

ABSTRACT

Female Representation and the Game in the Film *Lola Rennt*

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Lola Rennt is a German film that was released in 1998, directed by Tom Tykwer and starring Franka Potente and Moritz Bleibtreu. The purpose of this research is to examine the use of game studies, the symbolic use of color and time, female representation, and postmodernism in the film *Lola Rennt*. Game theory is used to study the structure of the film: the narrative is separated into three sequences of the same mission that have differing outcomes. Color is an indicator of good and bad fortune; most notably, the color red is present whenever a part of Lola's mission fails. Time in the film is Lola's opponent, as her mission has a time limit. Tykwer examines the reversal of stereotypes, particularly concerning the masculine and feminine aspects of Lola's character. Finally, postmodernism is used to examine the film with respect to Germany's history. *Lola Rennt* is a philosophically and visually stunning film, and the intention of the study is to explore these aspects in order to better understand the film.

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FEMALE REPRESENTATION AND THE GAME IN *LOLA RENNT*

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Preface

Lola Rennt is a German film released in 1998, directed by Tom Tykwer and starring Franka Potente and Moritz Bleibtreu. The film was well received internationally by a variety of film festivals and awards shows. It was nominated for a total of forty-two awards and won twenty-eight, including eight awards for best foreign film. Tykwer was nominated for his direction, the screenplay, and soundtrack composition.

Tom Tykwer is a well-known German director, writer, producer and composer. Most recently, he directed *Cloud Atlas* and *The International*, both of which were filmed in English. Even in his English language films, Tykwer creates a deeper meaning within his films, asking his audience difficult questions that may not surface in a single viewing. He plays with space and time, offering existential theories about the role of man in the universe.

The film was released less than ten years after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Although it is not initially obvious, Tykwer deals with important post-wall themes, such as geographical continuity in Berlin and the integration of East Berlin and West Berlin. Berlin, in the film, is intentionally presented as an “any” city; all of the many city’s distinguishing features and landmarks are removed, opening up the geographical location to the viewer.

Lola rennt is actress Franka Potente’s second collaboration with Tom Tykwer; in 2000, she starred in his film *The Princess and the Warrior*. She has received six award nominations for best actress, as well as six wins for best actress. In more recent years, due to the *Bourne Identity* series, Potente has branched out to American film as well as German film.

Lola rennt has been greatly studied since its release, primarily in reference to its symbolism. Tykwer's choice and use of color is specific and creates a better understanding of the film's structure. The subject of time and its relationship to fate and coincidence is also heavily discussed. Tykwer emphasizes the difference a few seconds can make in the outcome of any situation, and several of these studies examine how small fractions of time can have such an impact.

Studies also focus on the postmodernism of the film: the same segment is filmed with varying minute differences, leading to a different conclusion of each scenario. The repetition and structure of the film indicates postmodern thought, particularly in applying the film to current media, such as music videos or videogames.

Lastly, studies focus on the relationships of the film. Lola's key relationships are examined and compared, and some researchers even compare Lola's situation and relationships to post-wall Germany. Germany's fractured past, namely the division of the East and West, can be viewed through the lens of Lola's relationships.

CHAPTER ONE

Game Theory: The ball is round. Und ab!

Game theory examines the interactions of people and how those interactions affect their lives. It is also described as a series of meetings “in which each player’s choice affects the payoff of the other players.”¹ In *Lola Rennt*, the characters each experience a set of meetings or interactions that directly affect the outcome of their “game.” Each player, or in this case character, must act based on how he or she thinks the others in the game will act.

Game theory contains “a complete specification of the strategies each ‘player’ has, the order in which players choose strategies, the information players have, and how players value possible outcomes (‘utilities’) that result from strategy choices.”² At the beginning of a video game, for example, a player has a certain amount of information concerning what his task entails and how well his avatar can perform those tasks. The player must also take into account the information that other players have and how they intend to use that information. The player must, in turn, try to use the other players’ actions to his own benefit. He can also try to use the “tit for tat” cooperation method. If another player does something helpful for him, he returns the favor. Each player is then able to proceed toward his respective goal, aided by the partnership of the other player. However, if the other player does something aggressive toward him, the player may

¹ Colin F. Camerer. “Behavioural Studies of Strategic Thinking in Games.” *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 7.5 (2003). 225-232. Academic Search Complete. Web.

² Ibid.

respond in a similar manner, temporarily abandoning the partnership. The two players quickly learn how to respond to one another in the most effective way.

A second method is the Prisoner's Dilemma, in which players must act against other players in order to receive the best benefits. Players respond well when help has been given. However, if a player subverts another player's task or expectations, that player then responds aggressively. The partnership has to be respected in order for it to function.

The structure of *Lola Rennt* is similar to a video game. In the film, game theory allows for a limited number of outcomes, in which "all players have preference orderings over the possible outcomes of the game."³ *Lola Rennt*, specifically, has three possible outcomes. Therefore, it is the player's mission to ensure that the scenario ends with a favorable outcome. For example, Lola must determine at the beginning of the film who can give her the most assistance in completing her task. She is counting on certain characters to fulfill certain roles so that she can fulfill her own. Game theory is suggested in *Lola* by the use of a soccer ball at the beginning of the film. "Und ab!" ends the introduction and begins the film or, I will argue, the game. It is possible to draw on past experiences of a certain level in order to acquire the means to beat that level. Game theory calls this "reinforcement," which is the approach "in which players repeat previous strategies if they yielded good payoffs."⁴ By using reinforcement, players can choose methods that were successful in completing a previous level or task.

³ de Bruin, Boudewijn. "Game Theory in Philosophy." *Topoi* 24.2 (2005): 197-208. Web.

⁴ Camerer, "Behavioural Studies of Strategic Thinking in Games," 227.

In *Lola Rennt*, I explore game studies as the repeated level of a game, in which the same mission is attempted three times with different outcomes. Tykwer's film gives us examples of how minor interactions, lasting only a few seconds, might be the determining factor in the path of that person's life. Each scenario recounts Lola's attempts to save her boyfriend Manni. Every decision and hesitation factors into the final outcome, as demonstrated, for example, by Lola's interactions with the minor side characters. Therefore, although the decisions do not always affect Lola, the smallest change in behavior throughout the scenarios affects someone somehow. For example, the first time Lola passes a man riding a bike, flash-forwards of his life show him meeting a nice girl and getting married. However, in the second sequence, the man ends up a beggar living on the street and in public restrooms. A difference of a few seconds can completely change the course of each character's life. As Lola repeats each scenario, she encounters the same characters, but the characters experience a different outcome each time. Tykwer is trying to show us that fate is unpredictable and circumstances may change with the slightest provocation.

Tykwer creates a game-like scenario by giving the characters three sequences in which to complete the task before them. The three different scenarios are three attempts to pass the same level. To pass this particular level of the game, the player must save Manni's life by getting 100,000 German marks and delivering the money to Manni's boss within twenty minutes.

Structure/Plot

The game analysis begins with a frantic phone call from Lola's boyfriend Manni. He informs her that he has lost the payment owed to his mob boss by leaving it on the train, where it was picked up by a bum. If Manni does not have the 100,000 German marks in twenty minutes, his boss will kill him. Lola insists that the two of them will find a way to get the money. Manni is desperate and, searching desperately for a solution, warns her that if she does not reach him in twenty minutes, he will rob the Bolle, a nearby store. Lola needs a savior. Deciding on her father, she runs out of her apartment and begins her race to save Manni. Beginning at the moment the phone flies out of her hands, Lola's journey replays twice, before the third sequence allows her to complete her task. Each journey is different, the outcome affected by a few seconds difference at the beginning of each journey. Despite the fact that scenes are familiar in each of the sequences, the spacing of a few seconds reveals more about the characters and the circumstances each time the scene occurs. In between each sequence is an interlude, in which Lola and Manni discuss the themes of love and death before the next sequence commences.

In the first sequence, which begins as a cartoon animation, Lola runs down the stairs in her apartment building and passes a boy and his dog. She glances at them and continues running. Resuming "non-cartoon" form, Lola runs to her father's bank and begs for his assistance. Not only does he turn her away, but he also reveals that he is not her true father and that he has been having an affair with one of his coworkers. He turns her out of the bank, and, empty-handed, she continues running to meet Manni. However, she arrives too late, for he has already entered the Bolle and is in the process of robbing

it. She joins him, but the two are cornered by the police as they attempt to make an escape. In the ensuing chaos, Lola is accidentally shot. As she bleeds to death, the interlude begins, after which she simply says, “Stop.”

The second sequence begins as the phone falls back into its cradle. Cartoon-Lola runs down the stairs again, but this time the boy trips her, causing her to fall down the stairs. Lola limps out of her apartment building, her timing delayed compared to the first sequence. She again asks her father for help. This time, when he refuses, she steals the security guard’s gun and holds up the bank. She not only obtains the money, but also escapes the detection of the police waiting right outside the bank doors. She calls his name and catches Manni’s attention before he enters the convenience store, but as he turns while crossing the street, he is struck by the ambulance and killed. The scene shifts to the second interlude, in which Manni tells Lola that he believes she would find happiness with someone else if he died.

The film resets for the third and final sequence. As cartoon-Lola begins her journey down the stairs, she jumps over the dog and past the boy, an action that places her slightly ahead of the events in both the first and second sequences. She runs to her father’s office but is unable to intercept him before he gets into a car and leaves the bank with a colleague, Herr Meyer. Due to the timing in this sequence, Lola falls onto the hood of Herr Meyer’s car as she is running through Berlin. He pauses for a second, preventing him from causing a wreck as he did in the two previous sequences. Thus, he is able to reach the bank on time, and Lola’s father leaves without seeing her. In desperation, she runs through the city until nearly being run over by a truck. In this moment, she turns and notices a casino. Despite her appearance and shortage of money, she is allowed to enter

and place a bet. During this time, Manni happens to see the bum who took the money off the train. He begins chasing the man through the streets in an attempt to get the money back, eventually catching him and trading his gun to the bum for the money. Lola, meanwhile, wins not only her first but also her second bets, providing her with the necessary cash to pay Manni's boss. Lola arrives at the designated meeting place in time to see Manni shaking hands with his boss and walking away unharmed. This time, both survive and have an additional 100,000 German marks.

Beginning Quotations

Tykwer uses four quotations to introduce his film. The quotations establish the underlying philosophy that Tykwer communicates to his audience throughout the film, most notably in the subjects of life and fate. Each quote explores the idea of life as a game in which people, the players, must navigate life's obstacles in order to reach their goal.

The first quotation by German soccer coach Sepp Herberger, who is well-known for his philosophical sports quotes, appears on the screen: "Nach dem Spiel ist vor dem Spiel."⁵ The quote introduces the idea of a "game" and suggests that life is circular, a new game beginning just as another one ends. In the world of sports, each game is preparation for the next, continuing in an endless cycle. Applied to the film, the quote suggests that prior to this level of the game, Lola has experienced a previous level. The success of each level is the preparation for the level that will follow. The quote also

⁵ "After the game is before the game."

suggests that Lola's journey will never be complete: a new level awaits her no matter how many she has previously completed.

TS Eliot's quotation appears onscreen next to Herberger's: "We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started, and to know the place for the first time."⁶ In contrast to Herberger, Eliot portrays the subject as being unaware of the continued cycle. In this case, the person cannot prepare himself for the next test, but instead passes through the same cycles unknowingly. This is similar to Lola's situation in that she moves through the same level repeatedly, yet for the most part does not seem to be aware of her previous journey. The gamer experiences a sense of déjà vu when approaching, or perhaps repeating, each level. The setting varies only slightly between levels, because each completed level provides the familiar home base with an expansion that provides new challenges and obstacles. Although the audience realizes that Lola is trying to master the level again, Lola herself does not. There are details that she seems to have learned, such as how a gun works, but she does not seem to know that she is repeating a level over and over. Therefore, to Lola, the beginning is always new, even though the audience is experiencing a return to the start.

The film's first visual message begins with a ticking clock and the swinging of a pendulum. The entire screen is then filled by a clock figure that opens its mouth to reveal a blurred group of people moving aimlessly around a square. As the camera focuses on a few in the crowd, a narrator muses:

"Man...probably the most mysterious species on our planet. A mystery of unanswered questions. Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going? How do we know what we think we know? Why do we believe anything at all? Countless questions in search of an answer...an answer

⁶ T.S. Eliot. "Little Gidding."

that will give rise to a new question, and the next question will give rise to the next question and so on. But, in the end, isn't it always the same question? And always the same answer?"

Tykwer is presenting an existential philosophical question. Throughout the different ages of history, man has struggled to find his purpose in the world. He wonders what direction his life is taking and how the decisions of others will direct his steps toward his fate. The questions above all come from the need to know how and why man came to exist. However, with each question answered, a new question arises, leaving humanity lost again. Through this quotation, Tykwer suggests that there is only one question that must be answered. The struggle, then, is to discover what that question is.

Tykwer encourages his audience to take a deeper look at *Lola* in the following ways: the way that the symbols, in particular color and time, create meaning; the way in which each sequence complements the others; and the way the interludes give us insight into Lola and Manni as characters. The "game" that Lola plays for twenty minutes of her life is indicative of the game of life itself. Throughout the film, these questions are answered for Lola at a temporary surface level. However, the questions continue beyond the ending of the film.

The guard, an otherwise relatively minor character, provides the viewer with the sense of both the simplicity and the complexity of the mission: "Ball ist rund, Spiel dauert 90 Minuten. Soviel ist schon mal klar. Alles andere ist Theorie! Und ab!"⁷ The first half of the quotation, another of Herberger's, compares life to a soccer game: the guard provides the audience with the philosophy, and the game begins. A sense of immediacy follows, in which the player is thrust into the game without being told the

⁷ "The ball is round. The game lasts 90 minutes. That's a fact. Everything else is pure theory!"

rules. The game begins—“und ab!”—and the player must figure out the complexities of the game in the midst of playing it. The game has a purpose and a time limit; anything else that the audience needs to know it will have to decipher for itself. As the guard, acting as a referee, announces the beginning of the game, the tangled mass of people suddenly organizes itself into the words “Lola rennt,” which the audience views from above. Despite the mass chaos, the game is highly organized. The guard throws a soccer ball into the air. As the ball falls, it becomes a cartoon ball and disappears into the “o” of “Lola” in the film title. A cartoon Lola follows the ball down a tunnel, smashing and avoiding obstacles as she continues running through the film credits, foreshadowing the race against time that occurs in the main body of the film. This follows the pattern of a game: although the actions of the players may appear random or skewed, there is an ultimate purpose that the viewers cannot guess. The game of life has few known rules, and the audience must use what knowledge it possesses to find the order and different rules of the game.

Video Game Aspects of Lola rennt

Lola rennt possesses a multitude of video game characteristics that drive the narrative and its themes and philosophies, such as avatars, the mission, reset periods, and side games. The film’s introduction and sequence structure can be read as a video game. The general framework for a video game includes a choice of avatars (the figure that the gamer controls), a mission for that level of the game; and the setup of the game (a cartoon sequence that determines how that level will be played out). The interludes represent reset periods, in which the player can find out new information before retrying the level.

While these are technical aspects of the video game, it is important to take note of limitations. Obviously, the director and screenwriters determine the avatars chosen and the decisions made throughout the film; therefore, it is as if the audience is viewing another player. Although they are not playing the game themselves, the viewers are still invested and involved in the outcome of the game. Game theory allows an innovative way to examine the elements of time and different methods of character development within the framework of the film. *Lola rennt* is an off-beat film that responds well to an uncharacteristic approach to interpretation. This analysis will provide a new perspective on the film by organizing the narrative on the game model.

Before the narrative begins, the characters are introduced as “avatars” for the game. Along with the actor’s name, each character is portrayed through a series of revolving snapshots, similar to how an avatar is portrayed prior to the gamer’s choice.⁸ Before each photograph, the camera winds up before delivering a series of clicking sounds to accompany each of the pictures. In a game, this sequence allows the gamer to see the avatars from all angles to assess their physical strengths and weaknesses. The game menu gives information about the avatars, such as speed or strength. In *Lola rennt*, the audience knows from the film title that the avatar will need to be a runner. The gamer might consider these factors: high speed, quick thinking, and access to monetary assets. Lola and Manni are the two youngest avatars available; therefore, based on a search for speed, one of the two should be considered. Manni is a small-time crook. Lola, on the other hand, has a father who is a bank executive. Between the two of them, Lola is more clearheaded. This characteristic makes her the avatar most likely to make rational,

⁸ The mugshots are discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

calculated decisions during periods of extreme pressure. Although these characteristics are not given along with Lola's photograph, the audience knows from the title that Lola has been chosen for the task. The audience also sees Lola in action immediately as a cartoon Lola, moves through the obstacles in the tunnel, rather than a cartoon Manni.

The Mission

Through her phone call with Manni, Lola receives her mission: Manni has left a bag filled with 100,000 Deutsch-marks on a train. If he does not hand the money to his boss within twenty minutes, Manni believes he will be killed. The camera circles Lola, providing a last minute evaluation of her physical strengths and weaknesses, as the avatar gets ready to act. The quick succession of faces is similarly filmed in a shutter stop technique to the choosing of the avatar in the first section of the game: mother, father, grandmother, and other friends are evaluated in order to choose which person can offer Lola the most help. Lola must pick the person most likely to help her succeed in her mission; therefore, she needs to select someone with large assets and considerable power. Lola's father, a bank executive, is her obvious choice. The task is for Lola to attain and deliver the money to Manni before the twenty minutes are finished. It becomes apparent after the first and second scenarios that obtaining the money is not enough to win the level; both Lola and Manni must survive as well. The objective has not changed, but instead has been made fully known to the gamer.

Cartoon

Before the player theoretically gets control of the game, there is a beginning cartoon sequence that determines Lola's condition before she enters the game. The first

time, cartoon-Lola runs down a flight of stairs and emerges from her apartment building as herself at normal strength. The first time a player begins a level in a game, the player has no idea what to expect. To the player, the way everything works the first time is normal. When she runs down the flight of stairs in the second scenario, a boy trips her, causing Lola to fall and begin the level with a handicap. This slows her considerably at the beginning and throughout the level. In some video games, the manner in which the gamer played and died in his previous attempt in the level can affect his startup position. If he did not have enough supplies, his health will be lower at the beginning of the level. He may not be able to move as quickly. He may have lost a few of the assets from the previous attempt and be forced to acquire them a second time in order to use them. For example, in the last scenario, the boy's dog growls at Lola menacingly. However, Lola anticipates the boy's intentions and jumps past the boy and his dog, putting her slightly ahead of her previous runs. Therefore, in addition to the speed at which Lola moves throughout the level, the beginning sequence also determines the exact time that Lola begins the level. This is suggested at the beginning of the second sequence as Lola limps out of her apartment complex. However, the most concrete exhibition of timing given is a train that Lola runs past near the beginning. In the first sequence, she runs with the train as it rounds a curve. The train rounds the curve ahead of her in the second sequence, and behind her in the third. Therefore, timing is of the utmost importance.

Level T⁹

It takes Lola three attempts to pass Level T. At the time the film came out, it was common for most traditional video games to allow avatars three lives, unless they somehow gained a bonus life. Lola has gained no bonus, so the gamer can assume that the third sequence will be Lola's final chance to pass the level. On the first occasion, she is fatally shot. It is at this point that the full objective of the game is revealed: Lola must ensure Manni's and her survival, in addition to acquiring the money. The objective has not changed so much as become more risky and complex. The second time, Manni is hit by an ambulance and dies. In the second sequence, Lola cannot find the perfect balance of passing the level without either losing her life or Manni losing his. On the third try, with the last of her three lives, Lola completes the level without either injuring herself or Manni injuring himself. However, it is possible that Lola's journey is not concluded by the completion of the current level. The game continues, and Lola and Manni advance to a new level.

In a video game, the gamer can acquire keys that advance play. As Lola moves through the level, she learns from past sequences and benefits when she tries to complete Level T again. For example, in the second sequence, she remembers how to turn off the safety of a gun. The first time someone plays a level, she is figuring out how to activate and use short cuts, special items, and key interactive characters in a way that will help her succeed. If a player has failed a level once, she will theoretically have a better understanding of how things work the second time around. For instance, in the second sequence, the gamer, playing Lola, still starts with Lola's father, but tries to take a short

⁹ Named "T" as a symbol for time.

cut to the money by holding up the bank. Although Manni dies at the end of the second sequence, the short cut itself is successful: Lola has accomplished the objective of getting the money from the bank. Once certain tools are learned, such as releasing the safety or not wasting time in her father's office, the gamer can draw upon those tools in later levels or situations.

Another example of memory of a previous attempt is Lola and the ambulance. In the first sequence, she runs past the ambulance en route to Manni. In the second, she asks the driver for a ride and is denied, but the ambulance hits Manni. In the third, she merely hops on board and arrives safely to meet Manni, saving another man's life in the process. Because the gamer has learned the trajectory of the ambulance based on the first sequence, he now knows that this time Lola can use the ambulance to arrive at the destination on time.

Finally, in both the first and second sequences, Lola pauses outside the bank to ask an elderly woman the time. In the first sequence, Lola pauses, realizing that her time is ticking away. In the second sequence, Lola asks the time as she runs past, without bothering to stop to hear the answer. The few seconds she gains from not stopping are exactly the right amount of time needed to prevent Manni from entering the Bolle.

Reset Periods/Interludes

Another structural element of this film is the reset periods, just as in a game. Between each failed level is a pause from the game, or a reset interlude. In the film, the reset allows the gamer to learn something new about the characters, such as motivation or fundamental characteristics. For example, in the first reset period, Lola has died and is

trying to decide whether or not to try the level again. She seems torn between allowing herself to die—convinced that Manni will find someone else to love—and returning to the game. Most video games guide the gamer toward a retry of the level, and the reset period gives him insight into why Lola herself must complete the level. In the second reset period, Manni has died. He asks Lola what she would do if he died. He too, is sure that Lola could find another to love in the case of his death. However, Lola insists that she would never let him die. The gamer, playing Lola, cannot let Manni die, and this prompts a third attempt. After each pause, the game is reset and Lola begins the level again.

Side Games

In addition to these other video game aspects, *Lola rennt* also has what could be construed as side games. In a video game, there are small side games that do not advance the story of the main game. However, they can be used as aids to receive extra lives, more health or strength points, or more understanding of how the game functions as a whole. In the film, Lola runs into a specific set of characters. These three characters—a woman with a baby, a man riding a bike, and a woman who works at the same bank as Lola's father—are pictured clearly in the hazy introductory sequence, indicating their importance to the game as a whole.

When Lola runs into them, their future life is depicted in a series of flash-forward Polaroid snapshots. In the first scenario, the woman with the baby loses her child to CPS and proceeds to then steal another child. The man on the bike meets a young woman and they get married. The woman at the bank is in a horrific car accident, reducing her to a

paraplegic state. She commits suicide by cutting her wrists. However, in the second story, their stories are drastically different. The woman with the baby wins the lottery, the man on the bike is beaten for stealing it and appears to be dead in a public restroom, and the woman at the bank carries on a sadistic and masochistic sexual relationship with a teller at the bank before settling down with him.

While the photographs could be important for the purpose of character development, these characters are minor and do not advance the story in any particular way (the exception being the man on the bike in the third scenario). Rather, these side snapshots provide the audience with the critical information that the fabric of the game has been fundamentally altered. The few seconds' difference in Lola's starting time may seem insignificant at first, but they are shown to be vitally important in the unfolding of the plot. The snapshots provide a point of reference by which to determine exactly how that game has changed and, furthermore, give a better understanding of how Lola's and Manni's fates may be altered so entirely by the difference of a few seconds.

Superpowers

In most video games, different avatars come with specialized abilities. Lola's most obvious ability is her speed and her endurance, since much of the level involves moving throughout Berlin rapidly and with determination. After she is tripped in the beginning of the second sequence, she is still able to set a good pace as she runs through the streets of the city. Most video game avatars have an unusual skill that none of the others possess. In Lola's case, her skill is her ear-splitting scream. She uses it in two cases when she is frustrated and in a third when she is desperately trying to manipulate

something. Glass shatters, and whoever is near her is shocked into silence. Lola's last superpower is her ability to think quickly. Despite a great amount of pressure, Lola stays calm and contemplates solutions for Manni's and her situation.

The Final Test

At the end of every video game level, there is a final task or battle that the gamer must win in order to proceed with the game. The final task puts to use the knowledge and skills that the player has acquired throughout the course of the level. In *Lola rennt*, Lola must win the roulette game at the casino. The danger of the final test is indicated by the color red at the entrance of the casino; throughout the film, the color red has indicated disaster for Lola and her mission. Coloring also plays a factor in the bet: Lola bets on a black number rather than a red number. It is the gamer's responsibility to recognize the significance of colors and to choose black, the color that indicates finality and success for Lola, rather than red, which has led only to death and failure.

After winning the first bet, it is a risky decision on the part of the player to bet on the same number of the previous bet. It is at this moment that one of Lola's superpowers, her scream, is instrumental in winning the second bet. In a moment of uncertain tension, Lola emits the shrillest and most powerful scream of the film, shattering glass and arresting the attention of her fellow players. By drawing upon his knowledge of color symbolism and Lola's talents, the gamer is successful in winning the bet to complete his mission.

CHAPTER TWO

Time, Color, and Female Representation in *Lola rennt*

Lola rennt is a film rich with symbolism, particularly in Lola's character as a representative female hero in film. In this chapter, I will examine the elements of time and color and connect them to female representation in the narrative. The section on feminism and its ties to male and female relationships will discuss how Lola relates to three specific male characters in the film: Manni, her father, and the bank guard, and how Lola's character develops differently in the three different sequences. In the first, she takes a passive approach to the three men, allowing her father to throw her out of the bank and Manni to persuade her to participate in a robbery. In the second, she is decidedly more aggressive toward men in her actions, holding her father and the bank guard at gunpoint in order to get the money she needs. In the third sequence, she is able to balance the masculine and feminine aspects of her character, as both she and Manni work separately to obtain the necessary amount of money. This balance is also demonstrated through Lola's balance of activity and receptiveness in the third scenario. She is receptive to the option of entering the casino, led by *Schicksal*,¹⁰ and she actively advocates for herself to stay and finish the roulette game.

Colors are used throughout the film to draw the viewers' attention to certain aspects of the story. The film doesn't overflow with color, as the streets that Lola runs down are generally grey, and nondescript, heavy with the naturalism common in

¹⁰ German word meaning fate or destiny. *Schicksal* is discussed in Chapter Three.

cityscape. Most of the characters wear tones of black, grey, and white. The inside of the bank is patterned in variations of black and white. These dull locations are in sharp contrast to the red used in the film. Lola's hair is a bright, unnatural red—a defiant assertion of her outsider position in society. Lola's room is bright with color: the phone is red, and multiple knickknacks and photographs on the wall are brightly colored. The red light during the interludes, or reset periods, signifies a stopping and restarting of the narrative. During the first two scenarios, the color red is present when something goes wrong. The sign over the supermarket that Manni robs in the first sequence is red, and the ambulance that runs over him in the second scenario is also red. When she enters the casino, Lola is guided by a red carpet; however, once inside, the casino is decorated only in shades of white and black. Because the entrance has a red carpet, a color that has been up to this point a signal of disaster for Lola's mission, it is potentially dangerous for Lola to enter the casino. It may seem surprising that during the last scenario, while betting at the casino, Lola bets on a black number rather than a red at the roulette wheel. It is this black number that affords her success. The red symbolizes the problems or difficulties in Lola's life. Throughout the film, the color is present whenever there is an accident or a death. In the end, the focus in color is altered from red to black.

The red in the interludes shows a time of transition, rather than one of finality. As Manni and Lola lie in bed, they are bathed in red light. In the first interlude, Lola voices her concern whether Manni would be happy without her, asking him how he knows that she is the best girl out of all the others. In the scene directly before, she was shot, and now seems to be deciding whether to live or die, based on Manni's responses and how she thinks he will live if she dies. The same type of situation occurs for Manni in the

second interlude, after he has been run over by an ambulance. He seems convinced that Lola would be as happy with another man as she has been with him if he were to die, until Lola gently reminds him, “You’re not dead yet.” In both of these cases, the characters are in periods of transition. Red does not signal an end to their situation. At the end of the film, a camera whirrs, as if to take another series of Polaroid shots. However, rather than presenting a continuation of their story, the screen goes black, showing that this part of Lola and Manni’s story has indeed been completed.

Tykwer also uses color in clothing to draw attention to certain characters. Lola, for example, is the only main character that wears lightly colored clothing: a light blue shirt and light green pants. All of the side characters involved in the flash-forwards wear colored clothing. The woman pushing the baby carriage is wearing a pink shirt. The man on the bicycle is wearing a red jersey. The woman who works at the bank wears a black dress patterned with brightly colored flowers, and in her first flash-forward photograph, she is wearing a red shirt when she is paralyzed in a car accident. The bank teller whom Lola holds at gunpoint while robbing the bank wears a red vest. By contrasting these types of clothing with the clothing of other characters, which is dominantly monochromatic, Tykwer lets his audience know that these particular characters hold a key to understanding the role of color in the film.

Tykwer uses clocks to convey the urgency of Lola’s errand. She has only twenty minutes to obtain 100,000 German marks, and there is a constant tension provided by well-placed temporal reminders. Clocks represent the constraints in the film. At the beginning of *Lola rennt*, the screen is devoured by a mouth on a large clock. The audience then sees cartoon-Lola running through a tunnel, dodging pendulums and

breaking clocks. It is as if she is attempting to physically defeat time. During the film, Lola's greatest disadvantage is time, rather than the large amount of money to be obtained. Clocks are everywhere throughout the film: Lola's room, outside the Bolle, which is a convenience store, in the bank, and in the casino. Therefore, the clock—and by association time—is Lola and Manni's real enemy.

When the screen is consumed by the clock figure, there is no defense against it, and it becomes the arbiter of the film. In the opening credits, Lola tries to fight against time, breaking glass clock faces and dodging pendulums. However, simply by avoiding the pendulums, Lola's actions are influenced by the clock. Although she moves to escape the effects of time, time itself dictates how and where she moves. Her attempts to escape the control of time lead to being manipulated by it.

The same sort of scene occurs during the second sequence in her father's office. In her frustration, Lola screams and shatters the glass clock in his office. Yet the destruction of the physical clock does not free her from ongoing temporal effects—time is authoritative and continues to pass, and Lola is helpless to stop it. In the first sequence, directly after speaking to Manni, a turtle moves slowly across the floor as if to signify Lola's wish that time might temporarily slow down. The presence and slowness of the turtle suggest Lola's physical limitations to surpass time. However, despite the fact that it moves slowly, the turtle is a symbol of something that always arrives at its destination. Therefore, Lola must work with time in order to eventually arrive at her destination, even if it means running without direction or taking longer in the casino to achieve her objective. However, at this early point in the film, Lola tries to beat time by running as quickly as possible. Throughout each of the sequences, she runs in the belief that running

will help her defeat time, but time moves on without being influenced by Lola's actions. It is only in the third sequence that she succeeds. By working with time rather than fighting against it. Before the third sequence, she focuses on the immediacy of finishing the task. In the last sequence, she pleads as she runs: "Come on. Help me. Please. Just this once. I'll keep on running, okay? I'm waiting." Rather than requiring an immediate answer to her problems, she demonstrates a willingness to wait for the answer to come to her.

Tykwer uses stereotype reversals to examine male and female roles in the film. In this film, most characters can be stereotyped a certain way; however, all the main characters are distinguished by breaking or resisting these stereotypes. Lola is, by her looks alone, not a typical female. Her own father refers to her as a "weirdo." Her hair and her clothes stereotype her as someone who has little regard for societal norms. Although she appears to be in a stable relationship, she is not in school, as most of her peers are likely to be. She lives at home and does not support herself financially. Even though these attributes are ordinarily viewed as negative by society, Lola proves herself to be loyal, reliable, and resourceful. She takes it upon herself to resolve Manni's plight by employing every resource at her disposal to ensure a favorable outcome. She promises to get a job if her father will only help her raise the money for Manni. Indeed, despite her looks, she comes across as a capable, (usually) composed young woman.

Manni, on the other hand, seems to move in the opposite direction. A participant in small-time mob operations, Manni perceives his boss, Ronnie, to be a ruthless, cruel man who suspects everyone of double-crossing him. Manni's position in the mob might

indicate a resourceful, competent individual. In reality, Manni panics at the first sign of trouble and needs his girlfriend to save him.

Perhaps the most fascinating use of stereotypes in the film concerns the bank employees. Compared to Lola, Manni, and Manni's colleagues, the employees are visibly clean cut: no tattoos, no dyed hair, no brightly colored or unprofessional clothing. On the outside, they seem to be the most respectable characters in the movie. Lola's father, an executive at the bank, claims to work long hours. In the third sequence, when he leaves the bank, he greets several employees by name on the way out. He is presented as an affable, yet professional man who is good at his job. However, mere seconds after he is introduced, viewers learn that he is having an affair with Jutta Hansen, who is on the board of directors. In the first sequence, Jutta also reveals that she is pregnant. Lola's father tells Lola that he is leaving her and his wife, and his seemingly perfect image is immediately stripped away. He cruelly tells Lola that she is not his child, indicting her mother.

In the second sequence, the audience is given more information, namely that Jutta is pregnant with another man's child. The adulteress is cheating on the adulterer. Despite their financial and occupational security, their character leaves them no moral high ground for judging Lola's character. Lola does not hide behind appearances: despite her educational shortcomings and her unorthodox looks, she never tries to be anyone other than herself. Indeed, her vulnerability and honesty in the first sequence leaves her prey to her father's scathing remarks, however hypocritical they might be.

Finally, through a flash-forward sequence, the audience is given a glimpse into a possible future relationship of two other bank employees. On the outside, the two are

models of professionalism. The man's uniform is perfect, his hair neatly combed. When Lola robs the bank in the second sequence, the man carefully and efficiently gathers the money together at his boss's request. The woman wears a modest dress and tries to calmly intervene during the bank robbery. However, in a flash-forward of the woman, the two are shown to be involved in a sadistic and masochistic sexual relationship. This relationship further draws into question the appearances of the bank employees. This flash-forward compares to Lola's father and Jutta, who are also not what they seem. The audience only comes to know four employees, and all four have secrets beneath a respectable exterior. Their behavior demonstrates that character cannot be measured by outward appearance alone.

By calling into question these traditional stereotypes, Tykwer offers his characters a chance to escape what is expected of them, which sounds like a desirable end. For example, during the beginning credits, each character is shown in what appears to be a series of mug shots with his or her name stamped onto their photograph. As each name is placed, it sounds like a jail cell door being shut. It seems at first as if these characters are trapped in the lives that have been set out for them, an idea that is also suggested by the photo flash-forwards. However, Tykwer gives all of them the opportunity to move past their stereotypes, as suggested by Lola's multiple attempts to get the money needed to save Manni. Breaking the stereotypes is a way to escape their perceived fates. Some, such as Jutta and Lola's father, move in a negative direction. Lola, on the other hand, tries to better Manni's and her situation, rather than accepting the fate that has been given to them. Her determination is evident from the multiple attempts to obtain the money and save both Manni's and her lives.

These opposing stereotypes among the main characters and the bank employees allow Tykwer to point out that the characters are not always what they appear. At first glance, the bank workers appear to be the ones that are reliable and moral. In reality, Manni and Lola work through their situation and, in the end, possess a great deal of money, allowing them to move forward in their future together. Tykwer's Lola could have been created to be society's standard of beautiful and successful, with average hair and average clothes. However, the contrast to the bank workers would not have been as strong. By focusing on the reversal of stereotypes, Tykwer causes the audience to examine the contrasts in appearance and moral values of the characters.

In the first sequence, Lola adopts a passive attitude. In key situations throughout the first sequence, she submits to the will of men, notably Manni and her father. She begs her father for money, and he not only refuses and humiliates her, but completely rejects her as a daughter. Lola weeps and meekly allows herself to be escorted out of the building. Despite Lola's attempts to secure the money, Manni is the one who ultimately decides their course of action by beginning his robbery of the Bolle grocery store without her. She stands outside the window and asks, "Can't we just get out of here?"—but Manni ignores her plea and continues the robbery with her reluctant help. As their escape is thwarted, Manni is the one who throws the bag of money, distracting one of the policemen, and causing him to accidentally shoot Lola in the chest. As Lola lies dying, the scene shifts to the first interlude, in which Manni takes the dominant role. Lola asks questions about their relationship, and Manni is the one who gives definitive answers.

In the second sequence, through, Lola takes an active role in her fate. Directly after the first interlude, Lola assumes control with one word: "Stop." The cartoon

preamble is a small reminder of what she endured in the first sequence—a boy on the stairs trips her at the beginning of the second sequence. Despite this, she gets up and keeps going, reaffirmed in her decision to take a more aggressive approach. When she bursts into her father's office in the second sequence, she breaks decorum and confronts the affair by asking: "Who's that slut?!" Her father slaps her, but rather than crying and accepting his abuse, she begins throwing large decorations from his office at him. When her father refuses her the money and she is on her way out, she steals the bank guard's gun and holds up the bank. To the guard's warning of "You don't want to hurt anyone do you?" Lola responds, "I don't know." In the first sequence, Lola had meekly done what others wanted, even if she initially expressed a desire to do something else. Here, even though she is expressing doubt, Lola has become the aggressor willing to do whatever it takes to get the money she needs.

The second sequence also humiliates the male characters. Lola's father finds out that his mistress has been unfaithful, and Lola steals a gun easily from the security guard. She escapes solely because she is a young female and is not suspected by the SWAT team sent to the bank. Manni is run over in the middle of the street by an ambulance driver, who refused Lola a ride only moments earlier. Lola's aggressive behavior fails to help her save Manni, but her actions dictate a change in traditional gender roles. The men in this sequence are easily bested. Because Manni dies before she can reach him, Lola loses control as well, and the sequence ends badly.

In the third sequence, Lola succeeds because she and Manni both actively pursue a solution to the problem. In the other two sequences, Manni called friends for favors, but for the most part he waited for Lola to solve the problem. This time around, by working

through the problem in their respective ways, the two are able to get the money needed. Indeed, Lola willingly surrenders control to *Schicksal*, rather than meekly submitting to her father or Manni or trying to keep control of multiple events. Her surrender is not a sign of hopelessness; rather, she actively allows a higher power to guide her. It is by this compromise that Lola is guided by *Schicksal*, or a higher power, winning the money needed to save Manni at a casino. She does not forsake her femininity, but she is not helpless either. Ultimately, as Heidi Schlipphacke has argued, “Tykwer’s heroines represent simultaneously feminine types and the transcendence of these types.”¹¹ Lola is able to save Manni, but not in such a way that reverses their gender roles or takes power away from Manni. Both emerge successful.

Lola is a young woman who has been drawn into the traditional male role of protector and savior. However, despite being forced to take on a masculine role, she is motivated by selfless love rather than glory or riches. This motivation allows her to maintain her female role and characteristics while performing a more masculine savior role. As I have shown, Lola’s relationship with the three main male characters in the film—Manni, her father, and the bank guard—creates the framework of her growth as a character.

Lola and Manni, at this point in the film, have been together for over a year. Manni trusts Lola, since he has partly involved her in his jobs for Ronnie. In the initial phone conversation, Manni stresses that Lola is a reliable person who is normally on time for important meetings. Despite his dependence on her for certain things, they seem to

¹¹ Heidi Schlipphacke. *Nostalgia After Nazism: History, Home, and Affect in German and Austrian Literature and Film* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell City Press, 2010), 140.

have a healthy relationship. The interludes focus directly on their relationship. In the first interlude, as Lola questions the strength of their relationship, Manni has his arm around her and smokes. In the second, their roles are reversed. Manni is the one to worry about how much Lola loves him, while she puts her arm around him and smokes. Nevertheless, neither one of these interludes, with Lola and Manni acting in distinctive dominant and submissive roles, plays out well in the shift to the sequences. Indeed, for the first two sequences, it is almost as if the two were working against each other: in the first sequence, Manni pressures Lola by telling her that he will rob the Bolle if she does not arrive by a certain time, and Lola tries to solve their predicament on her own in the second sequence. In the second sequence, Lola is an overpowering force and attempts to succeed alone for a second time. It is only during the last sequence, when both of them move toward a solution for their predicament, that their relationship is able to show its true strength. It is the motivation of love rather than material gain that makes their relationship a strong one.

Lola maintains a distant relationship with her father, as is shown from the very first time they interact in the film. He implies that the only reason Lola has come to him is to make a request. Because of his affair, he has also been distancing himself from Lola and his wife, making him a father by name only, instead of a father in practice. He callously reveals to Lola in the first sequence that she is not his real daughter and that he feels no obligation to her. He orders her removal from the bank. In the second sequence, the conversation is not repeated, but Lola does catch him arguing with Jutta. After her father refuses her the money, Lola holds him at gunpoint, which indicates the deterioration of their familial relationship. This time, the relationship is terminated on her

terms rather than his. Both sequences contain a forcible ending to Lola's relationship with her father. In the final sequence, Lola does not arrive at the bank in time to engage with her father, and he departs. Their relationship is left unresolved, although it is implied that he dies in a car accident. Their relationship revolves around money and a sense of duty rather than love.

Finally, Tykwer presents viewers with the character of the bank guard at the beginning of the film, signifying his importance. When Lola encounters him at the bank in the first sequence, it is clear that they are familiar with one another: "Our little princess, Lola! What a rare pleasure." He shows sympathy as he escorts her out of bank a short time later, having witnessed the end of the altercation between Lola and her father. In the second sequence, he offers patronizing advice after her father tells her to go: "It's not your day today. Doesn't matter. You can't have everything." Lola responds by stealing his gun, placing herself in the dominant position. It is only in the last sequence that their relationship becomes clear, according to Robert K. Johnston: "Lola yells, 'Daddy, Daddy' as her father drives away, and the bank guard opens the door and says, 'You've come at last, dear.' ... The security guard is her real father."¹² Compared to his interactions with Lola in the first two sequences, the guard shows more seriousness in this dialogue. He is truly focused on Lola. Lola's initial rejection by and of her supposed father sets up the revelation of her biological father. Despite this realization, however, Lola continues running, which could be viewed as her rejection of this fact. Lola climbs into the ambulance with her casino winnings and finds an EMT administering CPR to

¹²Robert K. Johnston. *Useless Beauty: Ecclesiastes through the Lens of Contemporary Film* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 100.

him. Lola looks at him with recognition and says, “Ich gehöre zu ihm.”¹³ At this acceptance, the guard’s heart rate slows and the EMT relaxes. This is an example that exemplifies her feminine characteristics of—love and nurturing—while fulfilling her role of savior, which is a more masculine role in the film. In the end, Lola accepts the security guard as her father because of love.

¹³ “I belong to him.”

CHAPTER THREE

Lola as a Postmodern Figure

In the following, I analyze the themes of the film with respect to central character development, character relationships, and postmodernism as it concerns the history of Germany. “As postmodern theory claims, every discourse and every sign conceals a trace of another sign, another discourse.”¹⁴ Different aspects of the film point to different facets of German history. Therefore, postmodernism in the film provides the scaffolding for the examination of postmodern questions in recent German history.

First, it is important to understand how Tykwer develops Lola’s physical appearance, choices, and moral character throughout the film. Lola is not a stereotypical female hero, and the entire film is centered on Lola and the results of her choices. Her every decision dictates the outcome of each scenario. While her father’s choices and Manni’s choices also affect the outcomes, Lola’s decision to restart the mission grants her the most control over the outcome.

Second, by studying Lola’s motives and actions, I will compare and contrast her relationships throughout the film, particularly with Manni and with her father. Lola’s role in these relationships is an example of postmodern feminism within the framework of German film.

¹⁴ Grant P. McAllister “Romantic Imagery in Tykwer’s *Lola rennt*,” (*German Studies Review* 30.2, 2007), 331.

Third, I will examine the way the film attempts to move Lola, and symbolically Germany, forward. In each sequence, Lola learns to navigate obstacles in order to achieve a satisfying end. She learns to manipulate her way through the obstacles and learns from her mistakes in previous scenarios. For example, in the second scenario, she calls to Manni sooner than she did in the first, preventing him from robbing the Bolle. She changes her behavior toward certain characters in different scenarios, acting passively in one and aggressively in another.

Finally, I theorize Lola's role in the film vis-à-vis reunified Germany, for a postmodern analysis. By examining the motivation and factors in Lola's actions, I argue that reflections of postmodern Germany indicate potential effects in Germany's future. Then it will be possible to see how Germany, within the framework presented through the film, will move forward as it continues to develop after the fall of the wall and how past memory affects the development of Germany's future.

Character

Lola is an unconventional lead in the film, as she stands out from the other characters. When the audience first sees her, she appears to be one who has deviated from societal norms. Her hair is dyed an unnatural red, her clothing is masculine, and she sports odd tattoos. She is the physical representation of a rebel in society and, even in youth culture, her appearance is striking. She does not take spend a lot of time on her appearance and she is not society's definition of beautiful. Indeed, some audience members might go so far as to as to believe that she is an odd young woman who contributes nothing to society. It appears that Lola lives at home and does not attend

school. Her first conversation with her father confirms that she has no job. This implies a certain lack of responsibility and self-motivation.

When Manni calls, Lola assumes the role of the logical, responsible one in the relationship. Despite the overwhelming task of obtaining 100,000 Deutsch marks in twenty minutes, Lola rapidly thinks clearly through Manni's, and by extension her, options. Her capability is further suggested when Lola's mother is introduced as a bathrobe-clad figure drinking and watching television in the middle of the day, who asks Lola to pick up a few things for her while she is out. In the first five minutes of the film, then, Lola's role as caretaker is cemented in two of her central relationships. Both Manni and her mother are reactive, while Lola is proactive. Therefore, the audience's initial impression of Lola, based on her appearance, is already proven wrong. Although she does live at home, Lola appears to be the only thing keeping the family together—a fragile structure that does not survive the film.

Lola continues to disclose herself as the film introduces her father. In addition to his involvement in an ongoing affair, he claims that he is not really Lola's father at all. While he cannot be blamed for the truth of Lola's parentage, his vindictive manner shows him to be childish and resentful. He had at least fulfilled the father role in her life, making this untimely announcement even more cruel. As the audience learns more about her family dynamic, more sympathy toward Lola is possible: Lola's outsider position in society is the product of her outcast status in a dysfunctional home. Ultimately, her odd appearance is the result of her attempt to create and understand her own identity, as she is unable to find one at home. Her mother's distraction by alcohol and her social life and her father's absence from the home, as he devotes his time to his mistress and work, is a

stark contrast to Lola's willingness to sacrifice for others. Therefore, her father appears to be a selfish and insensitive man, and her mother equally so. At this moment of her father's rejection, Lola is transformed in the eyes of the audience from a countercultural young woman into a figure with whom the audience can sympathize.

Lola's divergent path from mainstream society leads her to attempt changing her position in the world without fully participating in it, specifically through material gain. Heidi Schlipphacke, who has studied Lola as a postmodern character, states, "Lola is able to manipulate the world to achieve her ends, her desires are anti-capitalist."¹⁵ Lola manipulates her world in two different ways: she screams to command attention three times and her choices in the interludes allow her three chances to save Manni. The first time Lola screams, Manni is panicking about his situation. As he speaks faster and more frantically, Lola tries to get his attention but is only able to do so by a prolonged, ear-splitting scream of "Shut up!" into the phone. This scream seems to stem from frustration, but it succeeds in getting Manni's attention. He quiets, allowing Lola to speak calmly to him. Further, the scream has a pitch that shatters several vases in Lola's room, making it seem otherworldly.

Relationships

The second time she screams, Lola is standing in her father's office, begging for him to give her money to help Manni. Her father makes clear this lack of interest in Lola's life or her problems and in her Manni, despite the fact that Lola and Manni have been together for over a year. He is clearly disengaged from Lola's life. This

¹⁵ Schlipphacke, *Nostalgia After Nazism*, 138.

estrangement from his family hinges on his distractions, but the tension he feels from his family is at a breaking point. It is at this point, still in the first scenario, that Lola screams again. This scream shatters a large, modern glass clock hanging on the wall in her father's office. However, this scream's trigger is markedly different from the first—more desperate than frustrated. She is trying to convey the urgency of her errand while simultaneously drawing him back from the distraction of his mistress. The despair heard in her scream stems from her hurt and anger at her father's betrayal of his family. But she fails to convince her father of the seriousness of her plight, and instead of giving her the money she needs, escorts her coldly out of the building. His physical removal of Lola from the bank is a representation of his inner desire to forcibly rend her from his life. Lola is nothing to him, and he has no obligations to her.

In the third scenario, the last scream is by far the most bizarre of the three. Lola barely misses seeing her father at the bank, and is therefore unable to ask him for money or confront him. At this point, she has little time and is out of options. Since she has nothing left to run to, she determines to run until something comes to her. As she runs, she prays, "Come one. Help me. Please. Just this once. I'll just keep running, okay? I'm waiting." She continues to run aimlessly through the city until she is almost hit by a large truck. The driver asks her if she is trying to get killed, and at that exact moment, *Schicksal* presents a casino to her, where she is allowed to enter a high risk bet despite her disheveled appearance and being just short of the 100 German Mark minimum. She wins her first bet at the roulette wheel, and while being escorted out asks to be allowed to play once more: simply, "please." Whether because of her desperate state or curiosity, Lola is allowed one more bet. As the roulette wheel, a symbol of fate and chance, spins,

Lola screams the loudest and most prolonged of the three screams, shattering glass throughout the casino. The people in the casino grimace and cover their ears, as *Schicksal*, the German word for fate or fortune, yields to Lola and she wins enough money to save Manni's life. Although the screams in the first two scenarios help Lola express her frustration and anger, the scream in the third scenario is the only scream that directly aids her mission. The third scream is a demonstration of her growing power to manipulate her situations.

Lola's second method of manipulating her world is her ability to start over each time she fails in her mission. As discussed in the game theory chapter, each failure has a "reset" period before starting the "level" again. At the end of the first scenario, when she has been shot, Lola simply says, "Stop." When Manni is accidentally run over and killed by the ambulance at the end of the second scenario, Lola tells him that it is not over. Her love for Manni prevents her from seeing any outcome but the one in which they both survive, allowing her to bend the rules of time and mortality. Because of the direction of the conversations in the interlude, the level "restarts" twice, until she succeeds—by a combination of *Schicksal* and *Zufall*, the German word for chance or coincidence, in the third scenario, rather than manipulating people in the first and second scenarios. In the first two scenarios, Lola thinks she is able to control the way she obtained the money: she aided Manni in completing a robbery in the first scenario and improvised a bank heist in the second. The action is active rather than passive. However, in the third scenario, she wins money in a casino by no means but *Schicksal*. It is also by pure coincidence, *Zufall*, that Manni crosses paths with the beggar who found the money bag in the first place, and is able to retrieve it from him. In the first two scenarios, Lola crosses paths with the

beggar, without realizing that he is the one she should be seeking. The third scenario is the most unlikely *Zufall*, or *Schicksal*, but it is the only one of the three in which Lola is allowed to succeed.

Although Lola is able to manipulate her world somewhat, she never does so for the sake of money. Rather, it is always out of a desire she feels to save Manni's life. Capitalism is something that is done for a profit of money; Lola, however, makes it clear throughout the film that she is not interested in any profit either from this venture or from material wealth in her everyday life. Lola lives with her parents. Her father tells her to get a job, and she desperately promises to get one in order to secure an immediate gift of money. She is only interested in the money because it provides a way to save Manni's life. Her lack of job also indicates that she is not interested in social mobility. This is also reflected in her appearance, through her unkempt hair and cast-off, ill-fitting clothes. It is when Lola is at the bank where her father works that she is the most out of place. Her appearance is contrasted with the clean lines and well-maintained business suits of the bank's employees.

Lola is driven by desperation and her love for Manni rather than by any material gain when obtaining money in the casino. She enters the casino in the first place only because she is out of options. In reality, she does not even choose to go to the casino; rather, she is "shown" the way. Once she meets Manni after he has returned the money to his boss, she completely forgets about the money she is holding, interested only in his safety. This reinforces the theme of Lola's general lack of interest in wealth that occurs throughout the film: she is not fixated on money for money's sake. In addition, Lola is

not interested in ill-gotten money, despite Manni's choices. And although she has no job, she does not choose to join him in his criminal endeavors.

Schlipphacke suggests that Lola is "motivated not by the lure of wealth and social mobility but rather by love."¹⁶ As her story develops, it becomes apparent that Lola's life choices are not the usual path expected of a young person: she lives at home and it is not clear whether or not she has attended university. Manni contradicts Lola's outward appearance of irresponsibility by saying at the beginning of the film that Lola is the responsible one—that she is always on time. Manni, on the other hand, has chosen to work for a criminal, most likely in the hopes of making quick and easy money. Despite Manni's chosen path, all Lola cares about throughout the film is saving Manni's life. This is sharply contrasted by her parents' apathy: her mother does not seem to care about anyone except herself and her father is also only concerned for himself and how Lola reflects on him. Both have distanced themselves from Lola's life, and neither one are worried that Manni might lose his life over his mistake. Lola, on the other hand, demonstrates her devotion to Manni repeatedly throughout the ordeal. Rather than admonishing Manni for being involved with criminals and telling him to take responsibility for his actions, Lola immediately begins trying to find a solution to the problem because she loves him.

Lola demonstrates her love for Manni by placing herself in dangerous situations in order to save him. She is not involved at all in his dealings with his boss; therefore, her life is not in danger. However, she was going to pick him up after he received the money, directly choosing to involve herself in something illegal. During the film she places

¹⁶ Schlipphacke, *Nostalgia After Nazism*, 139.

herself in two compromising situations: a store robbery that ends with running from the police in the first scenario, and holding up the bank in the second scenario. Indeed, Lola's willingness to do anything to save Manni ends in one instance with her getting shot and killed. In addition to these physical perils, Lola is also willing to be vulnerable to save Manni. She humbles herself as she begs her father for money, subjecting herself to ridicule. When he does not give her the money and insensitively tells her the truth about her parentage in the first scenario, Lola remains focused on Manni and finding a solution rather than on her personal hurt. As a result of her focus, she continues trying to save him, even when she successfully obtains the money in the second scenario. In scenario three, when it is evident that Manni is safe and the money she won is no longer needed, her focus remains on Manni. It is only after he asks what she has in the bag that she seems to remember the money from the casino at all.

Lastly, Lola shows her value of love during the first interlude with Manni, which occurs after she has been shot accidentally at the end of the first scenario. She wants to know why he loves her more than any other girl, and whether or not he will continue to do so. He asserts that she is the best girl in the world, but Lola is not easily persuaded. She is convinced that she could be any other girl and that Manni would love that girl just as much as he loves Lola. Perhaps Lola is trying to convince herself that Manni would be able to move on if she died—that he would find another girl to love as much, if not more, than he loved Lola. This idea demonstrates Lola's desire to have what is best for Manni, even at the greatest cost to herself. After much discussion, Manni asks Lola, "Are you leaving me?" She responds, "I don't know. I think I have a decision to make." This is a particularly important moment because it is after she has been shot, but it is before she

says “stop” to restart the level. In the end, she cannot separate herself from Manni physically even as she cannot untangle herself from him emotionally. His affirmation of love for her is what persuades her to continue.

Lola as Germany and Germany as Lola

It is possible to see connections between the Lola’s journey through the film and Germany’s history. There are four distinct realities of German history that can be seen through the lens of the film: reunification, lack of geographical landmarks, the search for the least objectionable ending, and past memory. Lola’s experiences provide a technique for retrospection that may be applied to post-unification Germany.

Lola lives in a recently unified Germany. Based on Lola’s age in the film and the film’s production in 1998, Lola was about ten years old when the Berlin Wall fell and the eastern and western halves of Germany were thrust back together. Lola spent her formative years living in a divided city, as reflected in her broken home. Because of her parents’ strained marriage and the divided nature of the city, Lola’s formative years were made up of pieces; there was nothing whole. Her identity is similarly fragmented, reflecting what she knew. This fragmented identity manifests itself through her complex character. She seems to be a rebel, yet when she is in trouble, she runs to her father for help. She is not interested in monetary gain or social status, but she is driven by love to secure Manni’s safety. Her relationship with Manni is clearly her most central relationship, but it is obvious through the course of the film that Lola bears the majority of the responsibility in their relationship. While most people may be easily placed in a category—businessman, artist, athlete, professor—Lola is not so easy to stereotype.

As Lola attempts to master her own identity in the film's context, Germany tries to build its unified identity after being divided for almost half a century. East and West have difficulty reconciling, because each half has developed its own cultural styles, societal norms, political parties and beliefs, and even food preferences¹⁷. This cultural diversity is not bad for Germany; indeed, a wide variety adds to the unique culture of the country. However, the same diversity often draws distinctions between and among sections of Germany, making it difficult to integrate the country as a whole. While Germany is supposedly now a unified whole, it becomes apparent that it is more like a dish that was broken and clumsily glued back together; it is now one, but the distinctions are fragmented pieces obvious to those looking at the whole picture. Few would argue that reunification was a bad thing, but that does not make it simple. Germany's unified identity can be examined with the same fragmented lens that represents Lola's life. Germany's struggles to reunify itself in the post-Cold War era are reflected in Lola's attempt to find her true identity.

Lola's running in the film dramatizes a metaphorical attempt to reunite the city of Berlin. The film takes place all over Berlin. With long sequences of Lola simply running through the streets and alleys, unless one is quite familiar with Berlin, it is impossible to locate Lola geographically. The sections of the city filmed are indistinct—business districts that could belong to any city—and none of the obvious, distinguishing

¹⁷ Rennefanz, Sabine. "East Germans are still different." (*The Guardian*. 30 September 2010), 1.

landmarks of Berlin are to be found.¹⁸ Only upon closer examination does Berlin become identifiable, and even then it quickly becomes apparent that Lola's path is not linear: the running sequences, stitched seamlessly together, jump back and forth from one side of Berlin to the other.¹⁹ This is an effort to push the reunified halves of the city together, making one indistinguishable from the other. As Lola runs from home to Manni, the city is melded together and geographically reconciled, diminishing the physical divides in Germany, particularly the Berlin Wall as a physical separation of the east from the west. In 1989, the Berlin Wall was dismantled, losing its physical role; however, physical characteristics continue to divide Berlin, particularly those pertaining to architecture. In Berlin, it was initially easy to distinguish the crossing from east into west simply by changes in the appearances and upkeep of buildings. Although the contrast is waning every year, a mental boundary remains. Even though the wall has been gone for nearly two decades, it still exists in the minds of the people who were shaped by it. Years may go by, but the knowledge of the wall's presence will continue to cause people to distinguish between the two halves. However, Tykwer's subtlety in stitching the two halves together temporarily erases this mental wall. By filming indistinct sections of both halves of the city, Tykwer can manipulate the film into making the journey appear seamless when, in reality, it is a synthesis of fragmented parts. The success of this synthesis gives hope for a lessening of the differences.

Another aspect of German history reflected in the film is the concept of searching for the best ending. Through the three scenarios, it becomes evident that Lola is

¹⁸ Although I have been in Berlin, when I first saw the film, I knew the location was Germany but I had no idea which city was the backdrop.

unconsciously searching for the least objectionable ending, one in which both she and Manni survive—what is for her the best and only option. However, A. Robert Lauer points out that in each scenario, someone other than Lola and Manni must die. In the first scenario, through the flash-forward photographs, the audience sees the female bank worker get into a car wreck and then commit suicide. In the second, the man on the bike becomes homeless and dies either from exposure or through suicide. In the last sequence, Herr Meyer and Lola's father are killed in a car accident. Lauer's point is that there is no perfect world in which Lola and Manni can live. There can be no true happy ending: in the end, some sacrifice has to be made. It is obvious that were Lola's decisions to trigger a fourth scenario, someone would die in that sequence as well. The world is not perfect, and no matter how many revisions Lola may make, the ripple effect of her choices will result in the unplanned. Therefore, the third ending is her best and only option. By weighing the options and consequences related to Lola's choices, one may arrive at the least objectionable option.

The same principle applied in the film relates to Germany as a country: it is possible for the government and the people to choose the option that will cause the least amount of pain. Germany endured the shame and aftermath of the Holocaust and the forced division of the country, and the choices made afterward are perhaps more significant than the choices that led to Germany's internal destruction. For example, Chancellor Adenauer, who was elected after the end of World War II, chose to focus on rebuilding Germany as an economic power rather than a military power. As a result, Germany is today one of the economic powers in Europe. Rather than focusing on the division of the country and the destruction of the war, Adenauer channeled the country's

resources and succeeded in creating a better Germany, providing economic stability during the merging of the two Germanys after the Cold War. Germany's least objectionable option, in order to reach the maximum potential of its future as a country, is to acknowledge the past, or "past memory," and learn from the experience, while moving forward from the past.

The concept of past memory is present in *Lola Rennt*, as well as in Germany's history. Past memory urges progress by learning from past mistakes. In her article, Heidi Schlipphacke states, "...the most important thing is that the viewer feels that Lola really has lived through the various possibilities we show in the film. ... In this sense, Lola learns and changes in the film."²⁰ On multiple occasions, Lola demonstrates knowledge acquired in a previous sequence, or a "past memory." Thus, Lola's "memory" from previous attempts is representative of her country learning from past mistakes. In the first scenario, Lola has never fired a gun before. During the store robbery, Lola has to ask Manni how to release the safety in order to fire the weapon. However, during the bank heist in the second scenario, Lola steals the bank guard's gun and, when her father challenges her ability to use it, responds by removing the safety and firing a shot into the wall. Lola carries the knowledge gained in the first scenario in to the second. She has learned and adapted.

This past memory is also shown in the differences between Lola's conversations with her father. In the first scenario, Lola is civil to Jutta Hansen, her father's mistress, despite catching the two of them in a compromising situation. Jutta quickly introduces and abruptly excuses herself from the office. Lola asks what her father is doing, but

²⁰ Schlipphacke, *Nostalgia After Nazism*, 139.

quickly moves forward with her task. In the second scenario, Lola is not surprised at the argument between her father and Jutta when she bursts into his office. She cries, “Who’s that slut?” and begins to cry as she did when her father told her the truth about her mother in the first scenario, as if recalling his words and his rejection. In the second scenario, after Jutta has departed, Lola treats her father with coldness, mechanically asking for the money she needs. The desperation is gone, as is her attempt to make him understand her plight. She rejects his role as her father; he is a means to an end.

The film is able to function as a postmodern representation of Germany, as viewing German history through *Lola rennt* provides a new perspective on history. After all that Germany has been through as a nation, many Germans have difficulty talking about the past. They don’t want to have to remember it. However, it is through the absorption and recognition of the past that the country can move ahead, without forgetting the past. Just as Lola grows and adapts throughout each scenario, so must a country grow and adapt using past memory. If Germany cannot reconcile itself with the events of World War II and the difficulties of existing as a divided state, the country cannot better itself. In order to move forward, Germany must be united to achieve the most effective future.

These four elements of German history are central elements of the film. Although not as central as the game, the historical aspects give *Lola rennt* more weight as a German film. While the film is, at first glance, an action film, Tykwer broadens the scope of the film by applying it to German history and vice versa. Past memory, for example, is an interesting way to examine the progression of German history. By applying the realities of reunification, lack of geographical landmarks, the search for the least

objectionable ending, and past memory to the film, Tykwer allows the audience to experience German history and philosophy through a postmodern medium.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *Lola rennt* is a rich film filled with both symbolic action and imagery. Tom Tykwer creates a compelling story, drawing viewers into Lola's mission. He helps the audience relate to her by providing an in-depth view of her relationships, both with Manni and her family, and by structuring the film as a videogame. The film itself has social and historical applications that can be made to and by the plot. Reflections of past and present Germany, for instance, can be found throughout the film. Germany's history gives the film scope, and the film draws upon concepts like past memory and the least objectionable option in order to make sense of Germany history. The fact that *Lola rennt* has a German director gives viewers a representation of modern Germany through the eyes of someone who lived in the time of the Berlin Wall.

Tykwer draws upon postmodern film effects to present the film as a videogame. His approach encourages the audience to examine the film in nonconventional ways. The film becomes an interactive experience by involving the audience in the choice of avatar and Lola's three attempts to pass a level of "the game." Viewing the film as a game also provides a structure for the quotations at the beginning of the film, particularly the sports related quotes. By structuring the film in this way, Tykwer gives viewers a new approach to the manner in which the characters interact with each other and the audience.

Lola rennt also gives scope to cultural and social stereotypes and their reversals. Lola, as a character, challenges the audience about passing surface-level judgment. In fact, I would argue that Lola is proven to be the most moral and consistent character in the film.

Tykwer ensures that the film takes on philosophical and religious elements as well. The quotations at the beginning of the film encourage the viewer to begin looking for deeper meaning throughout the film. The subject of grace comes up repeatedly, as well, most notably through Tykwer's treatment of Lola's second and third chances and *Schicksal*'s guidance to the casino. Her prayer in the third scenario leads to her and Manni's salvation.

In the end, the symbolism, game, and representation of post-wall Germany connect to create a thought-provoking film, rather than simply entertainment. Combined, these three elements provide meaning and understanding to life in post-wall Germany, as well as an exploration of man's existence. The film is successful because it allows the viewers to participate in the story, while offering a perspective on the value of life and the importance of relationships.

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