Behind The Mask – *Das verlorene Gesicht* (*The Lost Face*) and Popular German Cinema after World War II

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This essay analyses the post-war West German psychological women's melodrama, *Das verlorene Gesicht* (*The Lost Face*, 1948), and investigates its international influences (Hollywood and British traditions of melodrama), and the film's articulation of issues such as gender and national identity through aspects such as cinematography, mise-en-scène, and performance. The essay also places the film within the contexts of developments in film production in post-war Germany, and reassesses it in the context of the career of its director, Kurt Hoffmann.

Until very recently, Kurt Hoffmann (1910-2001) mainly featured in historical accounts of German film (if at all) as a quintessential representative of the kind of "Daddy's cinema" the Oberhausen Manifesto in 1961 rallied against, and that the directors of the New German Cinema of the 1970s wanted to overcome – a tradition condemned as politically conservative and artistically deficient. A recent publication by the German Film Institute (DIF) in Frankfurt has begun to challenge this perception, and to reassess the director's legacy.[1] Hoffmann's career spanned a large part of German cinema history – the son of Weimar-era cinematographer Carl Hoffmann (who had worked with Fritz Lang and F. W. Murnau), the young filmmaker began his professional life in the early 1930s as an assistant to soon-to-be exiles Erik Charell, Reinhold Schünzel, and Robert Siodmak. Turning director in his own right in the Nazi period, Hoffmann established and consolidated a lifelong reputation as a comedy specialist and as an actor's director. During World War II, he directed a number of star vehicles for popular star Heinz Rühmann, which were generally escapist but also reflected the militarized

[1] Wahl, Chris (ed.) (2010) *Der Mann mit der leichten Hand: Kurt Hoffmann und seine Filme*. Belleville/Deutsches Filminstitut, München/Frankfurt.

ideology prevalent in German society under Nazi rule.[2] After 1945, he continued making films in West Germany, before retiring in the early 1970s. Throughout his career, Hoffmann's productions were consistently successful at the box-office (albeit almost exclusively domestically) at the time of their release, but they have also endured in the affectionate and nostalgic memory of their audiences and fans. In the 1950s and 1960s, his gently ironic comedies and tasteful literary adaptations (based on authors including Erich Kästner, Kurt Tucholsky, and Curt Goetz) made Hoffmann an undisputed champion of middlebrow family entertainment. Whereas other trends in popular film of the time (such as the *Heimat* cycle, the revue musical, or the war film) were predicated on the formulae and expectations of genre and serial production, Hoffmann's films tended to retain a sense of authorial independence, artisanal approach, and originality, as well as aspirations towards quality and prestige, both in terms of cinematic style and in terms of narrative content. In this essay, however, my focus will not be on Hoffmann's best-remembered classics from the peak of his popularity in the mid- to late 1950s and early 1960s such as his romantic comedies starring Swiss actress Liselotte Pulver (e.g. *Ich denke oft an Piroschka/I Often Think of Piroschka,* 1955, and *Das Wirtshaus in Spessart/The Spessart Inn*, 1957), his adaptation of Thomas Mann's *Bekenntnisse des Hochstaplers Felix Krull*/*The Confessions of Felix Krull* (1957), or his satire of the West German economic miracle (*Wir Wunderkinder/Children of the Miracle*, 1958). Instead I direct my attention towards Hoffmann's films from the late 1940s, which have largely remained obscure and forgotten even among his fans.

Although he is usually associated with comedies and light entertainment, Hoffmann initially resumed his career after 1945 with atmospheric crime films, melodramas and psychological mysteries that drew on international generic templates and influences. Unlike his later films, these early postwar films met with only limited box-office success, perhaps one reason why descriptions of Hoffmann's career often either leave out or gloss over the period between the end of the war and his return to musical comedies such as *Taxi-Kitty* (1950) and *Fanfaren der Liebe/Fanfares of Love* (1951). Likewise, general histories of postwar German cinema rarely mention Hoffman's films from the late 1940s. This is again not surprising, since upon first glance, they appear to have little in common with the type of film that is often seen as definitive for the period:

[2] See Aurich, Rolf (2010) Zivile Kriegsfilme. Ein Blick auf die frühen Regiearbeiten von Kurt Hoffmann. In: Wahl, *Der Mann mit der leichten Hand*, pp. 39-47.

the so-called *rubble film* (*Trümmerfilm*).[3] With the exception of the melodrama *Heimliches Rendezvous/Secret Rendezvous* (1949), which refers (albeit more in passing than as a central concern) to the critical living conditions in Germany's bombed cities after the war and features the plight of refugees, few of Hoffmann's other films during these years appear to deal directly with the circumstances of the time. *Das verlorene Gesicht/The Lost Face* (1948, see figure 1), which I will discuss in more detail in the following pages, is set in the University town of Heidelberg whose picturesque medieval architecture had escaped extensive damage during the war. Partly as a result of that, the film's story is difficult to place at a precise moment in time – in some respects the narrative could equally have taken place in the present of 1948, or it might have occurred in the 1920s. The young adult crime thriller *Fünf unter Verdacht/Five Under Suspicion* (1949), in which a group of high school seniors tries to solve the murder of the school's caretaker, is set in a fictitious Danish port (recreated in a studio in Tempelhof, Berlin), and although again the narrative is notionally contemporaneous, any direct legacy of the war remains unspoken. *Der Fall Rabanser/The Rabanser Case* (1950), meanwhile, is a crime film in the Hitchcock/Lang tradition, centring on an innocent man suspected of murder, which re-imagines Hamburg as a rainy film noir backdrop, but which is devoid of any traces of years of Allied aerial bombardment. In all these films, the consequences of the war and the political, material, and moral challenges that Germany had to face after 1945, are sometimes allegorically, but never explicitly, addressed. In this respect, Hoffmann's films are not alone in being condemned by critics for their failure to tackle social problems; the general consensus on German cinema of the late 1940s has been that it offered unsatisfying answers to the issues of the time and that through continuities of personnel, it remained contaminated by the aesthetic and ideological paradigms of the Nazi film industry. Peter Pleyer argued that, "if one takes into account the more or less inevitable political reorientation at the end of the war, the understanding among German filmmakers of what the nature and function of a feature film should be hardly changed."[4] In contrast, Thomas

[3] See Shandley, Robert (2001) *Rubble Films. German Cinema in the Shadow of the Third Reich*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

[4] Pleyer, Peter (1965) *Deutscher Nachkriegsfilm 1946-1948*. Fahle: Münster, p. 45.

Brandlmeier rejects such criticism as "too harsh", and finds that it "disregards history and ignores the restricted conditions under which the films originated."[5]

It remains important to stress the continuities between Weimar film, the film industry of the *Third Reich*, and postwar cinematography, and to dismiss the notion of a creative and political *Zero Hour* in 1945. In this respect, Hoffmann's professional trajectory is indeed a prime example for the links across different periods. At the same time, an exclusive emphasis on unbroken continuities in the discussion on German films after 1945 often neglects to investigate the genuinely new possibilities that the end of the war opened up. In this sense, Hoffmann's melodramas and crime films from the late 1940's can be read as an experimental phase for the kind of popular cinema that West German cinema would consolidate over the next two decades and beyond. Different variations of generic conventions and narrative possibilities were developed, tested, and in some cases rejected, not least through juxtaposing traditional motifs, styles, and themes with international approaches and templates, discovered through the renewed distribution of foreign films after a decade of enforced national quarantine. And although Hoffmann moved towards other genres in the following decades, some of his postwar films contain elements that he integrated in his later work, or which re-emerge as successful generic strategies in subsequent decades. For example, Hoffmann repeatedly picked up the theme of adolescent self-discovery that is prominently featured in *Fünf unter Verdacht*, and to which he returned perhaps most poignantly in in *Das fliegende Klassenzimmer/The Flying Classroom* (1954). And while *Der Fall Rabanser* may have remained a relatively unsuccessful crime film in the late 1940s, the genre itself witnessed a popular revival a decade later (with the Edgar Wallace films, among others). For the remainder of this essay I shall discuss *Das verlorene Gesicht*, in order to illustrate the film's place within Hoffmann's own oeuvre, but perhaps more importantly to understand it within broader structures and developments. Acknowledging multiple possibilities of interpretation, my main focus will be on questions pertaining to the film's representation of gender, its dialogue with certain narrative themes in other national cinemas of the time (most prominently Hollywood and Britain), and its use of mise-en-scène. I shall also speculate about some of the horizons of expectations and knowledge audiences of the time may have brought to the film.

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[5] Brandlmeier, Thomas (1989) Von Hitler bis Adenauer: Deutsche Trümmerfilme. In: Jürgen Berger, Hans-Peter Reimann, and Rudolf Worschech (eds.) *Zwischen gestern und morgen.*

The narrative of *Das verlorene Gesicht* is organised into complex successive and interlacing flashbacks, a characteristic quite common in German cinema from the late 1940s (see, e.g., classic rubble films such as Helmut Käutner's *In jenen Tagen/In those Days*, 1947, and Harald Braun's *Zwischen gestern und morgen/Between Yesterday And Tomorrow*, 1947). After the title credits have rolled, a text box informs the viewer: "This film draws on the results of modern psychological research. It is based on several scientifically verified cases from 1920-1930." The film proper commences with a slow pan through a bedroom by night, gradually homing in on a close-up of a sleeping woman, who is moving restlessly on her bed. A dissolve segues into a dream sequence: the woman (clearly in her younger years) is running away from an unseen danger; she hides herself under a vehicle at a fairground, where she is discovered by a man with a Far-East Asian appearance. As the scene dissolves again, the woman finds herself behind bars in a police van, which suddenly skids while driving around a street corner. After the protagonist awakens from what appears to have been a nightmare, the narrative introduces the viewer to her. The audience learns that Johanna (Marianne Hoppe), a successful photographer, is haunted by an increasing fear of losing her identity, a danger seemingly emanating from a mysterious Asian mask on her wall with a mysterious connection to a suppressed past life. As she explains it herself, "It's as if I was living in a different world, with no people, just masks."

Johanna is engaged to Thomas (Gustav Fröhlich), a physician who attends to her medical needs and gives her nightly vitamin injections to calm her anxiety. Reporter Axel (Paul Dahlke) and lawyer Robert (Richard Häußler) are introduced as part of the couple's social circle. An oppressive sense of dread hangs over the protagonists. Axel observes a seemingly suspicious change in Thomas' behaviour and notices that he is using hypnosis and is administering marijuana to Johanna. But it becomes clear that there are no sinister motivations for Thomas's behaviour, and the real arch-manipulator turns out to be Robert. In a long flashback, Johanna's mysterious story is revealed. Five years previously, a young Asian-looking woman was picked up by the police in a park in Stuttgart. Unable to communicate, she was admitted to a psychiatric clinic, where various indications suggest that she might originate from Tibet. The director of a theosophical institute gives shelter to the young woman, who is slowly resocialized under the name Luscha, even though her true origins remain a mystery. Robert, a

Westdeutscher Nachkriegsfilm 1946-1962. Deutsches Filminstitut, Frankfurt am Main, p. 54.

frequent visitor to the institute, falls in love with Luscha and plans to marry her. Shortly before the wedding is due to take place, Robert requests a plaster cast of her face – but when the mask is removed, Luscha's Asian features and characteristics disappear.

Figure 1: Marianne Hoppe in *Das verlorene Gesicht* (1948).

Photo: Courtesy of the Stiftung Deutsche Kinemathek Berlin.

The young woman, whom we now recognize as Johanna, remembers nothing. The unknown woman's true past is gradually uncovered. The dream sequence from the beginning of the film is retrospectively explained: Johanna had grown up with behavioural problems in an orphanage; while being transported to a juvenile detention centre, she lost her memory in the traffic accident. She subsequently found sanctuary with a group of Mongolian circus performers before being found by the police after another schizophrenic episode. Johanna's adoption of an alternative Asian identity coincided with a gradual physical transformation. Back in the present, Robert admits to having intentionally tried to erase Johanna's identity in order to recover Luscha's personality once more. Ultimately, he recognizes that Luscha is gone forever, and he leaves Johanna and Thomas to start a new life.

Upon first inspection, *Das verlorene Gesicht* seems an unusual story when compared with Hoffmann's better-known films. Even so the theme of masquerade and the dynamic between appearance and reality are elements that recur in his work, for example in the cross-dressing charade in *Fanfaren der Liebe* (a film famously remade by Billy Wilder as *Some Like It Hot*), or in the deceptions of the eponymous conman in *Bekenntnisse des Hochstaplers Felix Krull*. One can also extend the notion of masquerade to the very narrative structure of *Das verlorene Gesicht* in that the film's

generic identity is almost impossible to determine: the film blurs the boundaries between romantic melodrama, crime thriller, and occult mystery horror. The film's fantastic quality is underscored by its visual style, and its editing techniques that betray the film's indebtedness to domestic aesthetic traditions. The cinematographer Franz Koch was a typical representative of the classic Ufa style, having started his career in the 1920s, and who during the *Third Reich* was particularly noted for his collaborations with the star Hans Albers. Koch draws on this legacy by employing expressionist lighting that selectively emphasizes isolated facial features of characters in close-ups, among others. This is reminiscent at times of Lang's Mabuse films from the 1920s and early 1930s. Johanna's fear of persecution, trepidation, and the loss of reality are suggested through unusual camera angles and other techniques, including the blocking-off of perspectives with props such as doors, chairs, chandeliers, and stair landings, through the frequent use of mirrors with their doubling effects and through false and deceptive reflections (for example in a scene where Johanna is hallucinating, she sees not her own face in the mirror, but Luscha's mask); Meanwhile circular tracking shots induce a feeling of dizziness. The editing, in particular the use of dissolves, as well as the occasional jump-cut, also contribute to the dreamlike and hallucinatory quality of the film, and reflect Johanna's disjointed cognitive state.

From a contemporary perspective it is easy to find fault with and ridicule the story's pseudo-scientific explanations and over-earnest mystical tone. On the other hand it is worth noting that schizophrenia and a psychiatric discourse in general were quite common narrative themes in the cinema of that decade, and not just in Germany. In this respect, it may be productive to place *Das verlorene Gesicht* within an international context. In a book on Hollywood melodrama in the 1940s, American film historian Mary Ann Doane identified a number of distinctive subgenres, including films wherein the female protagonists are subjected to an explicit medical discourse.[6] Doane sees the reason for the success of these films in the rising popularity of psychoanalysis in the USA, which started in the late 1930s. Typical of this genre are female characters who are defined as pathological, and who are denied active self-determination, which instead is transferred to a male authority figure (usually, though not always from the medical profession). This loss of self-determination often coincides with the woman's inability

[6] Doane, Mary Ann (1987) *The Desire to Desire. The Woman's Film of the 1940s*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

to communicate and speak, a condition, which can only be overcome by therapy. Drawing on Michel Foucault, Doane argues that these films should be judged as "didactic exercises" that "produce knowledge about women."[7] She also discusses another subgenre, the "paranoid woman's melodrama," in which the heroine suspects her partner of wanting to murder or otherwise harm her – this suspicion can be justified (as in the case of George Cukor's *Gaslight*, 1944, where Charles Boyer's character attempts to drive Ingrid Bergman insane), or not (as in Alfred Hitchcock's *Suspicion*, 1941, where Joan Fontaine's fears that her husband Cary Grant is trying to kill her turn out to be unfounded). Irrespective of whether the danger is imagined or real, however, the male protagonist is constructed in these films as at least a potential threat, which in turn undermines and pathologizes two of Hollywood' most central ideological tenets, the formation of the heterosexual couple, and the institution of marriage. In this respect, the paranoid woman's film for Doane reflects a real crisis in gender relations in the late war and postwar period.

Hoffmann was very familiar with at least one of the films discussed by Doane – one year prior to making *Das verlorene Gesicht*, he had written the dialogues and overseen the dubbing for the German-language release of Cukor's *Gaslight*. Around the same time, Hoffmann also coordinated the dubbed version of Henry King's religious epic *The Song of Bernadette* (1943). Both films can be counted among the most successful Hollywood imports after the war at a time when American films did not necessarily meet with approval among German audiences.[8] As Lutz Koepnick has shown, another film that could be grouped under Doane's category of the paranoid woman's film, Robert Siodmak's *The Spiral Staircase* (1945), was received with downright hostility by German critics and rejected as an unwanted product of a brutalised American society, whose import was seen as symptomatic of objectionable occupation policies and cultural colonialism.[9] Seen in this context, Hoffmann's contribution to mediating Hollywood genre cinema through his dubbing assignments, but also his engagement with international themes in his postwar films, indicate a more open and culturally less defensive approach towards adopting foreign influences.

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7 Ibid., p. 67.

8 See Bergfelder, Tim (2005) *International Adventures. German Popular Cinema and European Co-productions in the 1960s*. Oxford and New York: Berghahn, pp. 32-34.

9 Koepnick, Lutz (2002) *The Dark Mirror: German Cinema between Hitler and Hollywood*. Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 192-195.

Many of the narrative patterns that Doane identifies in Hollywood films of the 1940s resurface in *Das verlorene Gesicht*, but they become transformed in interesting ways. Thus, in the first half of the film, an unspecified threat to Johanna seems to emanate from (in turn) Thomas and Robert. Robert's attempts to unsettle Johanna, in particular, are reminiscent of similar scenes in American films of the time. In contrast, the second half of the film clearly fits the narrative patterns of the medical discourse. Whereas the first half assumes Johanna's perspective, the point of view shifts to Robert whose narration dominates the long flashback. In this respect, female self-determination is transferred to the male protagonist, and it is notable that in contrast to Johanna, Luscha remains mostly a mute character, objectified as exotic, decorative, and unknowable. However, what complicates the gender dynamic in *Das verlorene Gesicht* and what sets the film apart from most of its Hollywood counterparts is that the film cannot provide any convincing male authority figures who might be able to assume control over the female heroine. Thomas, ostensibly the film's male hero, is a weak character, whose medical authority is called into question early on in the narrative. Similarly, the doctors who in the second half of the film voice their opinions on Luscha, act on the whole cluelessly and remain unable to cure her condition satisfactorily. A resolution is reached eventually not by scientific insight and therapeutic method, but by mere coincidence. Meanwhile Robert, who initially comes across as a demonic manipulator in the tradition of a Doctor Mabuse, turns out to be a rather pitiful romantic. Thus in the absence of any strong male candidates, it is Marianne Hoppe's Johanna who emerges as the film's strongest character even in spite of her split personality.

Of course, casting choices play a crucial part in determining the authority (or lack thereof) of any film's characters, as does an audience's knowledge of an actor's previous cinematic roles and in some cases their public and private lives. Hollywood's suspicious husbands and partners in the 1940s were played by assertive leading men and stars such as Cary Grant and Charles Boyer. Gustav Fröhlich, by contrast, typecast in German cinema as the youthful lover ever since Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), comes across as a pathetic figure in his postwar films. Ulrich Kurowski has perceptively described him as a "perennial victim whose psychological scarring as a result of the war is only too evident behind a façade of forced joviality".[10] Meanwhile, the head

[10] Kurowski, Ulrich (1989) Denn viele sind von uns verlorene Kinder: Schauspielerinnen und Schauspieler im deutschen Nachkriegsfilm. In: Berger, Reichmann, Worschech (eds.) *Zwischen gestern und morgen*. p. 129.

physician Kersten, who investigates Luscha's case, is portrayed by Rudolf Vogel, who was given comic roles in many of Hoffmann's films over the span of many decades; and while his character in *Das verlorene Gesicht* may not be intentionally funny, he is also not too convincing as figure of authority. In contrast, there is the intriguing casting of Marianne Hoppe in the female lead. Among the ensemble of *Das verlorene Gesicht*, Hoppe was at the time of the film's release without a doubt the most prominent and best-known star. Moreover, *Das verlorene Gesicht* marked her first postwar screen assignment, which is likely to have heightened anticipations and expectations. Since her stage debut in the late 1920s, Hoppe had risen to the status of national acting royalty, primarily in the theatre (contracted at the Preußisches Staatstheater in Berlin), but also achieving cinema stardom in films such as Veit Harlan's *Der Herrscher/The Leader* (1937), as Effi Briest in an adaptation of Theodor Fontane's literary classic in *Der Schritt vom Wege/A Step off the Beaten Path* (1939), and as a tragic adulteress once more in Helmut Käutner's *Romanze in Moll/Romance in a Minor Key* (1942). But for German filmgoers in the late 1940s, Hoppe was almost as well known for her marriage of convenience to famous stage actor and director Gustaf Gründgens, a prominent figure of the cultural establishment under the Nazis, whose homosexuality was an open secret and the source of much gossip and innuendo during the war years. Hoppe's acclaim as a theatrical diva and cinema star and the extratextual knowledge about her private life are likely to have shaped audience perceptions about the role she plays in Hoffmann's film, with her charisma lending authority and strength to the character of Johanna, while the story about a woman's double identity and her passing as someone (and something) else was given an added subtext through the analogies with the actress's real life.

Doane has argued that Hollywood melodramas of the 1940s aimed to rationalize the "problem" woman and to re-legitimize patriarchy by instrumentalizing medical discourse. *Das verlorene Gesicht*, by contrast, ends in an impasse: the attempt to exert and reassume patriarchal power through science effectively fails, and instead the film seems to concur with the resigned realization of one of the characters who concludes "if you find the miracle you are searching for it gets destroyed." The implicit fatalism and quasi-religious perspective that pervades the film is also echoed in the final verdict of an expert (Erich Ponto) who explains: "It is good that there are still secrets in our explored world. It teaches us reverence." It is entirely fitting with this perspective that, unlike in

comparable Hollywood films, Johanna's disease is not given any clear medical diagnosis (for example, schizophrenia).

Alongside American films such as *Gaslight* and *Suspicion*, *Das verlorene Gesicht* also seems influenced by a number of British women's melodramas, especially those produced by Gainsborough Studios. In particular, Hoffmann's film has striking similarities with Arthur Crabtree's *Madonna of the Seven Moons* (1945). The latter's opening sequence is almost identical to the beginning of *Das verlorene Gesicht*: after the credits a text asserts that "This story is based on real-life events." This is followed by a scene in which a young woman is seen running away and being chased by a lecherous and predatory stalker. As in *Das verlorene Gesicht*, an initial trauma triggers in the female protagonist a medical condition including amnesia and a split personality that crosses racial boundaries. Maddalena, the central protagonist in *Madonna of the Seven Moons*, is an emotionally and sexually repressed wife and mother who turns into a passionate and law-breaking gypsy in psychotic episodes. Maddalena's condition is rooted in the trauma of childhood sexual abuse that is hinted at during the opening sequence. Like Johanna, Maddalena's split personality is accompanied by the choice between two men. But unlike in the story of Johanna, the escape from her self ends for Maddalena in tragedy; at the same moment as she realises her predicament, she dies.

Whether Hoffmann had seen and was directly copying *Madonna of the Seven Moons* is impossible to ascertain in retrospect, but it is certainly plausible. Crabtree's film had been released in Germany a year before *Das verlorene Gesicht* and was a success with general audiences,[11] although it was not received well by German critics.[12] In their country of origin, Gainsborough's historical costume dramas in the 1940s were enormously popular and geared toward a large (predominantly female) audience that cherished the films' unconventional heroines who defied stereotypes. Pam Cook has argued that these films

> looked back to a time of class, sexual, and ethnic inequality, and uncontrolled male abuse of power, in order to look forward to a more egalitarian future in which the role of women will be crucial.[13]

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[11] Bergfelder, *International Adventures*, p. 32.

[12] Clemens, Gabriele (1997) *Britische Kulturpolitik in Deutschland 1945-1949*. Stuttgart: Steiner, pp. 164-178.

[13] Cook, Pam (1996) *Fashioning The Nation. Costume and Identity in British Cinema*. London: BFI, p 89.

While the German social context of the late 1940s may have been different in several respects to what was going on in postwar Britain, there is nonetheless a similar convergence to be detected in *Das verlorene Gesicht* of looking back to the past and looking forward to the future while simultaneously blanking out the present. Robert expresses this feeling when explaining his motivations to Johanna: "I wanted to extinguish reality. You were meant to forget the present and become the woman that you once were." For Cook, *Madonna of the Seven Moons* and other Gainsborough films of the time reflect a crisis in British national identity in the mid 1940s. The country was torn between on the one hand opening up to new influences from abroad, and on the other maintaining a sense of splendid isolation, coupled with a suspicion of anything foreign. According to Cook, these contradictory tendencies are articulated in the films of the period, and in *Madonna of the Seven Moons* become manifested in the discrepancy between, on the one hand, the ostensible discourse of the plot (which culminates into the punishment for Maddalena's transgressions against normative gender behaviour, but also against ethnic purity), and, on the other hand, a parallel and almost independent visual discourse which is established through image composition, costume and production design. Thus, while on one level the film warns its audiences to give in to dangerous liberal and modern impulses, on another level it subtly champions those very same aspects.

A similar divergence between the narrative as told by the plot and the narrative that is transported through the image characterises *Das verlorene Gesicht*. Johanna faces a dilemma of having to decide whether to follow Thomas's advice to "find peace and accept the place where she belongs"; or heed Robert's admonition not to "fear to become the person who one truly is." The different directions and lifestyles associated with these conflicting choices are made visible primarily through costume, sets, and props. While on the plot level, Johanna might emerge triumphant over Luscha, and while Thomas's advice might cancel out Robert's, the images tell a different story. For example, Johanna's villa in Heidelberg, which is where she "belongs" according to Thomas, is a dark and unhomely place. Its drawn curtains and sparse windows allow very little light to enter a world that is introspective and eerily timeless. Dominated by sombre colours, the oppressive atmosphere in the house is furthermore conveyed by cluttered interior space that includes heavy and massive wooden staircases, looming baroque statues of the Virgin Mary, bulky grandfather clocks and oversized porcelain

vases. Multiple frames within the image produce a *mise-en-abyme* effect that enhances a sense of claustrophobia. The theosophical institute where Luscha lives, on the other hand, is the exact opposite: dominated by bright colours, the house is spacious and flooded with light, with high-ceilinged rooms and delicate ornaments. The openness and fluidity between interior and exterior is emphasised by a fountain in the front hall whose edges are planted with water lilies, reflecting the light and Luscha's appearance.

The film's costume design also regularly counterpoints the plot. Johanna is wearing practical and simple clothes, typical of the war years. A neutral, unisex white lab coat and a grey suit underplay female attributes and aid in de-sexualising Johanna. In Robert's flashbacks on the other hand, an emphatically feminine style becomes the motor of character development as the ugly duckling turns into a swan. Luscha's clothes, hairstyles, and accessories like earrings change in almost every scene. Her costumes luxuriate in sensual and expensive fabrics such as brocade and silk, featuring strong colour contrasts, flamboyant patterns, and floral designs. With their high collar tops, the dresses are inspired by the classic Chinese cheongsam, which corresponds to the character's exoticism, but the patterns and materials are influenced by Christian Dior's *new look*, the representative style of European post-war fashion. Pam Cook has observed that the new look, with its elegant curves that contrasted with the unisex clothes of the war years, was a nostalgic reminiscence of a faraway past. At the same time its extravagance can be seen to anticipate women's role in the consumer society of the 1950s.[14] Analysing female consumerism in postwar Germany, Erica Carter comes to similar conclusions as Cook for the British situation, arguing that a temporary devaluing of certainties such as those associated with national identity were replaced by the pleasures as well as the dangers of consumption, and that the values, activities, and processes associated with the latter were strongly channelled through gendered discourses.[15]

Das verlorene Gesicht does not offer any unambiguous solution to the ideological problems and conflicts its divergent narratives throw up. Luscha's mask hides a multiplicity of other masks with several possibilities for interpretation. Johanna represents a common female type in German films of the time – a woman without a

[14] Ibid., p. 53.

[15] Carter, Erica (1997) *How German is She? Postwar German Reconstruction and the Consuming Woman*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

past, a quasi-religious icon, equipped with self-confidence, a guarantor of the (national) future. In this respect she resembles the characters often portrayed in other films of the postwar period by Hildegard Knef.[16] On the other hand, the doubling of the female protagonist creates a ghostly and uncanny element, since in the film's present, Luscha is after all nothing but a chimera, a repressed memory. Helmut Käutner's almost contemporaneous film *Epilog – Das Geheimnis der Orplid* (*Epilogue – The Orplid Secret*, 1950) features a figure who shares many characteristics with Luscha, the mysterious Malayan girl Leata (played by Bettina Moissi). Hester Baer's interpretation of the latter might also open up another reading of Luscha:

> Leata is the spectral other who haunts the film – and indeed the German consciousness. There is a sense in which the figure of the absent Jew, as author of, and audience for German cinema, is displaced onto the exoticized figure of the mute and traumatized Leata. At the same time, EPILOG conflates the threatening qualities of the Jew and the Asian in its representation of Leata as femme fatale. As an Asian, Leata represents the threat from the East, a threat tied strongly to anti-communism.[17]

Like Leata in Baer's reading, Luscha can be seen to personify simultaneously the threat from the East, the absent Jew, and perhaps even the displaced German refugee. Some scenes in the film strongly invoke such a reading, for example when Luscha is initially picked up by the police as a distressed vagrant. But to some extent such a mode of representation can of course also imply a blurring of the distinction between victim and perpetrator which many commentators and historians have often identified as a classic response of postwar Germany in its coming to terms with its Nazi and war-time past. Like Leata, Luscha is both traumatized victim and femme fatale, whose excessive femininity beguiles but also poses dangers for the future. Luscha's rescue and resocialisation can be seen to promise a broader national redemption, while the fact that she is ultimately exorcised through the reappearance of the more rational Johanna ensures an equally rational national reorientation.

A final line of interpretation might construe Johanna/Luscha as an alter ego of Hoffmann himself, or at least as a metaphor for the filmmaking process and of the changes German cinema was undergoing at the time. This is not as far-fetched as it may

[16] See Sieglohr, Ulrike (2000) Hildegard Knef: From Rubble Woman to Fallen Woman. In: Sieglohr: *Heroines without Heroes: Reconstructing Female and national Identities*. In: *European Cinema 1945-51*. London: Cassell, pp. 113-27.

seem – many observers of the first years of post-war German cinema have noted filmmakers' tendency towards self-reflexivity, perhaps most explicitly explored in films such as Rudolf Jugert's *Film ohne Titel* (*Film Without a Title*, 1947), and Helmut Käutner's *Der Apfel ist ab* (*The Original Sin*, 1948). In a scene at the beginning of the film, the reporter Axel talks to Robert about Johanna's professionalism:

> Have you ever watched her when she takes photographs? She does it in such an obsessive way: She'll photograph a face full front, from the sides, from the bottom and from the top. Then she sits in front of the photo as if it was a doctoral thesis.

And later on Johanna describes her technique of retouching photographs to Thomas:

> I have to embellish these striking features a bit! One can alter the eyes a bit, or the cheekbones, and all of a sudden you get a wholly different face. A mask, and then you don't know any longer whose it is. You would have to find out what's behind it.

What seems to be implied in these dialogues are the filmmaker's attempts to define an aesthetic position and ideological orientation. For this reason, even though Hoffmann's films from the late 1940s may not have been as successful as his later films, they should not be disregarded as merely playful exercises, followed by more 'mature' works. Nor should they be dismissed as an artistic dead end. In retrospect, films like *Das verlorene Gesicht* crystallise what was at stake at a key moment in the history of a national cinema, what choices it had in absorbing outside influences and in maintaining its own traditions, and they help to explain to a great extent what followed in their wake.

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[17] Baer, Hester (2009) *Dismantling The Film Factory: Gender, German Cinema, and the Postwar Quest for a New Film Language*. Oxford: Berghahn, p. 117-118.

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