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Run Lola Run, The Internet, and Nietzsche's Theory of Eternal Recurrence

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To date, 35 year old German director Tom Tykwer, has worked, either as author, co-author, or director, on nine films: *Die Tödliche Maria* (1993), which was named the Best Film by the German Film Critics Association; *Das Leben ist eine Baustelle* (118 mins., 1997), with Wolfgang Becker; *Friday Afternoon*(Super 8, 1986); *Because* (medium-length, 1986); *Because* (medium-length feature, 1990); *Epilog* (8 min. short, 1992); *Winterschläfer* (123 mins., 1997); *Der Chef* (1998); and, lastly, *Lola rennt* (80 mins., 1998), which was submitted as the German entry for the 1999 Foreign Language Oscar. [1]

Circularity, repetition, and quanta are concepts that inform this last movie about what is otherwise a very simple story: Manni, a diamond smuggler courier, loses his boss's money; Lola, his punk-styled girlfriend, runs to help him; and, after two unfortunate attempts to find a solution to this problem, the 100,000 DM are eventually returned to Ronnie, the diamond *merc*, and Lola and Manni are saved. It is perhaps curious that in spite of the critics' comparisons of this with other films dealing with temporal transitions and retellings, virtual or otherwise (among them Akiro Kurosawa's *Rashomon* [1950], Krysztof Kieslowski's *Blind Chance* [1981] and his "color trilogy," *Groundhog Day* [1993], Tarantino's *Pulp Fiction* [1994], *Sliding Doors* [1999], *The Lovers of the Arctic Circle*, *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946), *Last Year at Marienbad*[1961], *The Exterminating Angel* [1962], *The Killing* [1956], *Reservoir Dogs* [1992], *Jackie Brown* [1997],*Go*, *Speed*, *Matrix*, and David Cronenberg's *eXistenZ*), [2] only three have placed Tykwer's film within an intellectual scientific context that would make subsequent philosophical dialogue possible: Bárbara Kruchin, who places the alternative retellings of *Lola rennt* within the literary context of Ítalo Calvino's *If on a Winter Night a Traveller*; Carlo Andrei Cubero, who sees the connection between *Lola*'s alternate sequences and the World Wide Web; and Dirk Gently, who sees the slight changes that occur during Lola's run as a form of chaos theory. It is perhaps sad that only one viewer, responding to a commentary that appeared in the *Christian Spotlight on the Movies*, sees a higher philosophical tone in Tykwer's film: on the one hand, the idea of predestation versus free will; on the other, the Eastern philosophical perspective on reincarnation, which is attributed to Buddhists and Hindus (see Matt Langdon). Moreover, no critic or commentator has analyzed or explained why a specific pattern is repeated thrice, although it helps to know that the repetitions take place "during a particular interval of time on the same day," as the director states (Tykwer). Likewise, no critic has contextualized the idea of repetition or recurrence within its obvious

philosophical tradition: the non-linear (or cyclical) concept of time, an ancient idea (cf. Cairns, Eliade, and Lukacher) refurbished in a scientific manner by Friedrich Nietzsche and whose impact is still being felt in quantum mechanics and supersymmetry or string theory physics (Kane 5).

Lola rennt, a film whichs lasts 80 minutes in the English version, is formally divided into 4 parts: a 3 min. philosophical preface which serves to introduce the leading thesis of circularity and repetition; a 29 min. subjective flashback thought out by the main character (Lola); a 20 minute "alternative" and equally subjective flashback envisioned by the secondary character (Manni); and a 22 minute "objective" (re)telling from the point of view of the camera, which freezes suddenly at the moment Lola is about to smile. The last three minutes of the film show the credits, which appear "up" instead of "down," thus forcing us to read "upward" instead of "downward." Likewise, the word "*Ende*" appears slowly from right to left, forcing us to read against what is customary. This unusual form of showing the credits in effect connects the end quite logically to the preface, which commences with quotations from T. S. Eliot and S. Herberger about returning to one's point of original departure, for *after* the game [film?] is *before* the game, and the only fact is that the ball is round and the game lasts 90 minutes: "Everything else is pure theory."

The ensuing sequences of Lola running, although shown temporally in the present time (from the viewers' perspective) moving chronologically toward a celluloid future, in effect refer to actions that have already been actualized, both in terms of the profilmic event proper (we are, of course, re-viewing what the camera viewed earlier) and in the make-belief filmic hypothesis of the two characters, who are viewing their reality merely as an unactualized possibility in which either Lola or Manni dies. Hence, both the profilmic event before our eyes and the hypothesized creations which we are viewing filtered through the characters' perspectives are twice as unreal or, if we prefer, just as subjective, one from the other. The clue is there at the beginning of each sequence as we are shown a cartoon-like (hence unreal) Lola running past a boy with a dog. Should this not be enough, the first and second sequences end with extreme close-ups of the dying profilmic viewers, followed by temporal transitions shot with heavy red gel on the lamps for the bed scenes wherein Lola and Manni are imagining the scenarios we have already viewed. The fact that at the end of the third sequence there is no "return" to either Lola or Manni's perspective is merely a willful affirmation of the camera, which simply freezes at the end of the game, when both Lola and Manni need no longer imagine anything new. In effect, both of them have exhausted their profilmic possibilities by having survived in their imaginary worlds, precisely by returning in time (the cartoon-like Lola goes against time by breaking clocks as she runs) to a point of equilibrium (when time stops) or by running in architectural space as Lola exits from a sumptuous 19th building, passes through the empty 18th century Gendarmenmarkt neo-classical palaces (reminders of the German *Aufklärung*), and arrives at the crossroads in Tauroggenerstrasse in a more prosaic 20th century Berlin. Returns in time and space are effective, for they enable one to start over again and, based on one's effort of will, cause a satisfactory qualitative change. Quanta, of course, cannot suddenly come to a halt. Hence, the camera merely chooses to stop moving—or filming--when the characters and the viewers have had enough. After all, the ball is round and the game lasts only so long.

A mistake that critics and viewers have made with respect to this film is that as Lola runs she changes the lives of those individuals she touches. The opposite might seem to be the case. The individuals Lola encounters enable her to make, in many cases, better choices the next time around. This is certainly the case with respect to the cyclist and the ambulance driver. That notwithstanding, the sequences that are fast-forwarded into a hypothetical future (the mother and child, the cyclist, and Mrs. Jäger), as well as the sequences that are not fast-forwarded (the nuns, Mr. Meyer, and the ambulance driver) serve a different function, namely, to provide the viewer with an accumulation (quanta) of hypothetical (happy or unhappy) or uncertain endings that will prepare us to accept the alternative (unhappy or happy) resolutions of each macrosequence. Hence, there is a preponderance of happy endings in the third

sequence, but not so in the first or even second sequences, where either the cyclist or Mrs. Jäger die by committing suicide. The only uncertain event in the first two sequences is what will happen to Mr. Meyer after he crashes into the white BMW from which three corpulent men come out. This is the only tragic ending in the third sequence, which, at least psychologically, gives one a sense of relief, for the violence that seems dormant in the first two sequences is finally resolved in the permanent stasis of death.

Nevertheless, when all is said and done, the three hypothesized sequences, although they have several aspects in common, are not ruled by any rational logic that would determine their resolution (or lack of). In the end, they seem to be ruled merely by chance (cf. Cairns 227). In this fashion, events are presented in the way Friedrich Nietzsche had imagined them to occur in his *Will to Power*, merely at random. Nietzsche's idea of the eternal recurrence, which posits that time is infinite and matter finite, suggests that eventually all physically known possibilities, whether actualized or not, must repeat previously actualized or potentially non-actualized patterns. What makes this theory non-mechanistic and, hence, aligned to the new developments in physics, is precisely that quanta, being always in motion, cannot die but only change. In human terms, what determines a qualitative change is mere will, which Nietzsche associates with raw quanta (457; frags. 855 and 858) and with the Dionysian urge to unity (a return, as it were [cf. 539; frag. 1050]). Events in effect could be better, but what is inevitable cannot be wished away, for it too forms part of the same willful affirmation of the world. Hence, by sheer will power and determination, Lola succeeds in the third hypothesized sequence to survive along with Manni. That notwithstanding, karma cannot be wished away, but merely allowed to manifest itself in another sequence of events, affecting other characters. Hence, someone has to die in the third sequence, whether Mrs. Jäger, who crashes her car, becomes a cripple, and cuts her veins; the cyclist, who loses his bicycle, ends in poverty, and overdoses in a public lavatory; or good Mr. Meyer, who in order to avoid hitting a bum crashes his black car into the white BMW with the three corpulent men.

Hence, what we have in *Run Lola Run* is a modern rendition of an ancient idea, the Hindu concept of eternal recurrence, but without its moral aspect, à la Nietzsche. We also have a film which is imitating a new technology which has compressed time and which continues to become more intricate and exciting in the new millennium, the internet, where everything, indeed, is possible upon returning to a previous icon which enables us to access other potentially available un-invoked routes. Access servers, like Netscape, Google, Altavista, etc., are also listed at random, unless one locks the system to one specific server. In a world of limitless possibilities, *Run Lola Run* in effect shows us a new way of accessing reality (virtual or otherwise): not as singular and determined but as multiple and random.

In the dawn of Postmodernism we have become heirs of multiple options and possibilities, which have always existed in one form or another, to be sure, but which were until a few years ago unavailable to all except government and military agencies. A hyper-democratic age such as the one we live in presently cannot and probably should not accept anything less than what *Run Lola Run* offers, namely, a multiplicity of options which are constantly and joyfully deferred in time and space. In this fashion, Tykwer's film is similar to other films that, unhappy with their original endings, change them but do not discard them, preferring to have their cake and eating it too, as it were, as we see in *Don Juan de Marco*, which has two endings, or *La mujer del puerto*, by Mexican director Arturo Rípstein, which has three alternative endings, depending on the point of view of the narrator.

In the age of hypertext and virtual reality, the question is no longer: "is it real?" as the Memorex commercial asked at one time, as a glass broke over and over again before a captive television audience. The, question now and in the future is or might be: "how real can it get?" *Run Lola Run*, like Nietzsche's theory on eternal recurrence, physics' multiplicity of strings in additional dimensions, and the Internet's bank of alternative possibilities, show the way to make future life, if not qualitatively better, certainly

quantitatively different, exciting, and fun. For those of us who might not make it to the next millennium, that should be more than sufficient.

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Notes

[1] *Lola rennt* received 8 awards at the 49th German Movie Awards; among them for best movie, best actress (Franka Potente), best supporting actress (Nina Petri), best supporting actor (Herbert Knaup), best director (Tom Tykwer), and best camera work (*http://www.cineclub.de/e/movies/run-lola-run.html*).

[2] See the e-articles by Jerry Lee, Jonathan Rosenbaum, Jeffrey M. Anderson, and Bárbara Kruchin. I personally would add Arturo Rípstein's *La mujer del puerto*, the one film with which *Lola rennt* would have more in common as film narrative.