

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

## Toward a Theory of Agentic Orientation: Rhetoric and Agency in *Run Lola Run*

Sonja K. Foss<sup>1</sup>, William J. C. Waters<sup>2</sup>, & Bernard J. Armada<sup>3</sup>

1 Department of Communication, University of Colorado, Denver, CO 80217-3364

2 Department of English, Northwest Missouri State University, Maryville, MO 64468-6001

3 Department of Communication and Journalism, University of St. Thomas, Saint Paul, MN 55105-1048

*In this essay, we explicate the nature and function of agentic orientation, a pattern of interaction that predisposes an individual to a particular enactment of agency. We use the film Run Lola Run to explicate three agentic orientations—victim, supplicant, and director—each with a different interpretation of structure, a different response to that interpretation, and a different outcome.*

doi:10.1111/j.1468-2885.2007.00293.x

Lucaites (2003) has called for identification of the wide range of options by which agency—the “capacity to make a difference” (Castor & Cooren, 2006, p. 573)—is constituted in particular rhetorical performances. He notes that “every rhetorical performance enacts and contains a theory of its own agency—of its own possibilities—as it structures and enacts the relationships between speaker and audience, self and other, action and structure” (p. 1). Such a mapping of various options for agency is important in that it can lead to “analytical leverage for charting varying degrees of maneuverability, inventiveness, and reflective choice” (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 964) in the rhetorical process.

Lucaites’ (2003) call has been answered in various ways by those concerned with the relationship between agency and rhetoric. Some seek to locate the origin of agency in various relationships between self and structure, as do, for example, Spivak (1988b), Gaonkar (1993), Conrad and Macom (1995), Lucaites and Condit (1999), Cooren (1999), Gunn (2003, 2006), Gunn and Treat (2005), and Cloud (2005). Some explicate various forms of agency, including the technological, human, and textual, a project undertaken by, among others, Hardy (2004), Cooren (2004), McPhee (2004), and Fairhurst (2004). The various dimensions of the agentic process constitute another focus, exemplified by the work of Emirbayer and Mische (1998) and of Bandura (1989). Others turn their attention to the nature of rhetoric as it constructs or enables agency, represented by the work of Grossberg (1997) and of Campbell

---

Corresponding author: Sonja K. Foss; e-mail: sonja.foss@cudenver.edu

(2005). Yet another project concerning agency is to explicate the strategies of agency employed by specific agents in response to a unique exigence, as do Wendell (1990) and Waggoner and O'Brien Hallstein (2001).

We want to take the conversation about rhetoric and agency in a somewhat different direction, which is to theorize a rhetorical mechanism—agentic orientation—that provides various options for the enactment of agency. Agentic orientation is a pattern of interaction that predisposes an individual to a particular enactment of agency. Thus, it is not unlike Bourdieu's (1990) "*habitus*, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures" (p. 10). Although a construct that others have referenced (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 964), agentic orientation has not been sufficiently developed to constitute a theoretical and practical option for understanding agency. Our aim in this essay is to explicate the nature and function of agentic orientation and the options available to agents through its application.

We chose to develop the construct of agentic orientation and to map out its various enactments after seeing the film *Run Lola Run*, a German film directed by Tom Tykwer that stars Franka Potente and Moritz Bleibtreu (Ardnt, 1998). Watching the film was the most fun we had had at the movies in a while, a response confirmed by the film's positive reception at festivals such as Sundance and Toronto. What pushed us to meet the film's insistent challenge to analyze it was our realization that the film has something to say about agency—in particular about the nature and function of agentic orientation.

*Run Lola Run* features the young lovers Lola and Manni who live on the fringes of the establishment in contemporary Germany. At the start of the film, Lola receives a frantic phone call from Manni, who has lost a small fortune (100,000 Deutsche-marks) belonging to his mobster boss, Ronnie, by accidentally leaving it in a subway car, where it is picked up by a tramp. Manni claims that if he cannot produce the money by noon (within 20 minutes), Ronnie will kill him, and he begs Lola for help. Lola takes off running to try to secure the money and to reach Manni by the deadline. She makes three runs in the film, each time encountering the same people, vehicles, and objects but in different ways: a boy and a dog on the stairs of her apartment, a woman with a baby carriage, a group of nuns, a man riding a bike, a security guard at her father's bank, Lola's father, his mistress, Lola's father's friend Mr. Meier, a secretary in the bank, a blind woman, an ambulance, and men crossing the street with a large pane of glass. She attempts to acquire the money in different ways in each run, and the outcomes of the runs are dramatically different.

Scholars and film critics who have analyzed *Run Lola Run* have read it in strikingly different ways. Wood (2006) suggests that the film's message is about the importance of a balance among "the human activities of willing, feeling, and thinking" (p. 110). O'Sickey (2002) asserts that the film is about Lola's effort to become synchronized with Manni in sexual terms. Lauer (2003) suggests that the film imitates the new technology of the Internet, in which "everything is possible upon returning to a previous icon that enables one to access other potentially available

albeit previously uninvoked routes” (p. 6). He suggests that the film admonishes viewers not “to accept anything less than... a multiplicity of options constantly and joyfully different (and deferred) in a continuously evolving universe” (p. 8). The most common way to read the film is through the metaphor of a game, as Bianco (2004) does, suggesting that the “end/s of the game lost become the possibility of the game continuing... a game that is the same and new with each round” (p. 379).

We find all these interpretations credible but are most intrigued by those that focus on agency. Scholars who address agency in the film stop at identifying the message of agency they believe the film offers without describing the processes by which the message is developed and communicated. Tobias (2004), for example, argues that the film develops the theme of “desire that plays out in the context of a female insistence on agency in the face of senior figures whose power is undesirable, and of peers whose impotence is unacceptable” (p. 31). Whalen (2000) reads the film as a coming-of-age fairy tale that disrupts determinism and suggests that “like Lola, we, too, if we work at it, can become the player rather than the played” (p. 8). Evans (2004) also interprets the film’s message as one about agency: “The film is about *not* passively accepting one’s fate; it is all about changing it” (p. 112). The “film advocates, and portrays,” he continues, “a spirit of never-say-die” (p. 114). The construct of agentic orientation, we believe, describes the process by which the agency these critics reference is enacted.

### Agentic orientation

We turn now to an explication of the construct of agentic orientation that we believe *Run Lola Run* offers to an understanding of agency. We begin with the fundamental contribution the film makes to mapping out the construct, which is to point to the components that comprise an agentic orientation. The film suggests that there are three components: a particular interpretation of structure, the selection of a response to that interpretation of structure, and the experience of an outcome in line with those choices. An agentic orientation first takes into account structural or material conditions because every act is an interpretation of a set of conditions. Agency is “always agency *toward* something,” and that something is the perceived structure, whether it consists of the “surrounding persons, places, meanings, and events” an agent encounters or “routines, dispositions, preconceptions, competences, schemas, patterns, typifications, and traditions” (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, pp. 973, 975). *Run Lola Run*, of course, has the requisite confrontational structure as exigence—Lola and Manni face the classic structural constraints of a lack of money and restrictions of time.

A second component of agentic orientation is a response to structure rooted in processes such as categorization, invention, and symbolization as employed by the agent. The artistry that Campbell (2005) finds so essential to agency finds its place in this second component of agentic orientation. The element of response maps out different responses to structure—different acts that involve certain arrangements

with or types of adaptation to structure. In *Run Lola Run*, Lola engages in different kinds of acts in response to her interpretations of structure across the three runs.

Finally, an agentic orientation generates an outcome tied to the choices made concerning structure and act. If agency is action that influences or exerts some degree of control, an agentic orientation must attend to the outcomes generated by particular enactments of agency. Different rhetorical choices should result in different outcomes if those choices make a difference and, of course, they make a dramatic difference in *Run Lola Run*. A third component of agentic orientation, then, is outcome.

*Run Lola Run* not only identifies structure, act, and outcome—the elements that we posit comprise an agentic orientation—but it also conducts an experiment with different relationships among these elements. It displays on screen three different agentic orientations—three different combinations of structure–act–outcome. The film holds structure constant—both the structural exigence (the need for money and a lack of time) and the material resources of the agents (Lola and Manni have the same amount of education; the same abilities; and the same class, race, and gender across the runs). But it varies agentic orientations—interpretations of structure, acts in response to those interpretations, and the outcomes the agents experience—thereby providing an elegant model for exploring different enactments of agency.

Our process of explicating the three enactments of agency in the film began when we sought an explanation for the varied outcomes of the three runs. We began our search by coding the runs for images, objects, dialogue, qualities, and events that stood out either because of intensity or frequency. When we noticed that the features we had identified within each run formed consistent patterns of interpretation and action, we developed those patterns into the three different agentic orientations that we came to label *victim*, *supplicant*, and *director*.

Because of constraints of space, we are unable to report all the aspects of *Run Lola Run* that led us to the theory of agentic orientation we develop here. Dimensions of the film we are unable to discuss include, for example, the musical score of the film, the flash-forwards for minor characters, and the bedroom scenes that serve as transitions from one run to the next. Our analysis is also circumscribed by a focus on the character of Lola. Although the characters in each run tend to share a particular agentic orientation so that Lola, Manni, Lola's father, his mistress, and the security guard at the bank all show evidence of the same agentic orientation within each run, we have chosen to focus our analysis on the agency enacted by the title character of Lola, where variations in agentic orientation are most clear. Although we have had to focus on those elements of the film that constitute the most relevant evidence for our claims concerning agentic orientation, the elements we are unable to discuss here are consistent in their development of particular agentic orientations.

We now turn to an explanation of the agentic orientations presented in the three runs of *Run Lola Run*—victim, supplicant, and director. We begin by explaining, for each run, the first two elements of agentic orientation—an understanding of structural conditions and the acts selected to respond to those conditions. We then

explicate the third element of agentic orientation—outcomes that align with agentic orientations. We conclude with a discussion of how the mechanism of agentic orientation might be applied.

### **Run 1: Victim**

In the first run, Lola chooses an agentic orientation of victim in which she sees her agency as dependent on structural conditions or external others. She interprets her structural conditions as limited and engages in acts of mortification that declare and reinforce her victimage. In this run, Lola runs to the bank where her father works to ask him for the money. She interrupts a conversation her father is having with his mistress, who has just revealed her pregnancy to him. Lola's father not only refuses to give his daughter the money, but he has her thrown off the premises by the bank's security guard. Lola reaches Manni empty-handed just as he begins to rob a grocery store, and she assists him with the robbery. As they run from the store with the money, they are surrounded by the police, one of whom accidentally shoots and kills Lola.

In the agentic orientation of victim evident in the first run, Lola sees herself as helpless and disempowered, dependent on conditions and individuals external to herself. This agentic option is one in which she "seeks power through an identity of powerlessness" (Wolf, 1993, p. 147) so that everything "is organized around the deprived, frustrated, handicapped subject, and the victim strategy is that of [her] acknowledgement as such" (Baudrillard, 1996, p. 137). Lola interprets her choices for action to be embedded in external sources, making her actions dependent on and determined by other people and things.

Adoption of an agentic orientation of victimage encourages an agent to see expected punishment as an indicator of the correctness of the chosen agentic orientation. Although the punishment is typically seen as an undesirable outcome, the fact that the outcome matches a victim's expectations is soothing to the victim in that it suggests a world that makes sense, a world she can count on, and a world in which she knows how to exist. Lola's father, for example, belittles her and lies to her, agreeing to help her, but he then throws her out of the bank. His actions toward her serve as forms of punishment that constitute proof for Lola that she is a victim. Similarly, when Lola helps Manni rob the grocery store, she reinforces her victim orientation because, against her own judgment, she is helping him do something criminal for which she knows she will be punished. The ultimate punishment for Lola in this run, of course, is death. That she dies is primary evidence of the appropriateness of her adoption of an agentic orientation of victim. Heroic and fiercely loyal, she does everything she can think of to help Manni, but she still loses. The ultimate victim, Lola loses her father, she loses Manni, and she loses her life.

#### **Structural conditions: Limitations**

When Lola adopts a victimage orientation, she interprets her structural conditions in ways that are consistent with an oppressed powerlessness. Because she has chosen

a dependent form of agency, she grants ultimate power to structural conditions and sees herself as powerless over her circumstances. Lola's perception that structural conditions limit her agency is most obvious in Lola's view that the time deadline set by Ronnie constitutes a real constraint within which she must operate. The menacing nature of time for Lola is clear in an animated sequence at the beginning of the film when Lola crashes through clock after clock adorned with ugly gargoyles and surrounded by sharp, menacing teeth.

Lola also cedes power to structural conditions by refusing to take responsibility for what happens to Manni and her. She places the blame for events in their lives on conditions, people, or events external to them. The perception that structural conditions are powerful controllers is evident even when Lola explains the sources of the pair's trouble to Manni at the beginning of the film. Lola tells Manni that, because her scooter was stolen, she could not pick him up after he took delivery of the money. Lola took a cab to try to meet Manni, but the cab driver got lost, which meant she could not arrive on time for the scheduled rendezvous with Manni. He thus was forced to take the subway, where he accidentally left the money when the arrival of police flustered him and compelled him to exit the subway car. The stolen scooter, the lost cab driver, the arrival of the police, and the money left on the subway are seen as conditions over which Lola and Manni have no control and that irrevocably determine the course of their lives. "It wasn't my fault, Manni," cries Lola in response to Manni's scapegoating of her for the lost money. "There was nothing I could do."

Lola's view of structural conditions as controlling is also seen when she runs alongside an ambulance after leaving her father at the bank. When the ambulance screeches to a halt to allow several men carrying a large pane of glass to cross an intersection, Lola, too, stops and waits as if she is governed by the rules of traffic that govern the vehicle. Although she is a pedestrian and easily could walk around the glass, she allows the glass to function as an obstacle that must be moved before she can continue rather than something that she can circumvent.

Lola chooses to interpret another structural condition as immutable as well. As Lola's father shoves her through the security door of the bank, he announces, "Now you know. The guy who fathered you never lived to see your birth." He then turns to the security guard and says, "Throw her out, please. Come on! Get her out of here!" His acts reference structural conditions often seen as governing and controlling—paternity, heredity, and institutional power. Lola sees these structural conditions as compelling forces that allow no response other than a tearful acquiescence.

Because Lola views structural conditions as controlling, she sees them as limiting. Instead of attending to the enabling dimensions of and the opportunities presented by the surrounding environment, she sees structural conditions as obstacles. As she runs through the streets of Berlin on her way to her father's office, Lola rejects a young man's offer to sell her the bike he is riding for 50 marks. Lola's sense of victimhood blinds her from seeing resources such as the bike that could help her reach Manni faster. A lack of money is not the issue here; she has enough money on

her to buy the bike, evidenced by the 99 marks she produces at the casino entrance in the third run. Accepting help means she could change her condition, but because an acceptance of assistance would require a change of agentic orientation, she refuses the offer.

Lola's negative attributions to structural conditions sometimes extend beyond limitation to danger. Even when there is no reason to fear a particular condition, she constructs it as dangerous and again reinforces the victim orientation that the presence of such danger appears to dictate. All three runs begin with a short animated vignette in which a cartoon version of Lola runs down the stairs of the apartment and confronts a nasty looking boy and his dog on the stairwell. In the first run, Lola screams in fear when she sees the dog, more fearful of the idea that the dog might harm her than is warranted by the actual dog.

The image of tragic death that frames the first run underscores most dramatically the controlling power of structural conditions for Lola. At the end of the run, death appears as an inescapable force when Lola is accidentally shot by a police officer. Lola's death is a visceral reminder of the power of structural conditions from the standpoint of a victim. As Burke (1970) advises, "death in the natural order becomes conceived as the fulfillment or completion" of a victim orientation (p. 207), and Lola's death in the service of saving Manni epitomizes that stance.

### **Response: Mortification**

The options Lola employs to respond to the strictures of structure also manifest an agentic orientation of victim. She chooses strategies that declare her victimage, maintain it, and repair it when she encounters evidence that she has other options. Her primary response is the strategy that Burke (1970) labels *mortification*, self-inflicted punishment, self-sacrifice, or self-imposed denials and restrictions designed to slay characteristics, impulses, or aspects of the self. He suggests that mortification is the "deliberate, disciplinary 'slaying' of any motive that, for 'doctrinal' reasons, one thinks of as unruly... it is a systematic way of saying no to Disorder, or obediently saying yes to Order" (p. 190). In Lola's case, Lola says yes to the order of the structural conditions and slays the possibility for action apart from their demands.

Lola employs a variety of strategies that function to ensure that she does not achieve her goals because accomplishment of those goals would require that she abandon her victim stance. One such strategy is to ask for help from people who are not able to provide it. In the beginning of the film, when Lola mentally and visually reviews the people she could ask for money, her father's face appears among the options, but he shakes his head "no." Although she already knows he will not give her the money, she still makes her request of him. Lola's piercing scream in the first run is also an option designed not to accomplish her presumed objective. In a scene in her father's office, where Lola has interrupted the conversation he is having with his mistress, Lola screams out in frustration at her father's refusal to give her money, shattering a glass clock on the wall. Her scream, which has a distinctly different rhetorical quality and function in the third run, here symbolizes Lola's frustration

with time limitations and immutable demands. It is an unfocused act of frustration, however, that does nothing to liberate her from those demands.

Another strategy Lola uses to maintain the agentic orientation of the victim is to announce her victim status publicly, suggesting to herself and others that there are no other viable agentic orientations for her to assume. Lola makes such an announcement when she is placed in circumstances in which she is given the opportunity to assume a position of power yet abdicates it for the position of victim. When Lola enters her father's office, he and his mistress have just kissed, clearly compromising him in his daughter's eyes. He sits down, placing himself in a subordinate position to Lola, who is standing—towering, in fact—over her father. Instead of choosing either to capitalize on this power disparity or to equalize it, Lola kneels in front of her father with her hands in his lap and begs him for the money: "Listen, if I tell you I need your help more than ever in my whole life, and you're the only one who can help me, would you help me?" Although her father is at a disadvantage and the opportunity is presented for her to occupy a position other than victim, Lola chooses verbally and nonverbally to adopt a classic stance of powerlessness.

Individuals who choose victimage as an agentic orientation in response to structural conditions "explore the multiple signs of misfortune to prove" their victim status and use as raw material "misfortune, wretchedness, and suffering" (Baudrillard, 1996, p. 135). As a result, Lola sees structural conditions as controlling and limiting. The rhetoric she employs has the predictable outcome of reinscribing the agentic orientation of victim and of abdicating control in favor of helplessness.

## Run 2: Suppliant

In the second run, Lola adopts an agentic orientation of suppliant, enacting emotional, physical, and moral appeals to those who appear to control the structures that impose demands on her. She interprets structural conditions as bequests and engages in the strategy of petitioning to secure any grants her structural environment may be prepared to dispense. In this run, Lola runs to the bank where her father works and, again, her father refuses to assist her, this time forcefully ushering her out of the bank himself. As she exits the bank, Lola grabs the security guard's gun, slips back into the bank, and demands the money from her father, who acquiesces to her demand under gunpoint. Lola leaves the bank with the money and encounters a perimeter the police have installed to catch the bank robber they have been alerted is inside. Mistaken for a bystander, Lola is whisked past the police lines and allowed to continue on her way. She arrives at the designated meeting place with Manni on time with money in hand, but when Manni turns to answer Lola, who is calling his name, he is struck and killed by an ambulance.

In the second run, Lola selects a version of agency under the control of the structural conditions in which she positions herself as a suppliant. This kind of agency appears to accomplish Lola's goals, but it is a hollow and insubstantial form of agency because it is rooted in the structural system's ultimate power to discipline

or govern that agency. Because Lola sees her agency as granted and disciplined by others and thus constructs herself as a supplicant, she cedes to others the power to validate her requests. Lola looks momentarily powerful when she is able to subvert the authority of the guard, encoded in his gun, for her own ends. The fact that Lola is ushered to safety by a police officer after she robs the bank is also an apparent accomplishment of her goals. Her ostensible agency is evident again when she shows up just before the fatal deadline with the required amount of money and thereby saves Manni from the feared retribution of Ronnie. Where there is acceptance of a petition, there appears to be agency on the part of the individual.

At the point at which a hegemonic structure is threatened by a supplicant's use of power and no longer tolerates it, however, everything the supplicant has gained loses value because the petition is no longer supported and validated by the sanctioning agent. Empowerment of the supplicant exists only within the limits determined by the structural hegemony, and where there is rejection of a supplicant's petition, the individual remains disempowered and unrewarded. Lola's desire for money is tolerated only until support is withdrawn by structural forces for her petition, at which point her gains lose all value. For example, when Lola holds her father at gunpoint, she is his equal and now apparently has the power to petition to save Manni's life. Lola is, in the absence of resistance, allowed to handle the gun, allowed to rob the bank, and allowed to escape with what she desires most: the lifesaving money. Ultimately, though, if her success is not continually validated by the structure that confronts her, that success is rendered meaningless.

The ultimate function of the granting of bequests by structural conditions is not to facilitate individuals' access to resources but to reify the structure itself. This principle is evident in the fact that although Lola attains the money and reaches Manni by the deadline, Manni is struck and killed by an ambulance. Lola thus gains the resources for which she petitions but is not granted the capacity to save Manni's life—her only purpose for securing the money. Her petition for his life remains invalidated by the structure, a lack of validation underscored when the ambulance, a mechanism of life-rescuing potential, strikes him dead. The ambulance here is both literally and figuratively a hegemonic rescue vehicle that instantly removes Lola's accomplishment and thus preserves the structural power. When the supplicant is granted power, that power still remains the power of structure to preserve itself, always adjusting and returning the granted power to itself in the end.

### **Structural conditions: Bequests**

In the second run, because Lola is apparently successful in gaining access to the bounty embedded in structure, she appears to have greater control over structural conditions than she does in the first run. Although she is not pinned under the absolute control of structural conditions, she still is limited by the requirement implicit in her supplicant orientation that others recognize or validate her requests for resources. She may or may not receive the grants, dispensed in the form of resources, that others offer. Thus, in this run, Lola does not actually have control

over structural conditions because the resources they provide are given and so can be revoked.

The second run contains a number of examples of the kinds of methods used to rein in and control individuals who seek to gain access to structural resources and power. These methods involve subjecting the lives of individuals to controls and regulations in various ways (Foucault, 1979). The use of physical discipline for the purpose of such control is demonstrated when Lola's father strikes her following her request for money. He supplements physical punishment with a normalizing label that is commonly used as a control mechanism: "Have you gone crazy? Think you can do anything you like?" Similarly, as Lola begins her run, the boy on the stairs deliberately trips her, reminding her that the control belongs to some external structure, which can mete out constraints and cripple individuals arbitrarily. At other times, etiquette rules are referenced to remind Lola of the system's control over her actions and the structural resources she desires. "Courtesy and composure are the queen's jewels," the security guard advises her as she enters the bank. He reminds her of this principle again when she first leaves the bank: "It just isn't your day. You can't have everything." The constraining mechanism can also be a simple denial of a request, as when Lola asks the ambulance driver for a lift, and he refuses. But the most obvious example of society's capacity to control behavior comes when Lola's father reminds her that she is being watched in the bank: "There are cameras. You'll never get out of here."

The mechanisms of control used to rein in agency become so ingrained and naturalized for those who enact an agentic orientation of supplicant that they themselves adopt these mechanisms and apply them to themselves. Imprisoning herself by subjecting herself to a power that is ever watchful and arbitrary, Lola in the second run "becomes the principle of [her] own subjection" (Foucault, 1979, p. 203). When the man on the bike offers to sell it to Lola for 50 marks, for example, she refuses with the retort, "It's stolen." Although she has no way of knowing whether the bike has been stolen, she monitors and constrains herself unnecessarily.

Adoption of a supplicant orientation, then, results in the interpretation of structural conditions as bequests that may or may not be conferred. Although the structural conditions appear to be less controlling and the agency of the individual seems to have more impact on those conditions, supplicants still are bound to structural conditions under the control of others. Structural representatives parcel out grants in response to requests, and they are aided in this effort as individuals themselves step up to assume the same disciplinary functions that the constraining mechanisms administer.

### **Response: Petitioning**

In the second run, Lola engages in the act of petitioning, the effectiveness of which depends on her perceived ability to receive a hearing and to appeal successfully to those who appear to control resources that she desires. Lola is the showcase example of petitioning in the second run. She petitions the security guard to be allowed to

enter the bank: “Let me in, please,” followed by a petition to her father: “I need money.” When he refuses her request, she forcefully petitions her father for the 100,000 marks by holding a gun to his head.

Although the claim might be made that the use of a gun constitutes an act of coercion, we assert that Lola’s use of the gun in this run constitutes supplication. If she wants to kill her father, the gun can do that. Lola’s only goal, though, is to save Manni, and using the gun to kill her father would only make it more difficult for her to achieve that goal. Therefore, Lola’s threat is empty. Her father could challenge the gun—call her on her empty threat—but he chooses not to because she is functioning as a supplicant. Rather than demanding what the gun promises—control over her father’s life—Lola is petitioning her father to give her the money. Even as he capitulates, he reminds Lola that her control of the money is tenuous and temporary because cameras are recording her actions in the bank.

In the second run, then, Lola is a supplicant whose enactment of agency depends on the discretion of structural power relations. In this orientation, structural resources are seen as bequests, and individuals petition structural forces that may or may not validate their petitions.

### **Run 3: Director**

Lola’s choice of agentic orientation in the third run is one of director, a form of agency in which she directs structural conditions and herself in such a way that her desires are affirmed and supported. Consistent with this orientation, Lola sees structural conditions as resources and employs innovating as her primary response. In this run, Lola’s father agrees to marry his mistress in a conversation that takes place as Lola runs to the bank. She misses her father, who has left the bank prior to her arrival to have lunch with his friend Mr. Meier, both of whom are killed in a car accident later in the run. Leaving the bank, Lola spies a casino, talks her way in, and wins 100,000 marks by playing roulette, using her piercing scream to will the wheel to stop on the number 20. On her way to meet Manni, Lola hops into the back of a passing ambulance, where she saves the life of the security guard from the bank, who apparently has suffered a heart attack. Manni also secures the required money by retrieving it from the tramp who had picked it up when he left it on the subway car. The run ends with Manni delivering the money to his boss and Lola joining Manni at their designated meeting place, carrying a bag that contains the money she has won.

What is striking about the third run, in contrast to the previous ones, is the individual responsibility and independence both Lola and Manni exhibit. They achieve their goals not by appealing to or controlling others but by using rhetoric to act on and direct themselves. Although Lola began the run acting on behalf of Manni, the fact that the outcome of her efforts is irrelevant to Manni’s needs—because he secures the money on his own—converts her run into one of agency on her own behalf.

Even when the conditions around her seem bleakest, in this run, Lola trusts that she will be inspired to find a way to secure the money. She whispers to herself as she runs, “What can I do? What can I do? Come on. Help me. Please. Just this once. I’ll just keep on running, okay? I’m waiting. I’m waiting. I’m waiting. I’m waiting.” No longer waiting for her father or a robbery to produce the money, she knows that she herself will be the one who will produce it, even though she is as yet unaware of the specific mechanisms she will use. Although her words might be interpreted as a prayer, we suggest that they are a plea to herself to be self-directing and to find her own answer, consistent with her other actions in this run. When she notices the casino, she recognizes it as her answer, even though she appears to know virtually nothing about gambling, evidenced by her question, “How does this work?” asked of the woman at the entrance.

Because the nature of the agentic orientation assumed in the third run is rooted in self-responsibility, Manni’s actions become relevant to an exploration of Lola’s version of agency in this run. He, too, assumes responsibility for himself and secures the money on his own, belying the frantic phone call in which he tells Lola that her assistance is the only means by which he can succeed. He encounters the tramp who earlier had picked up his money, stops him, and asks him to give the money back with a simple “that’s mine.” “I know,” the tramp replies.

Most indicative of Manni’s agency in the third run and a puzzling line of dialogue outside of the context of the director orientation is Manni’s greeting to Lola when they meet at the end of the run. Manni is surprised that Lola is out of breath and questions her: “Hey, what happened to you? Did you run here?” Despite the earlier phone call, his questions are rooted in the assumption that she has not been acting on his behalf. Manni’s question to Lola that ends the film, “What’s in the bag?” is asked in a casual, almost phatic style and, in the context of the previous runs, would be seen as total inattention to or betrayal of Lola. After all, Manni has begged her for help and then acts surprised when she gives it to him. In the context of this run, however, Manni’s question is a normal and natural result of two agents acting on their own behalf; there is no expectation that others are responsible for meeting their needs or desires. Manni does not know what is in the bag because he had no expectation that Lola would work to secure the money for him.

### **Structural conditions: Resources**

Because of her enactment of an agentic orientation of director, Lola interprets structural conditions in this run as resources and not as the obstacles they were for her in the previous runs. Rather than viewing her circumstances as lacking or problematic, she interprets them as strategic opportunities, toolkits, or inventory available for her use—or at least irrelevant or trivial in terms of their impact.

Lola grants structure little power over her, privileging its nature as a construction that can be de- and reconstructed. As Lola runs down the stairs at the start of the third run, she sails over the boy and dog that tripped her earlier and growls at them. She avoids running into people and obstacles she hit in earlier runs, such as a woman

pushing a baby carriage. She bounces off the hood of Mr. Meier's car when he stops suddenly to keep from hitting her, running on without injury. When the woman at the casino door tells Lola, "You can't go in like that," Lola acts as if the prohibition has no meaning and enters the casino anyway. She does not even have sufficient money for the 100-mark chit but buys it with only 99 marks 20.

Further evidence of Lola's interpretations of circumstances as resources rather than obstacles in the third run is that she ignores the structural condition of time that is so critical to the plot of the film—Manni must have the money by noon. While each of the first two runs is exactly 20 minutes long in real time, putting Lola at the meeting place with Manni at precisely 12:00, the third run takes over 20 minutes. As Lola leaves the casino, a clock shows the time as 3 minutes before 12:00, after which she catches a ride in the ambulance, where she restores the heartbeat of the security guard, while Manni catches up with the tramp and retrieves his money—sequences that in real time take another 6 minutes. Lola thus arrives at the meeting place at what should be about 3 minutes after noon.

That time does not function as a controlling structural condition for Lola is also evident when she wins at the roulette table in the casino. She always places her bets on the number 20, and, contrary to the experience of most gamblers, she wins each time she plays. She no longer fears the number 20 and has transformed the original 20-minute deadline into a resource. Because Lola does not interpret conditions as the obstacles they were for her in the earlier runs, they lack the capacity to confine her.

### **Response: Innovating**

Adoption of an agentic orientation of director in the third run enables Lola to employ innovative actions. Innovating means creating one's own options and not choosing from among options created by others. Lola's actions are marked by a lack of acceptance of the "masters' descriptions of the real" and an eschewal of the boundaries of the universe as defined by others (Rorty, 1998, p. 216). In this run, Lola writes her own script, and her acts are highly individualistic and idiosyncratic, with "no method or procedure to be followed except courageous and imaginative experimentation" (Rorty, 1998, p. 217).

Lola's actions are not strategies in the sense of planned efforts designed to accomplish certain goals—the types of scripted strategies that in the earlier runs were unsuccessful. A number of images in the third run reinforce the need to be blind to the strategies that are assumed to be effective in addressing the exigencies of structural conditions. Those who appear most at the mercy of their environments in the film play critical roles in envisioning and pointing to ways to address perceived problems independent of apparent structural limitations. In one scene, for example, Manni is waiting to enter a phone booth being used by a blind woman. As she leaves the booth, she looks toward the tramp who has Manni's money, thus directing Manni to look in that direction and discover where his money can be found. An individual who is marked by what usually is considered to be a major structural limitation—blindness—is the one who points Manni to his money. Similarly, Lola

runs around rather than through a group of nuns, choosing not to run the gauntlet subjecting her to their approval and system of rules but to operate instead within a system of her own construction. In addition, as Lola runs, waiting for inspiration, her eyes are closed, in contrast to the previous runs, suggesting that her attention is directed inward, and she is blind to the conditions and conventional strategies of the structural world.

Other evidence of Lola's shift from a reliance on external sources to her own creative capacity is suggested in the casino's emergence as a mechanism by which she can exercise agency. Lack of attention to external conditions allows Lola to see the casino in which she wins the money. She spots the casino only when her view is blocked by a truck that screeches to a halt as she crosses in front of it. Because it temporarily stops her physically and blocks her vision—preventing her from continuing on a planned or prescribed path—Lola notices the casino.

Those who develop and limit choices for Lola in previous runs no longer have the power to define and restrict choices for her in the third run. The security guard at the bank, who guards access to the funds, is outside of the bank on a cigarette break when Lola arrives in the third run. Outside of the structural system, no longer the representative of authority, he has stepped outside of his role, opening up new possibilities. The deaths of Lola's father and his friend, Mr. Meier, in a car accident remove the confines of parenthood, enabling Lola to function as her own parent. Similarly, the medical technician in the ambulance, once a director of Lola's fate when he refused to give her a ride, steps aside so she can take over the efforts to save the life of the security guard. In all these instances, structural representatives have become irrelevant. Those who were the authors of Lola's life and created the range of options for her in the earlier runs step aside or disappear.

Individuals move through the world with confidence, the third run suggests, when they are open to innovation. Such agents see the conditions around them as conspiring on their behalf and available for their use. Thus, the money comes easily in this run. Lola places a bet on the black 20 on the roulette wheel, wins, and then places her winnings on the black 20 again. As the ball bounces on the wheel, she lets out an ear-piercing scream that shatters glasses and the clock on the wall, willing the ball to land on the black 20, which it does. Even when the casino manager approaches Lola after the first win and says, "Come with me, please," she replies, "Just one more game." Her self-assured tone suggests that his request is irrelevant—that she will place a second bet, which, in fact, she does. Lola's confidence in her own actions continues when she catches a ride in the back of an ambulance following her successful wins in the casino. She does not ask for permission this time but simply climbs into the back of the ambulance when it stops to allow men carrying a pane of glass to pass in front of it (the men for whom she stopped in the first run).

The power that results when individuals engage their worlds as directors is demonstrated in the third run. It is suggested when the security guard at the bank greets Lola's arrival in the third run with the words, "You've come at last, dear." Lola has come at last to awareness and adoption of the powerful agency of the director.

Lola's apparent ability to control the roulette wheel in the casino through the unusual act of a scream also suggests such power. As she leaves the casino, the bystanders who gather to watch her go are awestruck by her power and recognize it as different from theirs. They are still gambling, playing the game using conventional strategies, but they recognize that Lola has freed herself from the game of chance.

Lola's healing of the security guard in the ambulance is another example of her almost magical power. He is dying when she enters the ambulance, and the medical technician's efforts to save him appear to be having little effect. Lola heals him, apparently by holding his hand and focusing her attention on him. Because the source of her power is her own interpretation, which is free from the influence, control, or determination of structure, she has unlimited access to innovative rhetorical options.

As a result of the choice to adopt an agentic orientation of director, both Lola and Manni are in control of the conditions and events they experience, and their efficacy flowers as they see structural conditions as irrelevant to or even supportive of the agency they claim. Because their actions do not follow traditional scripts, they are able to innovate in their structural reality to create outcomes in line with their desires.

### **Outcomes of agentic orientations**

We thus far have identified the components of interpretation of structure and response that characterize the three agentic orientations of victim, supplicant, and director presented in *Run Lola Run*. The third component of agentic orientation is outcome, and we now turn our attention to the concomitant outcomes of the agentic orientations. We argue here that choice of agentic orientation dictates the outcomes that agents experience in their lives rather than the strength, power, or persistence of material structures. Choice about what version of agentic orientation to adopt, then, appears to be the critical decision that individuals make in terms of agency.

Clearly, very different outcomes result from Lola's enactment of the three kinds of agentic orientations. In the first run, Lola adopts an agentic orientation of victim, in which she interprets her structural conditions as obstacles and engages in the act of mortification. She and Manni obtain the money they need, but Lola is killed. In the second run, Lola assumes an agentic orientation of supplicant, viewing her structural conditions as bequests bestowed on her by structural power and using petitioning as a primary option for securing those bequests. Lola acquires the money, but Manni dies. In the third run, both Lola and Manni choose agentic orientations of director, assuming that they can direct structural conditions, themselves, and their fate. Structural conditions become resources as they employ innovative responses to secure money and life for both of them.

*Run Lola Run* supports in a number of ways the claim that an agentic orientation of director is superior to those of victim and supplicant. The structural building of

the three runs to a preferred position conforms to the conventions of tripartite narratives (such as those of Goldilocks or the three speeches on love [rhetoric] in Plato's *Phaedrus*), in which inferior alternatives are rejected along the way until the preferred option is reached at the sequence's end. Its ending also suggests that the third run offers the preferred agentic orientation. That Lola and Manni are both alive at the end meets viewers' conventional preferences for happy filmic endings, in contrast to the endings of the two previous runs, where the deaths of the main characters, particularly so early in the film, are shocking to viewers.

The director orientation that *Run Lola Run* advocates contrasts with a normative interpretation of the relationship between agentic orientation and outcome. Such a view would dismiss the feasibility much less the superiority of the director orientation and would suggest that a director orientation can have no direct effect on structural conditions. The outcomes Lola experiences, this interpretation says, are the result of causes such as the flow of time, coincidences of arriving at particular places at particular times, and the accidental encountering of individuals who are either helpful or not.

In contrast, *Run Lola Run*'s connection between agentic orientation and outcome suggests a perspective that, while contrary to the normative one, is in tune with a tenet acknowledged by a number of diverse perspectives, ranging from social constructionism to quantum physics. Simply put, it is that symbols create reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Goswami, Reed, & Goswami, 1993; Marshall & Zohar, 1997; Potter, 1996; Sapolsky, 2005; Seligman, 2002; Whorf, 1956; Wolf, 1981). Symbolic choices, *Run Lola Run* argues, can and do affect the structural world. We acknowledge that a belief in this tenet is disputable in the presence of certain kinds of conditions, but we ask our readers to consider seriously for a moment what *Run Lola Run* suggests—the possibility that it might be true under all conditions. Although the reality of everyday life appears prearranged, ordered, and objective, and therefore outside of agents' sphere of influence through processes such as habituation and materialization (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, pp. 53–67; Butler, 1993, pp. 9, 10), the structural world not only “bears cultural constructions” but is itself a construction (Butler, 1993, p. 28). Choice is the basic mechanism by which the world is manifest, then, and as agents choose (as they do when they adopt an agentic orientation), real, material outcomes are created in line with their choices.

We are not suggesting that agents dictate precisely the outcomes they will experience in their worlds through the symbolic activity of an agentic orientation. We concur with McDaniel (2003) when he suggests that agency “signifies a capacity to invent, but not to control, possible worlds” (p. 1). Agents cannot, simply through choice of agentic orientation, lay out precisely the routes through which their desires will be fulfilled. What we do suggest, however, is that those desires are realized in outcomes that align with agents' choices, although their manifestations may occur in ways not imagined by agents. With a director orientation, the agent trusts that the orientation will open up possibilities, as is the case with Lola in the third run. When Lola takes off running with no idea of how she will obtain the money, her conception

of structural conditions as resources and a willingness to innovate to allow assistance to come to her in ways she could not have predicted at the outset of her run.

Scholars have offered a number of explanations to account for the kinds of outcomes that result from the agentic orientation of director that *Run Lola Run* “votes” to be the superior one. Among the reasons cited are phenomena such as activation, a complex of beliefs about the agent’s own nature (Harré, 1984, p. 95); an internal locus of control, which “makes a considerable difference in the ways that many life experiences will be confronted” (Lefcourt, 1982, p. 183); the representations individuals construct of the world (Danto, 1973); and individuals’ perceptions of self-efficacy (Rodin, 1990). Our analysis of *Run Lola Run* suggests three additional explanations for the effectiveness of the agentic orientation of director in terms of its outcomes—reconceptualization of exigence, availability of multiple options, and dissolution of enmity.

One explanation for why the agentic orientation of director produces outcomes in line with agents’ desires is that it posits an exigence different from that to which agents often believe they must respond. In traditional conceptions of the agentic process, structural conditions function as the compelling exigence. Individuals are confronted with particular structures that lead to the development of responses based on an understanding of those conditions as controlling and determining. Our analysis of *Run Lola Run* suggests a different exigence for agents. Exigence is the choice of agentic orientation adopted by an agent—whether victim, supplicant, director, or another—and that choice dictates the particular view of structural conditions the agent adopts. From such a perspective, structural conditions are dependent variables that vary according to the nature of the agentic orientation selected.

The consequences entailed by an exigence of agency are dramatically different from those that follow from an exigence rooted in structural conditions. An exigence of structural conditions requires that individuals, working alone or collectively, change all the conditions they see as blocking or diminishing their influence in the world. The task is an enormous and impossible one. If the effectiveness of agency is dependent on making all the structural conditions in agents’ worlds or lives align with their own desires or preferences, they cannot ever hope to enact agency effectively.

An exigence of agentic orientation, in contrast, is something that can be chosen and is under the control of the individual. No one can interfere with that choice because its location is internal, and it can be maintained and reinforced with every decision the individual makes. Exigence thus becomes not a constraining force within which agents must work but an opening that enables them to transcend what they previously conceptualized as constraints and limitations. With Anzaldúa (2002), individuals who assume an agentic orientation of director realize that “reactions to events” are the obstacles confronting them and “not something ‘real’ or unchangeable out there in the outer world” (p. 553).

A second explanation for the positive outcome produced by the agentic orientation of director is that the director orientation makes available the greatest number

of options for action for the individual. The agentic orientation of director enables agents themselves to create their own options rather than allowing them to be dictated by predetermined scripts or external others. Even when agents recognize that some of the options before them have been created by others, the very recognition that those choices were created by someone else points to their constructedness and the fact that they thus can be constructed differently. As a result, agents then can choose whether to stay within the array of choices being presented by others or to create options outside of them.

The agentic orientation of director, then, has the capacity to produce a virtually infinite array of options that are constrained only by the desires and imaginations of agents themselves. Arendt (1977) explains the critical role that the capacity to innovate beyond conventional choices plays in agency. She describes the capacity to choose among set alternatives as “a freedom of choice that arbitrates and decides between two given things, one good and one evil” and contrasts it with “the freedom to call something into being which did not exist before, which was not given, not even as an object of cognition or imagination, and which therefore, strictly speaking, could not be known” (p. 151). In *Run Lola Run*, Lola innovates in this latter fashion, evidenced by her choosing to gamble when she knows nothing about it and by her scream in the casino, certainly not a conventional rhetorical strategy. Anzaldúa (2002) explains the results of this kind of choice in this way: “Instead of walking your habitual routes you forge new ones. The changes affect your biology. The cells in your brain shift and, in turn, create new pathways, rewiring your brain” (p. 556).

Agents who adopt a director orientation are able to exploit the “literally fabulous nature of symbol using,” as Condit (2003) suggests, taking advantage of the “vast storehouse of variability” available to symbol users “to generate creatively new choices and possibilities” (p. 2). As Davies (2000) explains, when they are acting from such an orientation, agents “can go beyond the given meaning in any one discourse and forge something new, through a combination of previously unrelated discourses, through the invention of words and concepts that capture a shift in consciousness that is beginning to occur, or through imagining not what *is*, but what *might be*” (p. 67). Agency, from the orientation of director, becomes “the actor’s capacity to reinterpret and mobilize an array of resources in terms of cultural schemas other than those that initially constituted the array” (Sewell, 1992, p. 19).

An agentic orientation of director also produces the outcomes it does because it dissolves the traditional enmity that exists between agent and structure. The source of the antagonism that characterizes typical agentic efforts is a feeling of limitation and thus anger and hatred toward structures that individuals feel are thwarting them. Such hostility can make the structural “power appear absolute” and the agent’s “power insignificant” (Wendell, 1990, p. 28). Griffin (1982) explains the consequences for outcomes of such animosity:

But the moment I have defined another being as my enemy, I lose part of myself, the complexity and subtlety of my vision... Slowly all the power in my

life begins to be located outside, and my whole being is defined in relation to this outside force, which daily becomes more monstrous, more evil,... The quality of my thought then is diminished. My imagination grows small. (p. 657)

In the third run, Lola no longer sees structural others as her enemies. This new perspective is particularly evident in Lola's interaction with the security guard at the bank. When Lola discovers him in the back of the ambulance, suffering from an apparent heart attack, she tells the medical technician, "I'll stay with him." She holds his hand, stabilizing his heartbeat, and looks with empathy and concern at the man who, in earlier runs, represents a coercive, domineering structure. From the agentic orientation of director, others are not seen as enemies because they do not control anything that agents do not already have; thus, the source of antagonism and hostility vanishes. An agentic orientation of director, then, insures that the agent's imagination remains large and capable of complexity in interaction with the world.

The perspective on outcomes presented by *Run Lola Run* speaks to and, in fact, transforms a conventional understanding about the kind of agency required to produce outcomes in line with one's desires. We frequently encounter the claim in academic conversations that some individuals or groups lack agency, a view that is prevalent as well in the literature on marginalized groups and agency. Spivak's (1988a) argument that there "is no space from which the sexed subaltern subject can speak" is one example (p. 307); Shome and Hegde (2002) similarly suggest that a condition of nonagency is possible when they reference the existence of an "interstitial space between agency and the lack thereof" (p. 266). Such a perspective suggests that particular individuals or groups cannot control outcomes—cannot exert agency—because they lack a requisite set of life circumstances.

Agentic orientations, however, are achieved within, rather than simply given by, the conditions of individuals' lives. Thus, individuals may be in a dominant position as defined by economic and other structural conditions or in a subordinate position as defined by a lack of access to such resources, but they may choose any agentic orientation and produce any outcome they desire. We acknowledge that such a view may be difficult to accept in extreme cases such as imprisonment or genocide; even in these situations, however, agents have choices about how to perceive their conditions and their agency. Even in these situations, adoption of the agentic orientation of director opens up opportunities for innovating in ways unavailable to those who construct themselves as victims.<sup>1</sup> As Walker (1997) suggests, "Although I assume that very many things human beings have to or want to do are made harder, even excruciatingly costly, by deprivation or oppression," the notion that agency "is out of reach for people under conditions of social disadvantage represents a confusion, a mistake, or a temptation... If lives are distinctively our own because of the distinctive mix of circumstances thrown our ways and commitments and attachments we make under those circumstances," the issue "is how well one responds to that lot" (p. 76).

The capacity to generate desired outcomes is available in *Run Lola Run* not only to those with money, high status, or education—those with privilege as it is

conventionally conceptualized. Lola's banker father, who clearly is privileged according to conventional definitions of the term, chooses various agentic orientations over the course of the film, including those of victimage (in the first run) and director (in the third). The apparently least privileged exhibit the greatest freedom from the control of structural conditions of all the characters in the film in the third run. Manni, who desperately cries "I'm fucked!" at the start of the film—the cry of a person in a decidedly unprivileged position as traditionally defined—achieves privilege in the third run when the agentic orientation of director becomes so natural for him that he takes it for granted, allowing him to ask casually of Lola at the end of the third run, "You ran here?" Lola herself, of course, exemplifies the capacity of the least privileged to adopt an orientation of director. Traditionally marginalized in that she is a woman, is trying to enact a savior role usually assigned to men, is unemployed, and is relatively poor, Lola still successfully enacts the director orientation.

We acknowledge that a view that anyone has access to an agentic orientation of director and thus to desired outcomes challenges traditional notions of the nature and function of privilege. We believe that the attribution of privilege as it is traditionally conceptualized derives from a particular orientation to agency. A view that someone else is privileged suggests that the privileged person has control over outcomes in a way that the accuser does not. Individuals who lack structural resources and who choose to view someone with those resources as privileged have chosen to reify what is missing from their experience and to interpret it as lack, an emphasis that functions as a filter to prevent them from seeing options available to them. We are not blaming the victim here; in fact, we believe that the view we are articulating empowers rather than blames individuals. We simply are suggesting that a definition of a situation as lacking keeps individuals from being able to see options and to allow agency to work in the world in ways that would not continue to restrict the resources they desire.

That everyone has the same capacity for agency, regardless of access to resources, is not to be confused with the notion that everyone chooses well. With their agency, all individuals may choose situations that make them suffer and reduce their control over structural conditions. Those who make agentic choices that appear less desirable gain at least some rewards from such choices—possibly a greater capacity to attract others to a cause, the generation of positive responses in the form of sympathy, or avoidance of responsibility. Cindy Sheehan provides an example of someone whose adoption of a victim orientation has attracted others to a cause. She is able to generate a following for her antiwar and anti-Bush stance with an emotional appeal centered around her unjust suffering as a result of the Iraq War and Bush's refusal to speak with her. If the unjust suffering were removed or reinterpreted, the emotional appeal that supports her movement would disappear. Our intent is not to impugn Sheehan's motives or her cause but to suggest that adoption of a victim orientation can be a rhetorically functional choice for various reasons. *Run Lola Run*, of course, notes that it is not the only available choice.

The view of agency presented in *Run Lola Run*, then, rejects a conventional normative progressive assumption that "human agency primarily consists of acts

that challenge social norms and not those that uphold them” (Mahmood, 2005, p. 5). Agency is not consubstantial with resistance to relations of domination; agential capacity is entailed in the multiple ways in which individuals inhabit norms. From such a perspective, “what may appear to be a case of deplorable passivity and docility... may actually be a form of agency” (Mahmood, 2005, p. 15). Lola enacts agency in the first and second runs, then, just as much as she does in the third—her agentic choices are simply different.

### **Applications of agentic orientation**

The mechanism of agentic orientation answers Lucaites’ (2003) call for identification of the range of options by which agency is constituted in particular rhetorical performances. The mechanism readily allows for its application by those who are interested in understanding their agentic options as well as the link between orientation and outcome. Thus, although the characters in *Run Lola Run* do not make decisions or act—their agency, of course, is under the control of the film’s director—the mechanism of agentic orientation the film suggests can be used as a didactic tool for individuals outside of the film who are interested in enacting the greatest degree of control over their lives.

Key to application of the mechanism of agentic orientation is the act of interpretation. We agree with those who posit that agency is “shared between agents and the structures they animate” (Anderson, 2004, p. 271). What agentic orientation offers that departs from this perspective on the origin of agency is an insistence that all agentic positions are produced in the same way—through an interpretation of structural conditions. Interpretation of structural conditions creates an agentic orientation, which then creates outcomes in line with that particular orientation. The pragmatic application of agentic orientation thus is this: All individuals have the capacity to move to different agentic positions and to produce new outcomes in their lives because such changes occur through the act of interpretation. The fact that individuals are able to create one agentic orientation is evidence that they can create another. One kind of interpretation results in a particular agentic orientation; reinterpretation changes that orientation.

An example familiar to many of our readers will illustrate how choices of interpretation are played out so that they develop agentic orientations and generate outcomes in alignment with them. The situation is one in which a professor assigns a grade of F to a student’s paper. Upon receiving the grade, a student might say, “My professor gave me an F on the paper.” With this statement, the student interprets structural conditions as bequests and thus chooses a supplicant orientation. Consequently, she limits her options for response to a set of rhetorical options that involve petitioning—options such as asking for extra credit, pleading with the professor to change the grade, complaining to the department chair or the dean, holding a press conference to proclaim the injustice of the grade, or petitioning the legal system by suing the university. Even if she is given a new grade at the end of her pleas, the

student is still relatively powerless in that her agency and efficacy are dependent on someone else's granting of her request.

A change of interpretation substantially changes the student's orientation, options, and outcomes. When the student states instead "I earned a grade of F on the paper," she interprets structural conditions as resources that are available to her and adopts the agentic orientation of director. As a result, she now has available to her a variety of different options that enable her to learn from the paper and to develop her writing skills further. For example, she can secure a tutor, study what was unclear to her when she wrote the paper, make use of the writing center to improve her writing skills, talk with the professor about what went wrong with the paper, ask the professor for good models of papers to help her in the future, continue to work to develop the ideas in the paper more effectively, or even be happy with the grade because she knows it accurately represents the quality of her work. A change in interpretation positions her in a different agentic orientation, makes available different options, and generates different outcomes.

Application of the mechanism of agentic orientation also has implications for the teaching of rhetoric. Geisler (2004) suggests that a primary concern for teachers of rhetoric is to answer the question: "What shall we, as teachers, say to our students about their potential and obligations with respect to becoming rhetorical agents?" (p. 16). Traditionally, the answer to this question has been to teach students to formulate rhetoric in an effort to change structural conditions to create particular outcomes in their lives. We suggest a modification of the traditional approach that would involve teaching students how to use the mechanism of agentic orientation to make rhetorical choices to create their intended outcomes.<sup>2</sup>

Teaching from the perspective of agentic orientation primarily would involve illustrating the chain of connections among: (a) a particular set of interpretations of a set of structural conditions, (b) the agentic orientation that coincides with those interpretations, and (c) the outcomes that manifest in alignment with that agentic position. When they understand the linkages among these three elements, students would be able to adjust their rhetoric to achieve the outcomes they desire. If the students' present outcomes are undesirable and are produced by adopting a particular agentic orientation, then students would understand how to use the mechanism of agentic orientation to rearrange those outcomes. The instructional focus thus would be on isolating and illuminating the chain of structure–act–outcome, allowing students to practice revision or reinterpretation of structural conditions in their rhetorical choices to generate different outcomes. The primary mission of teachers of rhetoric would be to redirect students' focus from trying to change structural conditions to changing their interpretations of those conditions and inventing multiple and innovative options for response to those revised interpretations.<sup>3</sup>

We believe that the possibilities offered by the mechanism of agentic orientation—pedagogical, pragmatic, and heuristic—are exciting in their potential to extend current understandings of agency. At the same time, we recognize a number of questions that remain unanswered concerning agentic orientation and that must

be addressed to complete the picture of agency explored in our analysis of *Run Lola Run*. Among them are the factors that affect the selection of agentic orientation by agents, how individuals come to understand the choices that are available to them in agentic orientations, how descriptions of structural conditions are produced so that they appear solid and factual, and how such descriptions can be rhetorically undermined to facilitate different interpretations and thus different agentic orientations. We hope that our efforts here encourage others to contribute to the development of the nascent model of agentic orientation we have offered here and to join us in theorizing an agency ever open to the possibilities of choosing again and choosing something different.

### Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank Karen A. Foss, Christa J. Downer, Joshua Gunn, and François Cooren for their insightful comments on earlier versions of this essay.

### Notes

- 1 Examples of the agentic orientation of director even in dire circumstances can be seen in the actions of the main characters in two contemporary films: *The Hurricane* (2000), about the unjust imprisonment of boxer Rubin Carter, and *Life is Beautiful* (1997), in which a father helps his son survive a concentration camp.
- 2 Some rhetorical scholars suggest that the traditional answer to Geisler's question must change as a result of postmodernism or posthumanism. As is certainly clear by now, our view of agency privileges self over structure; we thus leave to others the concern about how postmodernism or posthumanism affects the teaching of rhetoric.
- 3 The idea that change is accomplished by changing oneself and not external conditions is not a new idea with us. It has been explicated by, among others, Anzaldúa (1987), Gearhart (1995), and Johnson (1989, 1991).

### References

- Anderson, D. (2004). Questioning the motives of habituated action: Burke and Bourdieu on practice. *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 37, 255–274.
- Anzaldúa, G. E. (1987). *Borderlands/La frontera: The new mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute.
- Anzaldúa, G. E. (2002). Now let us shift... the path of conocimiento... inner work, public acts. In G. E. Anzaldúa & A. Keating (Eds.), *This bridge we call home: Radical visions for transformation* (pp. 540–578). New York: Routledge.
- Ardnt, S. (Producer), & Tykwer, T. (Director). (1998). *Run Lola Run* [Film]. (Available from Sony Pictures Classics, 550 Madison Avenue, 8th floor, New York, NY10022)
- Arendt, H. (1977). *Between past and future: Eight exercises in political thought*. New York: Penguin.
- Bandura, A. (1989). Human agency in social cognitive theory. *American Psychologist*, 44, 1175–1180.

- Baudrillard, J. (1996). *The perfect crime* (C. Turner, Trans.). New York: Verso. (Original work published 1995)
- Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. Garden City, NY: Anchor/Doubleday.
- Bianco, J. S. (2004). Techno-cinema. *Comparative Literature Studies*, 41, 377–403.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The logic of practice* (R. Nice, Trans.). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press. (Original work published 1980)
- Burke, K. (1970). *The rhetoric of religion: Studies in logology*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of sex*. New York: Routledge.
- Campbell, K. K. (2005). Agency: Promiscuous and protean. *Communication and Critical Cultural Studies*, 2(1), 1–19.
- Castor, T., & Cooren, F. (2006). Organizations as hybrid forms of life: The implications of the selection of agency in problem formulation. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 19, 570–600.
- Cloud, D. L. (2005). Fighting words: Labor and the limits of communication at Staley, 1993 to 1996. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 18, 509–542.
- Condit, C. M. (2003, September). *Why rhetorical training can expand agency*. Paper presented at the meeting of the Alliance of Rhetoric Societies, Evanston, IL.
- Conrad, C., & Macom, E. A. (1995). Re-visiting Kenneth Burke: Dramatism/logology and the problem of agency. *Southern Communication Journal*, 61(1), 11–28.
- Cooren, F. (1999). Applying socio-semiotics to organizational communication: A new approach. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 13, 294–304.
- Cooren, F. (2004). Textual agency: How texts do things in organizational settings. *Organization*, 11, 373–393.
- Danto, A. C. (1973). *Analytical philosophy of action*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Davies, B. (2000). The concept of agency. In B. Davies (Ed.), *A body of writing: 1990–1999* (pp. 55–68). Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira/Rowman & Littlefield.
- Emirbayer, M., & Mische, A. (1998). What is agency? *American Journal of Sociology*, 103, 962–1023.
- Evans, O. (2004). Tom Tywyker's *Run Lola Run*: Postmodern, posthuman or “post-theory”? *Studies in European Cinema*, 1(2), 105–115.
- Fairhurst, G. T. (2004). Textuality and agency in interaction analysis. *Organization*, 11, 335–353.
- Foucault, M. (1979). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* (A. Sheridan, Trans.). New York: Vintage/Random House. (Original work published 1975)
- Gaonkar, D. P. (1993). The idea of rhetoric in the rhetoric of science. *Southern Communication Journal*, 58, 258–295.
- Gearhart, S. M. (1995). Notes from a recovering activist. *Sojourner: The Women's Forum*, 21(1), 8–11.
- Geisler, C. (2004). How ought we to understand the concept of rhetorical agency?: Report from the ARS. *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 34(3), 9–17.
- Goswami, A., Reed, R. E., & Goswami, M. (1993). *The self-aware universe: How consciousness creates the material world*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin Putnam.
- Griffin, S. (1982). The way of all ideology. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 7, 641–660.

- Grossberg, L. (1997). *Bringing it all back home: Essays on cultural studies*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Gunn, J. (2003, September). *The fantastic rhetorical agency debate*. Paper presented at the meeting of the Alliance of Rhetoric Societies, Evanston, IL.
- Gunn, J. (2006). Review essay: Mourning humanism, or, the idiom of haunting. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 92(1), 77–102.
- Gunn, J., & Treat, S. (2005). Zombie trouble: A propaedeutic on ideological subjectification and the unconscious. *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 91(2), 144–174.
- Hardy, C. (2004). Scaling up and bearing down in discourse analysis: Questions regarding textual agencies and their context. *Organization*, 11, 415–425.
- Harré, R. (1984). *Personal being: A theory for individual psychology*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Johnson, S. (1989). *Wildfire: Igniting the she/volution*. Albuquerque, NM: Wildfire.
- Johnson, S. (1991). *The ship that sailed into the living room: Sex and intimacy reconsidered*. Estancia, NM: Wildfire.
- Lauer, A. R. (2003). *Run Lola Run* at the dawn of postmodernity. *Studies in Media & Information Literacy Education*, 3(1). Retrieved November 28, 2006 from, <http://www.utpress.utoronto.ca/journal/ejournals/simile>
- Lefcourt, H. M. (1982). *Locus of control: Current trends in theory and research (2nd ed.)*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Lucaites, J. L. (2003, September). *Understanding “rhetorical agency.”* Paper presented at the meeting of the Alliance of Rhetoric Societies, Evanston, IL.
- Lucaites, J. L., & Condit, C. M. (1999). Epilogue: Contributions from rhetorical theory. In J. L. Lucaites, C. M. Condit, & S. Caudill (Eds.), *Contemporary rhetorical theory: A reader* (pp. 609–613). New York: Guilford.
- Mahmood, S. (2005). *Politics of piety: The Islamic revival and the feminist subject*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Marshall, I., & Zohar, D. (1997). *Who’s afraid of Schrödinger’s cat?: An A-to-Z guide to all the new science ideas you need to keep up with the new thinking*. New York: Quill/William Morrow.
- McDaniel, J. P. (2003, September). *Figuring agency... without finality*. Paper presented at the meeting of the Alliance of Rhetoric Societies, Evanston, IL.
- McPhee, R. D. (2004). Text, agency, and organization in the light of structuration theory. *Organization*, 11, 355–371.
- O’Sickey, I. M. (2002). Whatever Lola wants, Lola gets (or does she?): Time and desire in Tom Tykwer’s *Run Lola Run*. *Quarterly Review of Film & Video*, 19(2), 123–131.
- Potter, J. (1996). *Representing reality: Discourse, rhetoric and social construction*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Rodin, J. (1990). Control by any other name: Definitions, concepts, and processes. In J. Rodin, C. Schooler, & K. Schaie (Eds.), *Self-directedness: Cause and effects throughout the life course* (pp. 1–18). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Rorty, R. (1998). *Truth and progress: Volume 3: Philosophical papers*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Sapolsky, R. (2005, December). Sick of poverty. *Scientific American*, 293(6), 92–99.
- Seligman, M. E. P. (2002). *Authentic happiness*. New York: Free.

- Sewell, W. H., Jr. (1992). A theory of structure: Duality, agency, and transformation. *American Journal of Sociology*, *98*(1), 1–29.
- Shome, R., & Hegde, R. S. (2002). Postcolonial approaches to communication: Charting the terrain, engaging the intersections. *Communication Theory*, *12*, 249–270.
- Spivak, G. C. (1988a). Can the subaltern speak? In C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.), *Marxism and the interpretation of culture* (pp. 271–315). Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Spivak, G. C. (1988b). Subaltern studies: Deconstructing historiography. In R. Guha & G. C. Spivak (Eds.), *Selected subaltern studies* (pp. 3–36). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Tobias, J. (2004). Cinema, scored: Toward a comparative methodology for music in media. *Film Quarterly*, *57*(2), 26–36.
- Waggoner, C. E., & O'Brien Hallstein, D. L. (2001). Feminist ideologies meet fashionable bodies: Managing the agency/constraint conundrum. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, *21*(1), 26–46.
- Walker, M. U. (1997). Picking up pieces: Lives, stories, and integrity. In D. T. Meyers (Ed.), *Feminists rethink the self* (pp. 62–84). Boulder, CO: Westview.
- Wendell, S. (1990). Oppression and victimization: Choice and responsibility. *Hypatia*, *5*(3), 15–46.
- Whalen, T. (2000). The rules of the game: Tom Tykwer's *Lola Rennt*. *Film Quarterly*, *53*(3), 33–40.
- Whorf, B. L. (1956). *Language, thought, & reality: Selected writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf* (J. B. Carroll, Ed.). Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press.
- Wolf, F. A. (1981). *Taking the quantum leap: The new physics for nonscientists*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Wolf, N. (1993). *Fire with fire: The new female power and how it will change the 21st century*. London: Chatto & Windus.
- Wood, C. (2006). Sometimes you need the help of the universe: *Run Lola Run*. *Australian Screen Education*, *42*, 107–110.