to make us aware of the conventional binarism of gender construction, but the presence of a Ken amongst the Barbies also questions the binary model. The dolls embody the sort of gender prescriptions which are enforced in childhood, and in their plastic nakedness highlight hair or hair-piece as a fetishistic add-on, styling the play-body of childhood as adult. The collection of dolls echoes, amongst other films, Fassbinder's *Petra von Kant*, embodying the sort of prescriptive conditioning and fashioning of gender roles which, according to Butler, causes gender trouble. As fetish object, the doll embodies an excess (here of femininity) which is produced by a traumatic lack; Tykwer's child-women and child-men, prematurely cast into the demands of adult gendered identities, always seem to be in need of this kind of fetish.¹⁶ The childlike construction by Manni of Lola as 'die beste Frau von allen allen Frauen' is an indicator of the impossibility of the fantasy of absolute womanhood which is in play here.

Lola is a doll dressed for action: a sort of hybrid of Ken and Barbie. As an exponent of girl-power, she is constantly exceeding her conditioning as 'Mädchen', and thereby able to elude patriarchal control, as when she escapes capture after the bank heist. Conversely, the nicely named Manni clearly has trouble living up to his manful role; in the scene in the telephone kiosk, he is reduced to a figure of impotence and need, certainly no phone-box 'Supermanni', and it is Lola who has to intervene in the role of animated super-heroic rescuer. Manni's uncertain masculinity is only emphasised by his role relative to the hyper-masculinity of Ronnie and his gang; to use the parlance established by gender and queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1991), this is a homosocial order of embraces and corporal punishments between men. Indeed, the masculine world of uniforms and muscled posturing in the film may be understood as a sort of drag, a performance in which Manni struggles to pass.¹⁷ This same-sex drag act corresponds in this sense to the group of nuns

¹⁶ In this, they bear a certain relation to the fetishistic voodoo doll that embodies the passion and the pain of Maria in *Die tödliche Maria*.

¹⁷ According to his character profile in the book, Manni is a performer of 'Shownummern' (Töteberg 2000: 123).

which Lola runs past; the nun in sunglasses suggests a sort of dissidence in the role of the nun, a suggestion of the lure of disguise which has made nuns such attractive models for camp impersonation.

Lola rennt appears to supersede the gender relations which were prevalent in the Neuer Deutscher Film as much as in the Hollywood tradition, the objectification of the female figure which, in its most extreme forms, works through a melodramatic, hysterical fixation. It seems to offer a new brand of agency, where being bound to her man is no impediment to the protagonist's action heroism. In fact, Lola's construction is based on a complicated mythology. She is the princess who saves rather than being saved, a female grail knight, a Penelope who intervenes in her man's mock-Odyssey rather than staying at home; and more darkly she is Medusa with the evil eye which mortifies Schuster the guard and freezes the words Lolalola which would style her as princess-doll even as he speaks them, as well as the faith healer who brings him back to life. Her activity is also, however, conditioned and driven by another version of hysteria: 'Das kommt nur sehr, sehr selten vor [...] aber dann bricht die Hysterie sich Bahn' (Töteberg 1998: 119). The scream is the focus of the conversion of hysterical panic into energetic intervention (Tykwer et al. 1998). Here, however, hysteria is also the condition of the male lead. He is thus introduced in a state of physical disorder and emotional incontinence; as the book of the film has it: 'Manni hat sich heulend hysterisch geredet, wie ein Wasserfall sprudelt es aus ihm heraus' (Töteberg 1998: 22). While the film, at first sight, seems to represent a redressing of conventional gender roles in the late twentieth-century urban culture of Berlin, it also suggests that what is being equalised is a struggle to overcome the shared, transgender condition of hysteria.

One of the playful snapshot inserts in the film shows the two bank employees finding happiness together in a sado-masochistic relationship, with the telling clerk submitting to his dominatrix colleague. This represents in an uncharacteristically camp moment the potential for bending of the performative rules of gender which is more subtly at work throughout the film. It offers the basis for another link in the interfilmic chain, *Lola und Bilidikid*, E. Kutlug Ataman's 1999 film about Berlin's gay and transvestite Turkish subculture, which more explicitly stages acts of gender and asks questions about gender and sexuality in their relation to other forms of identity prescription. In the climax of the film, the young, gay Turkish boy re-performs the transvestite performance of his dead brother,

whose stage-name was Lola, in order to entrap their queer-bashing tormentors. Lola's trademark, and the symbolic object which prompts his brutal outing to and from his family, is a red wig. It is a sort of gender performance that can never pass, but provocatively draws attention to its own masquerade. As this Lola performed a subcultural version of Dietrich's cabaret artiste, so his brother enacts a version of *Lola rennt* in his desperate race to escape those in pursuit. The headline of the film's review in the *Stuttgarter Zeitung* (11 March 1999), which misspells the film's title, also misconstrues its dynamics: 'Lola rennt nicht, sie tanzt als Transvestit'; in fact, this Lola runs every bit as desperately as Tykwer's. The film which started with a cruising scene around the iconic Berlin figure of the winged 'Freiheitsgöttin' of the 'Siegessäule', focuses on a different kind of running for your life, and ends with an uncertain relation to the Berlin icon of the victory of freedom. In all three films, the agency and power of the female or feminized figure is conditioned, as so often in the computer games which *Lola rennt* cites, by the controlling hand of male power and fantasy, by the need to perform for the male gaze. This function is suggested by the role of Lola as a more interventionist version of Echo to Manni's Narcissus: 'Lola ist die Schutzfee, die den haltlosen, geliebten Narziß immer wieder auf die Beine bringt' (Töteberg 1998: 119).

This leads us to an interfilmic relationship staged explicitly by *Lola rennt*. As Tykwer's earlier film *Winterschläfer* tells its story of traumatic amnesia with reference to Hitchcock's *Spellbound*, *Lola rennt* is organised around motifs from another of Hitchcock's narratives of traumatic psychopathology, *Vertigo*. The signature of Hitchcock's film is inscribed throughout the film, in the *mise en scène* (especially the vertiginous return to the stairway in the three runs, which appears to quote the return to the stairway of the mission in *Vertigo*), in the iconography of the spiral, and, in particular, in the portrait on the wall of the casino. According to Tykwer in his DVD commentary, the film's producer was charged with improvising a painting of 'something from *Vertigo*' to go on the wall, and followed the logical path of painting the portrait which embodies Kim Novak's fixation with the traumatic case history of Carlotta Valdes. The copying of the portrait, drawing attention to the idea of the simulacrum and its ability to fascinate and support the forms of impersonation, the obsessive styling in the image of the other, which structure *Vertigo*, also

provides a nice index of the citational performances of femininity.¹⁸ What emerges, however, is a sort of dream portrait which condenses the image of Carlotta with the back of Novak's head, that is the object of her obsessive attention with that of James Stewart's character, John Ferguson, and, by extension, of Hitchcock's fetishistic filmic gaze.

The mocked up portrait represents a combination of the emblematic spiral with the idea of the fetishized hairpiece. The danger or emergency encoded in Lola's 'fiery red' shock of hair is thus linked to another sort of cinematic tradition: Dietrich's make-over from Lola Lola (with her femme fatale song 'Nimm dich in acht vor blonden Frauen') to the Blonde Venus of Sternberg's eponymous film, and more especially the blondes, or more precisely, the blonde hair-does, which fascinate Hitchcock's camera throughout his career. These fabricated cinematic blondes are designed to pass as natural, yet operate within a framework of intense theatricality and (sometimes transgender) impersonation. Lola's hair is styled for a heroine who is designed to be natural, singing on the sound-track but never a stage-act,¹⁹ and yet it could no more pass as natural than the red wig of her cabaret artist namesake in Ataman's film. Lola's 'Lola' hair-do challenges the artificial blonde extravagance of her Barbies and yet still arguably functions as an attachment to dolling up. The call of her neurotic, housebound mother, repeated at the beginning of each run – 'Lola, gehst du einkaufen? Ich brauch Shampoo' – and suggesting that the alcoholic mother is also a shampoo-addict, marks the hold over the film of the need for styling.²⁰

Tykwer claims in the English-language commentary to the film that his aim was to make Franka Potente known to US audiences. He thus follows a model of auteur directors fashioning and marketing their female leads: Sternberg and Dietrich, Lang and his Maria (Brigitte Helm), Hitchcock and Novak.²¹ Each of these director's dolls, however, is based

¹⁸ Carlotta Valdes was a cabaret artist before her marriage, and therefore seems set to prefigure a series of enactments of femininity in her image, extending to the mock impersonation by fashion-designer Midge in her version of the Valdes portrait.

¹⁹ The stage-act genealogy, which stretches from Dietrich to Hitchcock's Carlotta Valdes, does perhaps reach our Lola too. The book of the film reveals that her biological father was not a banker but a 'Kneipenkönig' (Töteberg 1998: 124).

²⁰ Manni is no less styled, with his tattoo, two-day shadow, and blond highlights. The inserts of snapshot fantasy futures for the minor characters are often in the style of makeovers.

²¹ Tykwer is clearly concerned with the idea of film as auteurist text. He wants his films to have 'eine eigene Handschrift' (Tykwer et al. 1998), a signature which is recognisable from film to film, along with an acting ensemble and leading lady in the established style of the auteurs. In the DVD

upon troubled forms of performance, where hyper-femininity exposes itself as masquerading, as stage-act or impersonation. In each case, too, this operates – as in *Lola rennt* – in association with a form of hystericized performance of manhood by the male lead.²² With Potente, Tykwer clearly wanted to create a new Lola who would redefine the allure of the doll and her to-be-looked-at-ness. But the sweating, screaming, tattooed Lola, with DMs for high-heels, showing her underwear in a less staged fashion than Dietrich's Lola, is nonetheless an intensely styled cinematic construct.

At the same time, each of the films represents through its patterns of repetition, re-enactment, and impersonation, a potentially dire threat to both male and female identities. The spiral hair-style borrowed from Hitchcock represents a danger that the film scenario might spiral in on itself, that repetition might become a desperate compulsion, that the quest-run might spin into free-fall, following the film's effects of *mise-en-abyme*, and indeed the model of *Winterschläfer*, by being projected into the abyss.²³ The recurrent effects of circling in the camerawork, and the circle or spiral as iconographic motif, relate to a sense of post-traumatic disorder in Tykwer's protagonists, what he calls '*Post-Schock*' (Kremski & Wulf 2000: 40). Trauma creates compulsive structures of return in this way. Tykwer talks about his desire to make a horror film, and the way that *Lola rennt* incorporates gestures towards that genre (imitating for instance in the casino scene, not only *Vertigo* but also the uncanny, zombie group shots of *Village of the Damned* and *House of the Living Dead*). It seems that, no less than in the order of gender, citational practices in film can gravitate from the compulsory to the compulsive. The compulsion to repeat the repetition compulsions of Hitchcock's psycho-dramas can be said to expose a sort of uncanny fixation, a horror film which haunts the controlled generic synthesis of Tykwer's film. The duplications, projections, and impersonations of his films always have the

commentary, Franka Potente comments that, in the scripting of the bed-scenes, it is uncanny how naturally he knows the pillow talk of women.

²² John Ferguson in *Vertigo* is not only subject to a hysterical fear of heights, but like Professor Rath, he is drawn into the fashion masquerade of his female counterparts, made to wear a corset for the correction of his post-traumatic disorder.

²³ The title sequence at the start of *Lola rennt* imitates the animation graphics of James Stewart's dream in *Vertigo*; while the three sequences of *Lola rennt* run towards a happy ending with both protagonists alive, the three-part animation sequence at the start is engulfed in vertiginous darkness at the end of its final version. A tension remains between this programmatic pattern and the apparent resolution at the end of the film.

uncanny potential of that classic horror figure, the *Doppelgänger*. While the recursive structure of the film is conceived as a form of re-birthing, it shares with the re-birthing of *Winterschläfer* or *Die tödliche Maria* a threat of mortification, an uncanny sense of living death.²⁴ The consuming spiral as emblem of that fixation retains a hysterical presence throughout the film's performance, a reminder of the traumatic accidents, pursuits, and collapses to which the performative act may always be susceptible.²⁵

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²⁴ Tykwer discusses his use of *Doppelgänger* figures and the structural principle of 'Wiedergeburt' in interview (Kremski & Wulf 2000: 36-9).

²⁵ When Tykwer describes the film's chance-led dynamic as having 'etwas unheimlich Filmisches' (Töteberg 1998: 129), or the red bed-scenes being 'unheimlich still' (Töteberg 1998: 133), this resonates with the sense of 'unheimlich' as uncanny.

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Biodata

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