## Tom Tykwer's *Run Lola Run* and the Usual Suspects: The Avant-Garde, Popular Culture, and History

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Tom Tykwer's 1998 film *Run Lola Run* has surprised even the most hardened critics of German cinema. As many have noted with uninhibited astonishment, it is rare that a German film is so clever while being an absolute pleasure to watch. The film has swept box offices and, with a budget of 3 million marks, has managed to run in over forty countries as well as win numerous film prizes.<sup>1</sup> The film has launched its director into the international limelight and has fulfilled most every contemporary German filmmaker's dream.

Why has Lola been such a box-office success? An important factor, no doubt, is Franka Potente's performance as the flaming red-headed Lola, who participates in an all-out race against time to save her boyfriend, Manni. She is a hipster, "a young tearaway Lola," as Robert Falcon writes.<sup>2</sup> In a film review in the fashion magazine Bazaar, Richard Rayner describes Potente as "a performer of potentially mythic charisma." In addition to her magnetic quality, he attributes the film's success to its accomplished deployment of the finest of European avant-garde traditions combined with Hollywood's pacing; to use his words, the film "brings Hollywood pizzazz to the European art movie."3 Other critics, equally enthusiastic, zoom in on the film's "Germanness" and applaud its profound philosophical musings on chance and time (Tykwer studied philosophy) and its hermeneutic and cinematographic depth. Tom Whalen is fascinated by the film's "ludic spirit willing to see life and art as a game. It's as tightly wound and playful as a Tinguely machine and constructed with care." He is quick to note that the film "leaps lightly over the typical Teutonic metaphysical mountains."4 There seems to be something in this film for everyone—romantics, rave enthusiasts, chaos theorists, adrenaline freaks, film critics, and scholars—everyone except filmmaker/actor Detlev Buck, a one-time hopeful for a new German cinema. In his estimation, the film leaps far beyond the national boundaries of German issues: "Run Lola Run doesn't have anything [shit] to say about Germany. It is pure entertainment." In other words, to cite Niklas Luhmann's understanding of entertainment, which seems to complement Buck's, it is "one component of modern leisure culture, charged with the function of destroying superfluous time."

Luhmann's and Buck's statements reveal a deeply ingrained belief in an unbridgeable divide between entertainment and having something to say about Germany. Their statements echo a modernist distrust of mass culture, a fear of selling out, and express a troubled relationship between German national identity and "Americanization" or commercialization that seems to be a German issue. When Buck uses the term einen Dreck (smut/shit), he seems to be referring to mass culture as the abject, as kitsch, and to be seeing the film as a version of an old-fashioned love song disguised in techno beats. Is Buck lamenting the end of the New German Cinema and/or of a cinema invested in producing an oppositional public sphere and a general turn to Hollywood? For critics who still work within the mass culture paradigm, popular culture, as opposed to "high" art, still has the reputation of being formulaic, as lacking critical insight and complexity. It is made in the United States and produced solely for mass consumption, that is, profit. As John Storey notes: "The claim that popular culture is mass American culture has a long history within the theoretical mapping of popular culture."7

Tykwer belongs to a generation of Germans that embraces popular culture rather than criticizes it as a colonization of the mind and a form of cultural imperialism, as Wenders and his generation of filmmakers maintained during the 1970s and 1980s. Yet Tykwer's postmodern merging of diverse art forms and genres and his incorporation of U.S. popular culture (comics, Westerns, slapstick, editing techniques) function as boundary breaking and liberating in their potential to launch viewers into the realm of fantasy. Tykwer traverses national boundaries in his choice of aesthetic practices and seems to relish his role as a *bricoleur* of the cultural offerings that this German-American merger affords. Thus, while *Run Lola Run* is entertaining, it does say quite a bit about the new Germany, about its cinematic aspirations and the turn it has taken, and about the image that the new nation wants to project for its own consumption as well as for its international audi-

ences. In addition, the fast-paced editing that defies memory and that locks the spectator into the present may be saying even more about contemporary Germany than Buck is loath to admit. It reflects on contemporary Germany's relationship to history, which I will discuss later. Rather than just killing superfluous time, it seems that time as well as place—in its specificity as well as its indistinctness—are of the essence in *Run Lola Run*. First, Lola only has twenty minutes to come up with one hundred thousand marks in order to save her petty-criminal boyfriend, Manni (Moritz Bleibtreu), from the hands of the racketeer Ronnie, whose money Manni accidentally left in the subway train when he tried to escape a policeman checking tickets. A street person (Joachim Król) consequently becomes the lucky recipient of the bag.

The story that ensues gets replayed three times with slight variations that affect different outcomes. Besides the obsessive attention to time—clocks are everywhere—the film itself is largely a product of its own time. Instead of shying away from popular culture, it subscribes to a pop culture wave that has come to define the literary scene in contemporary Germany. "Pop" is the "key to the present," as Thomas Assheuer woefully notes.<sup>8</sup> The indulgent meshing of art and commercialism, sensation and surfaces, music and images belongs to pop culture's allure and success. The film incorporates the elements of popular culture that are nonconformist, rebellious (Lola's scream), and subversive and that test mainstream forms of representation. And, as far as place is concerned, Tykwer insists that the film is a Berlin film—a city that is as much in progress as it is a product of the new millennium and globalization. The fast-paced editing that lends vitality to the urban setting and its resilient and determined protagonist Lola suggest a new cultural identity in a postwall era that is local as much as it is global in its multicultural setting. Tykwer develops a new formal language to represent the New Berlin and a new direction in German filmmaking that goes with it. Out of the union of "Hollywood pizzazz" and the European art film emerges a complex visual commentary on fantasy, narrative, and history.

Run Lola Run represents a new Germany unhinged from its all too familiar narratives. It is a highly self-conscious collage of filmic styles and genres that are brought into tension with one another, exploited, reinforced, undercut, and challenged simultaneously. Ironically, the explosion that is said to signal Lola's and Manni's love for each other, which Thomas D sings about in "Komm zu mir" (Come to me), expressed as "we shattered every framework [Rahmen] when we came together; it was like an explosion. I still feel the jolt," reveals a seismic

disintegration of classical narrative forms. 9 Tykwer brazenly dips into the grab bag of cinematic genres and trends and samples and exploits their potential while breaking with them. The film's visual playfulness and its copious allusions to game (roulette and video games) and risk taking emphasize a wild and reckless pleasure in experimenting with cinema's recently discovered possibilities. Lola's hybridity is reflected in the run-together title of an interview with Tykwer by Michael Töteberg that accompanies the film script. Töteberg calls it "A romanticphilosophical actionloveexperimentalthriller."10 Tykwer merges genres and styles only to dismiss their limitations. The emerging visual/narrative arrangement reveals a fundamental suspicion of narrative that allies his aesthetic project with early avant-garde cinema. He reveals: "I did not want one moment in the film that was motivated by dramaturgy, but rather directness and spontaneity" (130). The plot that serves as a mere skeleton is condensed into the first few minutes of the film. It offers just enough glue to hold together the visual kaleidoscope—while it unglues its protagonists. Lola and Manni, from the realm of realism.

Tykwer resorts to a variety of avant-garde aesthetic practices and in doing so acknowledges contemporary cinema's debt to its cinematic/phantasmatic precursors. Particularly, the suggestive salute to repetition through the film's thrice-told structure alludes to a return to the forms of visual experimentation associated with the invention of cinema. The possibilities inherent in a liberal exploration of a panoply of styles, and use of intertextuality in order to produce new experiences and perspectives are anticipated in the quote taken from the modernist icon T. S. Eliot's "Little Gidding" that introduces the film: "We shall not cease from exploration and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time." The use of the spirals (movement) throughout the film, for example, is a visual reference to Fritz Lang's M; the painting of the woman's head from behind in the casino is a tribute to Hitchcock's Vertigo, which Tykwer includes among his favorite films. The film also returns to the various avant-garde styles in its use of montage, split screen, and slanted angles. Let us for a moment consider the suggestive detail of the avantgarde's influence beginning with the Man Ray photograph entitled "Glass Tears" in Lola's apartment or the glorification of speed and momentum that could be ascribed to the futurists. Tykwer actually claims that if the title had not been Run Lola Run it may have been Speed.11 The fascination with movement and time at the end of the twentieth century resonates with the futurist manifesto that Filippo

Marinetti, founder of the futurist movement in 1909, expressed as "Speed is our God, the new canon of beauty; a roaring motorcar, which runs like a machine gun."<sup>12</sup>

The fast-paced editing, the innovative thrice-told story, the transnational techno beat that energizes the visuals, and the variety of media—animation, video, and 35 mm stock, as well as time-lapse effects, flash-forwards and various editing techniques, and photography (stop-motion photography pioneered by Méliès, chief in the development of trick effects in the emergent cinema)—is the arsenal needed to produce the fantasy that is bound by the convention of ninety minutes. *Run Lola Run* cashes in on the postmodern mantra of "everything goes" and entertains the multiple options implicit in constructing a story, a notion that a number of filmmakers have tested (Ramis's *Groundhog Day* [1993], Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* [1994], and Howitt's *Sliding Doors* [1998]). Most importantly, it builds on cinema's essential premise of fantasy or make-believe that is the juice of popular culture. Cinema is the site of desire—a dream machine.

Tykwer's description of the image that inspired the film is one that conflates movement, emotion, and the female body:

There was the image of a woman running, who for me represented the primal image [*Urbild*] of cinema because it connects dynamism and emotion. You conceptualize a dynamic series of events that may be viewed as only mechanical and that you simultaneously infuse with emotion. I imagined a woman with red hair and her hair had to blow and she had to project desperation and passion.<sup>13</sup>

The film thus explores the cinematic medium and uses Lola as its vehicle. She literally embodies the animated image and the essence of cinema. Intrinsic to Tykwer's understanding of cinema is the idea that the moving image is magical, which means that it is not bound to a time-space continuum. Lola is the fantasy, the specularized body that arouses pleasure; she is the source of visual pleasure that is erotic in its potential to seduce. At the same time, Lola is the new woman: athletic, determined, and powerful.

The film begins with a cartoon of a female figure who enters a time tunnel and smashes all of the obstacles in her path—demons, spider webs, and clocks—until she is swept into the spiraling time tunnel. As a cartoon figure, Lola is aggressive and tenacious, a new tough girl and a national hero. Her metamorphosis into a "real" image emphasizes the invention of the character, and her transformation from cartoon to

"real" image places her firmly in the realm of the imaginary. Her red hair and the other vibrant high-gloss colors of the mise-en-scène (the yellow subway, the phone booth) resemble the primary colors used in comics. They stand in contrast to the muted colors in the video footage used to set Lola off from other minor characters who are locked in conventional narratives. Interestingly, Lola bears a striking resemblance to Leeloo, the female character in French filmmaker Luc Besson's 1997 film The Fifth Element. The renowned comic book artists Moebius and Jean-Claude Mezieres provided his visual designs. Like most cartoon characters, Lola overcomes obstacles; her greatest power is her determination, her ability to change the course of the narrative and to resist death. When she is shot in the first round, or when Manni gets run over by an ambulance in the second round, Lola wills away their death and begins her quest anew. She also can mend a broken heart or, rather, rescue the guard who has suffered a heart attack by the touch of her hand. More importantly, she does get the money to save Manni within the allotted twenty minutes—a preposterous and insurmountable task that she is able to fulfill. And she certainly can run.

Besides endowing Lola with supernatural powers, the cartoon self-consciously represents the animated image (Lola running) and places the film at the juncture between avant-garde and popular culture. By setting up the film as a cartoon, Tykwer plays with the unlimited potential of animated films, which, as Roger Cordinal suggests, "suppress the categories of normal perception; indeed its logic might even be to suppress all differential categories, and annihilate the very conditions of rationality." The cartoon launches the viewer into a fantasy world in which anything is possible, any game can be won, any obstacles overcome, any evil destroyed. As William Marston, the creator of Wonder Woman, wrote in 1943, "comics defy the limits of accepted fact and convention, thus amortizing to apoplexy the ossified arteries of routine thought." The cartoon enables Lola; it lends her the power to perform the impossible, anchors her in the world of fantasy, leads her audience into a collective dream world.

To be sure, the cartoon also anticipates Lola's boundary-breaking movement through the metropolis that captivates her audience. In *Run Lola Run*, the female body commands the urban space and breaks with the spatial confines that define traditional femininity. Lola's image is sharply juxtaposed with that of her mother, who is dressed in a pink negligee and who functions as an ornament in the private sphere. Lola's stride carries her through the eastern and western parts of Berlin. She thus defies spatial logic in terms of the ground she covers in

Berlin, as Margit Sinka precisely observes: "Tykwer forcibly merges areas scattered throughout Berlin, thereby artificially creating spatial unity where none exists."16 But Lola also defies spatial logic in terms of the clearly gendered messages that spaces transmit. Lola takes over the space of the metropolis and appropriates it in a way that her more sedentary namesake, Lola Lola in von Sternberg's 1930 film The Blue Angel, could never dream of, even though they both seem to be made for love/consumption. In sharp contrast to Lola, Manni is stationary, limited to the phone booth where he must remain while Lola attempts to restore equilibrium. He is trapped and infantilized through his dependence on Lola (the phone cord is like an umbilical cord) and the blind woman (played by Moritz Bleibtreu's mother, Monica Bleibtreu). The space that encloses him is claustrophobic and undermines his manliness (Manniness). And, more unusually, he must wait for Lola and consequently must subscribe to a trope that traditionally is reserved for the female character. He challenges her to perform her gendered role so that Lola must prove her love and return events to their status quo. "You see," he charges,

I knew that you wouldn't have any bright ideas either. I told you that something'll happen one day and that you won't know how to get out of it either. Not if you die sooner! So much for love being able to do everything, except for conjuring up 100,000 marks in 20 minutes.<sup>17</sup>

Manni invokes the "love conquers all" myth, which gets played out time and again in popular renditions of romance. It is one that *Run Lola Run* falls back on because, as Tykwer admits, he needed to fuel the image with emotion. The question is whether the film features love as its primary interest or exhausts the conventional narrative of love.

Do visual innovation and eclectic structure and, more importantly, animation, which should complicate the issue of realism, only deceive the viewer into believing/fantasizing that something new is taking place and that traditional sensibilities are being tested and its narratives undone? Do the fast-paced editing and the film's pseudo-philosophical bent actually mask the emotional economy that sparks the narrative and that sets Lola running, or does that economy get left in the wake of the run? What is at the heart of the very sparse narrative? Is it the romance between Lola and Manni? Or does the film exploit the power of cartoons, which Sherrie Inness places "at the cutting edge of exploring new definitions of gender because of their marginalization." The

juxtaposition of genre, avant-garde aesthetics, and the spectacle of the female body racing through the metropolis, energized by techno music, guarantees for the film's rapture. But what are the fantasies that the film produces, and do they allow for a new image of gender? Do gender coordinates get recoded?

## Romance

The film flirts with the compulsions of the past, as in the narrative of romantic love. Manni and Lola's relationship is visually underscored by the shot of Mattel's Barbie and Ken dolls that the camera sights in Lola's room after Manni's phone call. The brief shot of the dolls (a creation of the 1950s) ironically comments on the repertoire of love fantasies that girls rehearse and perform and establishes these cultural icons as fixtures of the popular imagination. It also launches the representation of Lola and Manni's relationship into the realm of play and fantasy, where gender gets negotiated. The film constantly employs, undercuts, and edges along the narrative conventions of romance without getting itself caught in its clichés. It can hardly be disputed that Lola runs to save Manni, but it is significant that the primacy of Lola's image racing through Berlin, her hyper-presence, eclipses the actual reason for her running and undermines the film's interest in romance. The crosscuts of Lola and Manni and the split-screen image function to remind the viewer, who is engrossed in her exuberant sprint through the metropolis, of Lola's goal. The techno music functions similarly.<sup>19</sup> In fact, when Lola dashes into her father's office to ask him for the money, the father's befuddled response—"Who is Manni?"—chips away at Manni's significance.

The film features assorted genres that stage romantic love—fairy tale, melodrama, and soap opera. They appear as signposts along Lola's route, which the film encounters and undoes. When Lola bursts in on her father, she finds him entangled in a bourgeois melodrama. Shot in close-ups to lend the scenes an atmosphere of intimacy, and in extreme close-ups that create a sense of claustrophobia, the tempestuous drama between her father (Herbert Knaup) and his lover unfolds with each episode. The viewer learns that the overworked breadwinner is estranged from his home. His lover and colleague, Jutta Hansen (Nina Petri), needs to know whether he is prepared to leave his wife for her. The plot thickens as we learn that she is pregnant, but it is not his biological child. Ironically, his story gets repeated because, as Lola finds out, she is "ein Kuckucksei" (not his biological child). The repeti-

tion reflects the inherent circular thematic structure of melodrama or soap operas. The subplot of the father's adulterous liaison is shot with a more coarsely grained film stock than the shots of Lola's run. The muted colors in these scenes lend a television-like quality to the image. Significantly, the melodramatic romance retards the ecstatic pace that Lola's goal demands. In effect, it presents an obstacle to Lola's running and delays the visual pleasure it provides. The same holds true for the shots of Lola and Manni in bed, which are staged twice between runs. Tykwer refers to these scenes as the film's heart. With Manni and Lola lying on spiral-print pillows, the intimate close-ups, shot with red gel on the lamps, show them talking about love and death. The "he says-she says" dialogue after the first run reveals the intangibility of love and Lola's uncertainty; after the second run Manni asks Lola what she would do if he died (producing a hypothetical script) and concludes that life goes on. The scenes are static and tedious relative to the exciting kaleidoscope of images that display Lola's dart through Berlin.

The tale of romantic love gets spun differently in relation to the guard, Schuster (Armin Rohde), who literally kicks off the game, the film, and the odyssey with the soccer ball. Tykwer threads a fairy tale—like relationship to Lola into each encounter with him. Each time Lola arrives at the bank, the guard promotes her. At first he sarcastically calls her the princess of the house (Holla, holla, Lolalola, die Hausprinzessin, welch seltenes Glück); the second time around he lectures her on the virtues of a queen; the third time around he proclaims, "you're finally here darling." Lola runs on. Schuster stands still, and the soundtrack is mixed with the loud pounding of his heart. When Lola revives him in the ambulance, which she hops into when it crosses her path, she assures the paramedic: "I belong to him."

Is three times a charm, as we learn from fairy tales? Will love conquer all? The mistrust of narrative convention peaks in the third and final performance of Lola's run. At first she seems to negotiate better the obstacles she encounters and to gain strength. At the outset of the third run, she leaps over the dog and growls back, yet when she finds that she has missed her father at the bank her powers wane. As a last resort, Lola surrenders agency and appeals to a higher being: "Come on. Help me. Please. Just this one time. I'm just going to continue running, OK. I'm waiting." She closes her eyes and runs into the street. Traffic screeches to a halt, and a truck driver who has just missed her yells: "What's wrong, are you sick of life?" But Lola trusts in fantasy. She has put her life on the line in order to save Manni. Her reward is

the discovery of a casino, where, despite all odds, Lola wins one hundred thousand marks. The camera that anticipated the roulette game at the beginning of the film with the image of Lola turning has come full circle. The black ball falls twice on the number 20. Twenty has now become her lucky number instead of leading to Manni's demise. Yet, when Lola arrives with the cash, she sees Manni exiting Ronnie's car in good spirits. With the help of the blind woman—a reference to the blind man in Lang's M who leads the police to the serial killer—Manni discovers the street person bicycling past the phone booth and recovers the bag of money. His brief sprint, much shorter than Lola's, ends up being as fruitful.

Noticing Lola's fatigue, he asks whether she ran. Lola's race against time turns out to be superfluous. In other words, the convention of the happy ending necessitates a restoration of equilibrium and of a traditional gender arrangement and, last but not least, a casino. It is happy, at least, within the logic of the overarching narrative but is ultimately disappointing because it undermines Lola's success. Manni has regained his mobility, restored his masculinity, and taken control of his circumstance. Yet this perfunctory ending falls short of the complex visual spectacle that has dominated the film. The ending, spurious at best, is a self-conscious reenactment of a Hollywood convention. What is more, the happy ending is unsettled by the final image of Lola, who remains detached and reserved and does not arouse confidence in this "union of the heart" as suggested in the song "Komm zu mir." Lola does not respond to Manni's question concerning the contents of her bag. She has a mysterious and mischievous Mona Lisa-like smile that remains open-ended and uncompromised by the convention of the happy ending. The spectator and Lola share the knowledge of her abilities, while Manni remains clueless. After approximately eighty-one minutes, the film is over. Lola has one hundred thousand marks in the bag and has won the game on her own terms. She remains an image of fantasy that is not reabsorbed into the convention of the happy heterosexual couple. Lola retains a transcendent quality that is captured in the non-diegetic lyrics sung by Franka Potente at various times throughout the film in which she enumerates all of the things she wishes she were. She shouts: "I wish I were." Her wish list includes wanting to be a hunter, a starship, a princess, a ruler, a writer, a prayer—all powerful images that energize the visual representation of Lola. She has broken boundaries just like the film. The excitement ceases but identities have been transformed, and another female image can be added to the repertoire of representations that feeds popular culture.

## History

For all of Tykwer's technical innovation, his recourse to avant-garde traditions and to popular culture, and his challenge to conventional narrative forms, the question that remains is whether this game allows for a transition into another way of living. In other words, to return to Detley Buck's assertion, what else does the film have to say about Germany other than to call for a new type of German cinema (that dismisses history)? The relationship of the film to Germany's history is ambivalent indeed. With the exception of the traditional narratives (melodrama, romance, and so forth) that she encounters, Lola is barely impeded. Unlike the New German Cinema or the German heritage films, which Lutz Koepnick discusses in the present volume, it is significant that Run Lola Run hardly concerns itself with history, except when it trips Lola up. She is late in meeting Manni not only because her moped was stolen but also because a taxi driver mistakenly took her to the Grunewald Street in the eastern part of Berlin rather than the one in the western part. The mix-up reflects a postunification confusion owing to the divide that still exists between the eastern and western parts of Berlin. Besides this one explicit reference to history, history, for the most part, is only visually insinuated. For instance, Lola sails past the Garnison Cemetery (in the east) at the beginning of each segment. At the end of the third segment, she barrels across the Gendarmenmarkt (in the east). Her race against time (and thus history) then takes her over the Oberbaumbrücke—a border crossing for Germans during the time of the wall—and past the Friederichsstrasse and Kochstrasse (in the west) that bordered Checkpoint Charlie—the crossing points between East and West Berlin before the fall of the wall for citizens of allied nations. These sites and spaces are traversed, and it may be argued that the past and present are visually connected. Yet while Lola's twenty-minute sprint (a tribute to the end of the twentieth century) takes her past these sites, she never takes them in or reflects on them. Unlike Walter Benjamin's angel of history, who looks back in shock at the pile of debris that history has left and desires to return to fix it but cannot. Lola is oriented toward the future. 20 Her stride is resolute and unwavering; she never gazes back. The piles of bricks and open ditches, the construction sites that she passes, represent renewal. Berlin, Germany's new capital, stands for the future of a new Germany. Berlin is a city under construction that must reinvent itself, and Lola becomes its agent—a superhero of the contemporary German cultural scene.

The first cut on the CD soundtrack, which is not included in the film but accompanies it, is entitled "Believe." It begins with an inventory of the things in which the female protagonist does not believe. She does not believe in trouble, silence, panic, fear, history, truth, chance, prophecy, or destiny. She does, however, believe in fantasy, the stuff of popular culture. It is a type of fantasy that has the power to overcome the spatial divide of a newly unified Berlin, which Lola navigates with exceptional skill. Indeed, Run Lola Run is, as Sinka argues, the feature film that best portrays "the spirit of a New Berlin generation." This generation, she writes, does not "shun confrontations with Germany's fractured tortured past, this past no longer has a hold on them."21 Perhaps it is not only the New Berlin generation that is celebrated but also more significantly a new Germany that is less invested in remembering and more invested in looking ahead. Is it by chance that Lola emerges at a time when Germany is struggling to redefine itself as a nation and that the film has become synonymous with the new direction that Germany is taking?

Run Lola Run does not reflect the Germany that the New German filmmaker Fassbinder envisioned. After all, Fassbinder fatalistically returned to the past to identify the moment in postwar Germany history in which the game was won and thus lost simultaneously. I am referring here to Fassbinder's 1979 film The Marriage of Maria Braun, which ends with Germany's victory in the soccer match against Hungary in 1954. For Fassbinder, this victory marks a turning point in the direction the Federal Republic took in establishing its democracy and a failed opportunity to reflect on Germany's fascist past. In the last scene Maria's house explodes and with it her dreams of love and a new beginning. Tykwer's open admiration for the New German Cinema may have influenced his first feature, Die tödliche Maria (The Deadly Maria, 1994), but with Lola Tykwer steps outside of the politically motivated framework of the New German Cinema and its compulsive preoccupation with national identity and the past. The question of "who we are" at the beginning of the film is posed tellingly by the wellknown voice of Hans Paetsch, a storyteller of fairy tales, that is, popular culture. Ironically, Tykwer picks up where Fassbinder left off but changes the course. In the last scene of Maria Braun, the radio broadcaster exclaims that Germany has won the soccer match against Hungary. At the beginning of Run Lola Run, the questions of "who we are" and "why we believe" are answered in a quotation by Sepp Herberger, the same legendary soccer coach who took Germany to victory in the 1954 World Cup: "The ball is round, the game lasts 90 minutes. Everything else is theory." Yet the film only lasts eighty-one minutes, which means that Tykwer again did not stick to the rules. With *Run Lola Run*, he let his imagination run, placed his bets ("Rien ne va plus"), and became "the king" of a new wave in German cinema.

A subjective engagement in the film's fantasy may open up a space for a new type of German cinema and lend a new cultural identity to Germany that is focused more on the future. The premise on which the film operates, as Tykwer admits, is that "you have no chance, therefore, use it."<sup>22</sup> And he did. The film is celebrated as signaling a new beginning for German cinema that is bold, dynamic, and indulgent and that overcomes self-doubt and "artistic cowardliness," according to Helmut Krausser, who compares the film to opera and applauds Tykwer's courage to produce visual pathos. <sup>23</sup> Considering its international success and Hollywood's interest in engaging *Lola*'s filmmaker for its own productions, it comes as no surprise that the German Film Prize that is awarded annually now fondly is called *Lola*. <sup>24</sup> With *Lola* Tykwer has struck a new chord that serves Germany well.

## Notes

I would like to thank my colleagues Irene d'Almeida, Mary Beth Haralovich, Susan White, and Linda Zwinger for our lively discussions of the film that helped to shape this essay.

- I. Michael Töteberg, "Über die Karriere eines Films," in *Szenenwechsel: Momentaufnahmen des jungen deutschen Films*, ed. Michael Töteberg (Reinbeck and Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1999), 45–49.
- 2. Robert Falcon, "Run Lola Run/Lola rennt," Sight and Sound 9, no. II (1999): 52.
- 3. Richard Rayner, "Franka Potente: This German Actress Makes Her U.S. Film Debut in Run Lola Run," *Harper's Bazaar* 3451 (June 1999): 85.
  - 4. Tom Whalen, "Run Lola Run," Film Quarterly 53, no. 3 (2000): 22.
- 5. Cited in Margit Sinka, "Tom Tykwer's *Lola rennt*: A Blueprint of Millennial Berlin," *Glossen* 11 (2000): n 14: "*Lola rennt* erzählt von Deutschland einen Dreck. Das ist reines Entertainment." All translations in this essay are my own.
- 6. Niklas Luhmann, *The Reality of the Mass Media* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2000), 51.
- 7. John Storey, An Introduction to Cultural Theory and Popular Culture (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 11.
  - 8. Thomas Assheuer, "Im Reich des Scheins," Die Zeit, April 11, 2001, 16.
- 9. The original reads: "wir sprengten jeden Rahmen, als wir zusammenkamen. Es war wie eine Explosion. Ich spür die Erschütterung immer noch" (my translation). It is interesting to note the tension in the blending of the songs "Wish"

- (a female vocalist) and "Komm zu mir" (a male vocalist). While the female vocalist fantasizes about all of the things that she wishes to become, the male vocalist is intent on drawing her back to him.
- 10. Michael Töteberg, "Ein romantisch-philosophischer ActionLiebesExperimentalThriller" (interview with Tom Tykwer), in *Lola rennt* (Reinbeck and Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1998), 129–42.
- II. Töteberg, "Ein romantisch-philosophischer ActionLiebesExperimentalThriller," 129.
- 12. Cited in Giovanni Lista, *Futurism*, trans. Charles Lynn Clark (New York: Universe Books, 1986), 5. There is a resonance with futurism also in the fragmented representation of Lola in some advertisements for the film. Also, the *New Yorker* film advertisement includes a quote from Peter Rainer, of the *New York Magazine*. He writes: "Lola's like a human stun gun."
- 13. Tom Tykwer, "Generalschlüssel furs Kino," in *Szenenwechsel: Momentaufnahmen des jungen deutschen Films*, ed. Michael Töteberg (Reinbeck and Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1999), 32: "Bei *Lola rennt* war es das Bild dieser rennenden Frau, für mich so ein Urbild von Kino, weil es Dynamik und Emotion verbindet. In der Wahrnehmung fasst du einen dynamischen Ablauf zusammen, der einfach mechanisch sein könnte, den du aber gleichzeitig emotional auflädst. Ich hatte vor Augen eine Frau mit roten Haaren, und die Haare mußten auch so wehen, und sie mußte Verzweiflung und Leidenschaft ausdrücken. Das ist ein Bild, das hab ich immermal wieder gehabt."
- 14. Cited in Paul Wells, *Understanding Animation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), 26.
- 15. Cited in Les Daniels, Wonder Woman: The Complete History. The Life and Times of the Amazon Princess (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2000), 11.
  - 16. Sinka, "Tom Tykwer's Lola rennt."
- 17. "Siehste, ich wusste, dass dir da auch nix mehr einfällt, ich hab's dir ja gesagt, eines Tages passiert was, da weisst auch du keinen Ausweg mehr, und nicht erst, wen du stirbst, das kommt viel früher. Du wolltest mir ja nicht glauben, und jetzt stehste da. Von wegen die Liebe kann alles, aber nicht in zwanzig Minuten hunderttausend Mark herzaubern."
- 18. Sherrie A. Inness, *Tough Girls: Women Warriors and Wonder Women in Popular Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 141.
- 19. My special thanks to Caryl Flynn, who gave me her unpublished paper on the music in *Run Lola Run* entitled "That Music That Lola Ran To."
- 20. Flash-forwards of the nameless passersby that Lola encounters in each run, the guy on the bike or the woman pushing a baby carriage, suggest that she changes the course of their personal histories. Some critics have pursued a chaos theory reading of Lola and talked about the ripple effect that the smallest alteration to the narrative produces. I think that Tykwer plays with the endless possibilities and combinations that storytelling provides and, much like a constructivist, believes in the alterability of reality.
- 21. Sinka, "Tom Tykwer's *Lola rennt*." Sinka offers an incisive analysis of the impact of the film on the political landscape in Berlin. Both the conservative and social democratic parties appropriated the image of Lola's vitality and determina-

tion to inject their campaigns with a message for the future. Each candidate (Diepgen and Naumann) donned the Lola look.

- 22. Cited in Sinka, "Tom Tykwer's Lola rennt."
- 23. Helmut Krausser, "Lola: Ein Nachwort, viel zu früh," in *Szenenwechsel: Momentaufnahmen des jungen deutschen Films*, ed. Michael Töteberg (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1999), 35.
- 24. "Der Kanzler und die Kaiserin: In Berlin wird der Deutsche Filmpreis 2001 zelebriert," SZdigital- Süddeutsche Zeitung (June 22, 2001) <www.dizmuenchen.de> A012.502.877.