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## IMAGES OF WOMEN IN FLUX: FASSBINDER'S HEROINES AND THE LANGUAGE OF COSTUMES

The relationship that symbolically manifests between the aesthetic systems of fashion and film, which are regarded as autonomous, can be deciphered based on the collaboration between Barbara Baum and Rainer Werner Fassbinder. Both systems propagate ideals of beauty and life designs—albeit in different ways—both are media for the staging of identities, both constantly remodel the human silhouette, blur the boundaries between organic and inorganic, illusion and reality, life and death. Most of all, however, they create fictitious bodies, since far apart from lending expression to the ‘true’ body, both systems of communication focus on the fascination with masquerade. A game in which traditional gender identities can be staged based on norms but reinterpreted, extended, or even dissolved as well. Physical norms and cultural codes can be affirmed or broken through by the interaction between the aesthetic practices of fashion and film. The game with seduction and transformation characteristically intersects in the movie costume. At the same time, fashion and film tell of the alienation and objectification of the female body, of its ‘becoming a commodity’ in consumer culture, of which several of those unforgettable heroines that Barbara Baum and Rainer Werner Fassbinder created in collaboration are exemplary.

The story of the Federal Republic of Germany from the war years to the economic miracle is told based on female figures that embody the cultural transformation with ambivalences and contradictions. With reference to his trilogy about postwar German society—*DIE EHE DER MARIA BRAUN* (The Marriage of Maria Braun, DE 1978), *LOLA* (DE 1981), and *DIE SEHNSUCHT DER VERONIKA VOSS* (Veronika Voss, DE 1982)—Georg Seeßlen wrote about the director’s search “for the father, for the woman, for the origin.”<sup>(4)</sup> In the process, the search for the woman is revealed in the body images that Barbara Baum substantially co-created through her costumes. Maria Braun, Lola, Veronika Voss: whether as a rubble woman in improvised clothes, a *Fräuleinwunder* in a pencil skirt, a worn-out diva in lamé, or a high-class prostitute in garter belt and corsage—they are all women that present images of changing femaleness on the stage of Germany’s postwar history. With the changes in fashion, the actress’s body is repeatedly transformed in keeping with the period—sometimes soberly modeled, other times sensuously enveloped, pronouncedly feminine, or provocatively exposed; her exchange value in the incipient consumer world is constantly staged. Yet the unfulfilled longing for an authentic life in the artificial is also always transported in the material shells of the protagonists, who slip into them in the same way they slip into the roles they are to ‘play’ in their lifeworlds.<sup>(5)</sup>

The textile metamorphoses of the female figures make reference to unmistakable role models that influenced an entire German generation. Thus in the fash-

*DIE SEHNSUCHT DER VERONIKA VOSS*,  
Rainer Werner Fassbinder and  
Rosel Zech.



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- 1 *DIE EHE DER MARIA BRAUN*. Hanna Schygulla and Rainer Werner Fassbinder in a shooting break.
- 2 *LILI MARLEEN*. Hanna Schygulla and Rainer Werner Fassbinder in a shooting break.
- 3 *LOLA*. Barbara Sukowa and Rainer Werner Fassbinder go through the scene.

(4) Georg Seeßlen, “Fassbinder revisited: LOLA,” *epd Film* 6 (1992), pp. 22–24. See also <http://www.filmzentrale.com/rezis/lolags.htm> (accessed February 2, 2015).

(5) Marisa Buovolo, “Frauenbilder im Wandel: Fassbinder und die Kostümbildnerin Barbara Baum,” *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, November 10, 2013, p. 23.

ion-historical body of images on which the costume designer drew, her subjective world of experience interfuses with a pragmatic paragon who exemplarily embodies film and fashion, as it were: the likewise controversial as well as admired 'diva of the nation,' Marlene Dietrich. It is no accident that Fassbinder's cinematic worlds are characterized by female performers. Baum's provocative, sometimes entertaining, other times even unsettling play with excessive costuming time and again makes reference to the iconic Dietrich and her diva identity. However, she is not the only fashion role model, since other impulses were also taken up in the design and staging of images of femaleness. The scintillating, pathos-filled costuming of German movie stars in the 1930s and '40s also clearly belongs to this system of reference. One name that has to be mentioned in this context is Zarah Leander, whose image had to be fundamentally renewed after 1945. Pivotal as well is the stylistic eccentricity of Hollywood actresses in the melodramas of the 1940s and '50s, which made the overwhelming quality of their emotions visible, indeed, almost palpable.<sup>(6)</sup>

The diversity of textile forms of expressions in cuts, colors, and lines consistently gives rise to multifaceted characters. Creative effort and the reinterpretation of quotes, set pieces, or models not only reconstructs a fashion era, but at the same time demonstrates the historical-cultural and iconic importance of the restaged clothing. Hence each of the actresses—whether Hanna Schygulla, Barbara Sukowa, or Rosel Zech—slips seamlessly into the identity that Baum's costumes specifically produce in an interplay between contemporary, cultural discourse and historicizing reconstruction.

According to Elfriede Jelinek, Hanna Schygulla is "like a silk scarf that someone threw up into the air, and while it is poised there images are projected onto it."<sup>(7)</sup>

Schygulla's transcending physicality assumes palpable contours in the ever-changing costumes of Effi Briest, Maria Braun, and Willie and becomes one with the character being portrayed. With this perspective, it is not the later star Hanna Schygulla that shifts into the spotlight of the reflection, but her fusion with the fictional character, which becomes the focal point of notions of femaleness in the cinematic staging with the aid of the language of costumes.



DIE EHE DER MARIA BRAUN.  
Hanna Schygulla.

## WIVES

The wives in Fassbinder's movies and in the textile language of Barbara Baum seem to have been predefined in their role already at the beginning. Hence they initially manifest a quite stable identity and constancy. However, the clear contours of their 'marital' silhouette, which are determined by social constraints, gradually dissolve in order to ultimately reveal them as being a mere reflection.

(6) Cf. Jane Gaines, "Kostüm und filmisches Erzählen: Wie Kleidung die Geschichte der Helden erzählt," in Gertrud Lehnert, ed., *Mode, Weiblichkeit und Modernität* (Dortmund: Edition Ebersbach, 1998), pp. 211-65.

(7) Elfriede Jelinek, "Kein verworfenes Gesicht (ein paar Notizen, ungeordnet, zu Hanna Schygulla)." <http://www.elfriedejelinek.com/> (accessed February 2, 2015).



FONTANE EFFI BRIEST.  
Shooting of the opening sequence.  
Rainer Werner Fassbinder with  
Hanna Schygulla, Barbara Baum  
and Liselotte Eder.

## EFFI BRIEST: BETWEEN ROMANTIC LACE AND AUSTERE CUTS

The costume designer enters Fassbinder's world for the first time in the staging of the heroine from *FONTANE EFFI BRIEST*. The director did not intend to make a mere movie version of the literary source, but rather a subjective narrative in images.

"I think that you should be able to tell by the finished film that it's a novel, and that the important thing about a novel is not that it tells a story, but how it tells it. Previous movie versions of *Effi Briest* exhibit very little from the period and from Fontane's view of this period. I find that wrong; it should always be palpable that it's a story once told by someone. How and why the story was told in such a way has to be conveyed by the film."<sup>(8)</sup>

The director and the costume designer developed characters in carefully nuanced black-and-white scenarios that feed on references to the Hollywood melodrama, the recurring paragon Marlene Dietrich, and what for Fassbinder is his constant, fundamental reference to Douglas Sirk's film sets,<sup>(9)</sup> and are commented on from off camera by the director himself—reading from Fontane's novel.

*FONTANE EFFI BRIEST* begins with a costume-historical reference to Josef von Sternberg's *THE SCARLET EMPRESS* (US 1934), when the very young Effi appears on a swing in a lace dress, its puff sleeves adorned with gathering and ruffles, her waist delicately emphasized by a ribbon with a bow, her hair coifed in loose curls. Effi learns from her mother (Liselotte Eder) that Baron von Innstetten (Wolfgang Schenck) asked for her hand in marriage. The alienated staging of a child's innocence and playfulness in this initial scene is clearly inspired by the eccentric performance of the thirty-three-year-old Marlene Dietrich in a flounced dress in the role of the fourteen-year-old Princess Sophia Augusta Frederica of Anhalt-Zerbst and future Catherine the Great. The real Sophia was married in 1745 to the Grand Prince Peter III, heir apparent of Empress Elizabeth I, out of political consideration and later became the notorious "scarlet empress."

In von Sternberg's production, which did not strive for a faithful reconstruction of historical facts but for a reinterpretation of the figure of Empress Catherine, in the beginning the draconic Russian ambassador Count Alexi calls for the young Princess Sophia Augusta in her parental home. Sophia is asked to come downstairs, comes in, literally dancing, in a

THE SCARLET EMPRESS.  
Marlene Dietrich  
(Catherine the Great).



(8) Rainer Werner Fassbinder on his film *FONTANE EFFI BRIEST*. From a conversation with Corinna Brocher. [http://ww2.fassbinderfoundation.de/de/texte\\_detail.php?id=24&textid=119](http://ww2.fassbinderfoundation.de/de/texte_detail.php?id=24&textid=119) (accessed January 2, 2015).

(9) In his legendary essay "Imitation of Life" from 1971, Fassbinder expressed his enthusiasm for the Hollywood melodramas of the 1950s and their director Douglas Sirk, who would later become his role model. Cf. Rainer Werner Fassbinder, "Imitation of Life," *Fernsehen und Film 2* (1971), pp. 8-13.



Irm Hermann (Johanna) and Hanna Schygulla.



fluttering dress with countless flounces, and unavoidably encounters the lustful eyes of the count. She returns his glance with the golden curls of the naïve girl (Sophia) and the retraced eyebrows of the seductress (Marlene Dietrich). The later frivolous, aggressive, cruel Catherine the Great already shines through the innocent, delightful princess in an almost parodistic way—for once she has arrived in the hell of the royal palace, Sophia has to develop her own strategies for survival in order to ultimately transform herself into the ruthless Empress Catherine through rigor and discipline.

The strict home of Baron von Innstetten in Fassbinder's movie resembles the dark royal palace through which the small and seemingly still fragile Sophia, always wearing light-colored clothing, initially moves. As the new lady of the house in the stately home of her husband, Effi is a constantly radiant phenomenon in darkness, yet she feels alone in this dismal house and is plagued by nightmares. The attendant Johanna (Irm Hermann) throws a dark shadow on the charisma of her personality from the outset: she seems to have emanated from Effi's bad dreams.

Barbara Baum masterfully designed Johanna as a Victorian angel in black. The wide puff sleeves at the shoulders come across as menacing wings, and her hair is pinned up in two skeins at the side that lend her the dark radiance of an austere Victorian woman. If we give full scope to the kaleidoscopic interplay between fashion and film and let fantasy images collide with media-related memories and fragments from film history, a wide range of associations arise: Isn't the nearly gruesome Johanna reminiscent of the similarly threatening image of the housekeeper Mrs. Danvers (Judith Anderson) in Alfred Hitchcock's *REBECCA* (US 1940)? In the movie version of the novel by Daphne du Maurier, the shy,



*REBECCA*. Joan Fontaine as second Mrs. de Winter, and Judith Anderson (Mrs. Danver).

unobtrusive companion (Joan Fontaine) marries the attractive and mysterious Maxim de Winter (Laurence Olivier), who is haunted by the memory of his deceased wife Rebecca. The marriage lends the previously nameless young woman a clearly defined identity: she is the 'new' lady of the house, Mrs. de Winter. However, she is constantly plagued by self-doubt and feels overwhelmed by Rebecca's invisible presence, who seems to still walk the enormous Manderley manor. The grim housekeeper, Mrs. Danvers, in the long, austere housecoat, who continues to morbidly cling to the deceased Rebecca, also unsettles and terrorizes her.

Hence it seems as if the fragile Effi merges with the fickle Sophia from *THE SCARLET EMPRESS* and the timid Mrs. de Winter from *REBECCA* to become a solitary notion of femaleness from the visual repertoire of the cinema. By doing so, Fassbinder uses a multilayered system of reference for the purpose of invoking the inevitability of the female destiny in the bourgeois marriage of a social novel from 1894/95, while Barbara Baum develops her independent textile language for the staging of female identity in Wilhelminian Germany at the turn of the 20th century based on cinematic and fashion-historical precursors. The prescribed role of the wife is presented to the girl on the verge of becoming a woman, who is still wearing innocent flounces, in a romantic dream out of tulle and organza: "It seems like a fairy tale to you and you wish to be a princess," Effi's mother promises her daughter. The costumes give a striking account of the destruction of this dream of becoming a princess, the traumatic entrance into matrimony, and repeatedly link her with von Sternberg's and Hitchcock's characters. Each of them is confronted with what for them is a foreign, obscure place—the scene of their marriage—and has to slip into a radically new skin in order to develop an individual survival strategy. On her way to becoming the powerful Catherine wearing a hussar uniform, Sophia has to leave her romantic notions behind, along with organza and chiffon, in order to ultimately assert herself in a dominant pelt. Mrs. de Winter eventually becomes a domesticated wife in an elegant ladies' suit, and Effi, trapped in the lace and ruffles of the representative spouse, will perish in precisely these.

After her marriage to the reserved Baron von Innstetten, twenty years her senior, Baum expertly introduces Effi into the playful fashion of the *belle époque* and thus into the social status of the bourgeois wife. The mounting variety of the cuts and the fashionable opulence of the fabrics entangle her in an increasingly dense web of constraints and forms. Fashion-historical etiquette and the attitude toward life of the German bourgeoisie at the turn of the 20th century are reflected in her varied wardrobe, the artfully pinned-up hairstyles, and the neck brooches. Her daily routine is accompanied by the wealth of clothing befitting her social status: morning dress, tea dress, visiting dress, evening gown, nightgown. The abundance of accessories—lace gloves, parasols, wide plume hats, elaborate lockets, fur collars, or shawls—complete the contemporary notion of decorative femaleness that Effi has to embody as a "delightful, sweet creature" and "darling little wife," as her husband calls her. However, the level of precise fashion-historical reconstruction also exposes flaws in the standardized façade of the fashion-conscious wife. Barbara Baum subtly weaves Effi's unfulfilled yearning for physical closeness and sensuousness, which will ultimately drive her to adultery, into her garments. Hence seemingly exotic patterns and cuts gradually appear besides high lace collars and elaborately adorned dresses and unmistakably point to her marked sense of fashion. As a matter of fact, oriental fabrics were a sign of colonial fashion in the Western world. As early as



Hanna Schygulla with Karlheinz Böhm (Wüllersdorf) and Wolfgang Schenck (Baron von Innstetten).

Hanna Schygulla  
and Ulli Lommel  
(Crampas).



the 18th century, the so-called *chinoiserie* in fashion and in preferences for eccentric fabrics as well as unusual color combinations demonstrated the constant longing for the 'foreign' that was perceptible at the turn of the 20th century. Since what was a bourgeois lady at the time, meant to represent the wealth of her husband, predestined for if not busying herself with the capricious world of fashion? Effi's sense of fashion trends is always subtly emphasized in her clothes. At the same time, the oriental details in her outfits symbolize something else as well. Thus the 'Chinaman's ghost' that tormented and frightened her in her new, gloomy home at the beginning of her marriage gradually experiences a reversal. Originally a sign of her fear and insecurity, it now becomes the expression of her desire, as her seemingly eccentric garments tellingly reveal. The yearning for the other, the foreign, the longed-for escape from the ordinary, the everyday, expresses itself in an increasingly palpable way in the Far Eastern finesses of her clothing, in a fabric with an asymmetrical pattern, in an inclined cut, or in an elegant fan decorated with exotic drawings.

However, the fact that what lies behind the fashion variety is ultimately the conflict between norm and norm violation is also demonstrated by the narrowly cut coats and capes that allow her a newly gained mobility in public, on the street, in the woods, and at the beach. Thus there is a new, future-oriented clothing aesthetic in the tight-fitting cut of her slimmed-down silhouette that contradicts, indeed nearly alienates the exaggerated romanticism of ribbons, frills, ruffles, and bows. It is as if Effi sets an odd 'disembodiment' against the excessive physical presence of representative femininity. And it is precisely therein, in the detailed staging of a fashion-historical surface that is subtly ruptured, that the modernity of her sensibility and at the same time the paradox in which she has to live as a wife is revealed: between static representation and dynamic forms of clothing, the repression of her desire beneath opulent garments and its appearance in exotic fabrics, and between her will to break out of social



norms and being imprisoned in them. Fassbinder succinctly puts this paradox in a nutshell in the description of 'his' Effi:

"Like me, Fontane has a view of the world that you can surely condemn: namely, that things are the way they are and that they are so difficult to change. Although you understand that you have to change them, at some point you abandon the wish to do so and just describe them. And that's what fascinates me so much about Fontane: that Fontane is someone who knows exactly what's wrong in the society he lives in and that also acknowledges him as a writer, yet he can't help but accept this society, whose form he has realized are wrong. And today, I or we do the same, more or less consciously."<sup>(10)</sup>

The contradiction that Fassbinder addresses and that Barbara Baum expresses in her costume design condenses in the multilayered figure of Effi: the constant oscillating between assimilation and rebellion.

## MARIA BRAUN: METAMORPHOSES OF A WIFE

Maria Braun, a woman whose story is set in the years between 1945 and 1954—between the end of the war and the Soccer World Cup in Switzerland—oscillates between a claim to a life of her own and the self-sacrificing role of wife. The images of femaleness that bespeak the *zeitgeist* intensify in Maria and her metamorphoses over the course of a decade.

She marries Hermann Braun during the war, battles her way through, and begins a relationship with the G.I. Bill after the purported death of her husband. After casting off the worn-out coat of the war widow, Maria has to work as a barmaid to make a living and on the black market buys the black dress of seduction that will be used multiple times later in the film. It is no coincidence that Fassbinder himself embodies the sinister merchant who tries to lend her a new identity. He conjures the desired dress out of his suitcase: "Black, size 38, short sleeves, low-cut. Wasn't easy to get." As if she were an accomplice, it is Maria's likewise widowed mother (Gisela Uhlen) who later alters the dress and fits the lustrous material of the *femme fatale* to her body. The days of romantic dreams made of tulle and organza are a thing of the past, because in times in which "it's a bad time for emotions," as Maria herself says in one scene, the female body becomes an object of exchange and display.

Maria's ascent in black satin to become the "Mata Hari of the economic miracle," as she self-ironically describes herself, is thereby settled. She carves out a career as the aide and lover of the textile manufacturer Oswald (Ivan Desny), but continues to hold onto her marriage—because her husband Hermann, presumed dead, who on his return had surprised her with her lover Bill, assumes the responsibility for the death of the GI, whom Maria struck dead in the heat of passion. He



DIE EHE DER MARIA BRAUN.  
Gisela Uhlen (Mother) and Anton  
Schirsner (Grandpa Berger).

goes to prison in her place, while she attempts to set up a future for them in the 'new' Germany. Her clothes become increasingly dignified, her suits more formfitting. In the period of reconstruction, along with her girlfriend Betti (Elisabeth Trissenaar) she one day totters

on stiletto heels and in a black pencil skirt and plaid cape jacket through the rubble of her former school. A thoroughly painful encounter with the ruins of the past for the elegant, apparently strong businesswoman, because behind high-quality fabrics and sophisticated cuts are melancholy and grief. At the end, Maria Braun, wearing a strapless satin corsage, stands in front of her husband, who has finally returned, and has to learn that she had been nothing more than an article of exchange for him and Oswald. Because under the condition that Hermann keep away from Maria until his death, Oswald had promised him half of his fortune.

Barbara Baum impressively stages Maria's transformations through her clothes in a way that is as emblematic as it is alienating. They mark all of the phases of her eponymous marriage: as a war widow, as a coveted and coveting *femme fatale*, as a *Fräuleinwunder*, and finally as a powerful businesswoman. At the same time, Maria's varying clothes document the fashion-historical development of an era that is conjured up by wearing ever-new material shells with the customary savvy. The slightly bell-shaped skirt with the sleek top replaced the angular, narrow silhouette of the wartime fashion, when German women enthusiastically altered their old clothes in keeping with the New Look from Paris despite the austerity measures. Hence the shoulder pads were removed, the skirts lengthened, and the appearance of simple suits was refined by means of ribbons, bows, or patch pockets. With the onset of the Adenauer era and the revival of once prestigious fashion houses, the new image of women was laid down under the banner of Christian Dior. Figure-hugging daytime dresses in taffeta, satin, or chiffon that varied extremely in terms of cut and finery and staged a very specific corporeality characterized the emerging society of the economic miracle. When sensually parading the changing shapes, cuts, and bold, almost indecent colors (the virulent yellow of a cut-away jacket that plays around the hips or the excessive red of a tight-fitting dress), Maria, her mother, and girlfriend Betti seem ostentatiously feminine in their physical presence and deeply vulnerable. The signs of consumer society have thus permanently inscribed themselves in their bodies.

Maria ⑥

7/25/38 Lösung: unter Schlafkissen Aushilf  
steht am Fenster - unter Kissen  
nimmt Tröster - holt das neue  
Kleid aus dem Schrank wie  
im 1. Akt

3/26/39 Das - Nacht - selb. Tag  
Maria steht die Zeit -  
hängt nachdenklich, kein  
Mantel an der Tür  
hat das selbste an, fordert  
die zwei Tausen auf, sagt  
sie hat keine, am Schrank - die  
hat sie nicht! - nimmt Mantel  
an!

3/29/40 Schlafkissen Maria - Nacht - selb. Tag -  
Maria legt ihr Kleid (rot) auf  
auf den Boden! unterste  
Ausgabe - Strumpf - 3H?  
Rückseite wie im 1. - Flanel  
schliefend - so schlief ich  
ein!



Script breakdown sheet  
and continuity polaroid.

Barbara Baum designed all of the costumes for the role of Maria after conducting intensive research.<sup>(11)</sup> Their subtle alienation causes them to develop an aesthetic autonomy as soon as Hanna Schygulla leans against or supports herself on furniture and her silhouette in the narrow, formfitting tailored suit with stiletto heels 'freezes' into a motionless pose. However, they come across less as authentic than as quoted. On Maria's silhouette, the change in fashion seems like a skillful quote out of one of the fashion journals of the time, for example from *Berlins Modenblatt*, the first issue of which appeared in October 1945, or from *Constanze*, which in 1949 reported on the first fashion show in Germany with what were referred to as Christian Dior's "perfect" models. The erotic promise associated with fashion of that period also manifests in the figure of Maria, who constantly radiates something mask-like and artificial. What held true for Douglas Sirk's melodramas, which inspired Fassbinder in many ways, also applies here: the actors permanently appeared to be performing behind glass, making them untouchable. And so there is also always something detached about Maria's fashion transformations when, for example at the end, she attempts to revive the long since discarded role of the bride in the presence of her returned husband. She slips into a classy, strapless white dress with a jacket that is quite obviously reminiscent of the once improvised, surely homemade dress that the soldier bride wore when her freshly consummated marriage already lay in ruins. Now, ten years later, Maria appears in opulent white attire with coral-red lips: as pretty as a picture—in the literal sense—and utterly vulnerable. Shortly before that she had lit a cigarette on the stove and let the gas continue to flow. In the final explosion, the sophisticated dress that so supplely plays around Maria's body exposes her guilty-innocent play with the boundaries of self-destruction.



Klaus Löwitsch (Hermann Braun) and Hanna Schygulla.

(11) Kristina Jaspers and Hans-Peter Reichmann, "Kostüm als Charakterdarstellung: Interview mit der Kostümbildnerin Barbara Baum," *Filmdienst* 3 (2006), pp. 53-55.

## FEMALE PERFORMERS

It is no coincidence that all three female figures—Willie/Lili Marleen, Lola, and Veronika Voss—experience their greatest moments on the stage in shimmering costumes, as their female identity in the worlds in which they move is determined by a number of role-plays. Voice, demeanor, pose, and above all the costume define their appearance. At the same time,

they always remain creatures who stage themselves, whose nature oscillates between light and shadow, and whose boundaries between immateriality and bodily excess repeatedly dissolve.

The rather untalented singer Willie (Hanna Schygulla) from *LILI MARLEEN* (DE 1980), who evolves into a celebrated star in Nazi Germany, constantly flutters between illusion and reality, while Lola, the girl who wants to make it to the top in the fat years of the postwar economic miracle, performs her passion as a high-class prostitute and pop singer on the stage of a luxury bordello. By contrast, the aging diva Veronika Voss eerily counters the palpable physicality of the ideal of female beauty in the 1950s with her contrived appearance.

The fluid identity of the three female figures is always emphasized by their frequent change of costumes whenever the shimmering stage costumes are interwoven with fashion-historical references. Based on models from the respective time, their bodies are modeled down to the smallest detail and at the same time metaphorically accentuated in the virtuoso handling of authentic materials and reproduced set pieces.

“Fassbinder’s worlds are uncompromisingly artificial. He presents quotes, references, newspaper clips, press photographs, hit songs, and—above all—other films. What is characteristic of

his work and thus evidence of his political astuteness and his sense of history is precisely this subtle but consistent awareness of the fact that representation also always evokes a space of media reality. This implies two things: Firstly, Fassbinder never presents people ‘just as they are’ but their self-representations, hence the images they have of themselves or those they want other people to have of them. Secondly, the social reality in Fassbinder’s movies always already bears features of a media reality, whereby the media are accorded a peculiar materiality that goes beyond serving the purpose of transparent communication.”<sup>(12)</sup>

From this perspective, Barbara Baum’s concept is congruent with Fassbinder’s aesthetic credo, since on the one hand the costumes are dramaturgically integrated into the narrative and on the other hand develop their own artistic quality as independently created depictions of the period and by means of stylistic variation. In an interview, the costume designer boiled it down to an essence: “Rainer always said: ‘We’re making a film about a past era from our point of view.’”<sup>(13)</sup>



LOLA. Barbara Sukowa (Lola) on the stage of *Villa Fink*.

## LILI MARLEEN: BETWEEN SEDUCTION AND DECEPTION

In *LILI MARLEEN*, a variation on the story of Cinderella unfolds in the shadow of the Third Reich. In 1938, the still unknown German singer Willie lives in Switzerland and dreams of an illustrious career. She travels to Germany with her lover, the Jewish composer Robert Mendelsohn (Giancarlo Giannini), and is subsequently prohibited from returning to Switzerland. This was brought about by Robert’s father (Mel Ferrer), who helps get Jews out of Nazi Germany through an escape organization and has opposed their relationship from the beginning. Even after Willie comes forward and agrees to collaborate with the resistance, he causes the separation of the two lovers. When the singer rises to become a celebrated icon of National Socialist entertainment culture with the song *Lili Marleen* and is forced to leave Robert, the two time and again come together for passionate encounters, despite the fatal circumstances. However, their love ultimately remains unfulfilled.

Like for Maria Braun, the metamorphoses that Willie experiences over the course of the movie demonstrate an entire panorama of cultural images of femaleness. In the beginning she is still the naïve, sweet German girl: the floral, sleeveless dress that she wears with casual ease during a rendezvous with her lover Robert flatters her body and highlights her legs. The clunky shoes and the white ankle socks make reference to a time in which silk stockings were in short supply and young women began to combine massive plateau soles and chunky heels with white ankle socks—a fashion trend that would come to be considered almost ‘subversive,’ since it placed adult women in the proximity of small girls. In order to relativize the undesirable trend, *Vogue*, which had always shaped style in the Western world, even recommended barely visible footlets, which were intended to take the place of the unladylike little socks.<sup>(14)</sup> However, the idea was never consistently implemented, and the ankle socks persisted in the female fashion repertoire of the Third Reich as nonconformist and playful self-staging, which was meant to suppress the permanent threat in everyday life. Hence in Willie’s case as well, they underscore the character of an innocent and perky fantasy figure—almost as if she had arisen out of a fairy tale.

However, this fairy-tale quality vanishes during her first appearance as a starlet in a Swiss bar. Willie is now wearing nylon stockings, and her deeply slit swing dress openly puts her legs on display. With frivolous naiveté, piled-up hair and red lips she demonstrates the exchangeability of a Hollywood pin-up girl in her number as a bar singer and tap dancer. Does this scene not also recall Marilyn Monroe wearing her white dress and standing over the subway grate, trying in vain to tame her billowing skirt? When, right after that, Willie dances with the future SS officer Henkel (Karl-Heinz von Hassel), she continues to play the sweet girl, allows a glimpse down her neckline without



LILI MARLEEN. Hanna Schygulla. Continuity polaroid.

(12) Thomas Elsaesser, *Rainer Werner Fassbinder*, 2nd exp. ed. (Berlin: Bertz + Fischer, 2012), pp. 30–31.

(13) Jaspers and Reichmann 2006 (see note 11), p. 54.

(14) Cf. Ingrid Loschek, *Mode im 20. Jahrhundert: Eine Kulturgeschichte unserer Zeit* (Munich: Bruckmann, 1995), pp. 154–55.



Karin Baal, Hanna Schygulla and Giancarlo Giannini. Continuity polaroid.

feeling ashamed, flirts nonchalantly, and radiates innocent sex appeal with her wide smile. Yet this role intermingles with that of the enamored opponent of the regime when, a short time later, in her sharply cut gabardine trench coat she attempts to return to Zurich with Robert. Her application to enter the country is rejected, resulting in the fatal separation of the two lovers. The ironic allusions to the persecuted couple in Michael Curtiz's *CASABLANCA* (US 1942) are unmistakable.

It is possible that the pink sweater that stands out under her trench coat makes reference to her 'real' identity behind the mask, namely to the innocent Cinderella of the early years who desires nothing more eagerly than to become famous, and is truly in love with Robert?

A subtle trace of the naïve girl becomes apparent during her first appearance at the *Alter Simpl* in Munich—her debut as Lili Marleen. The stage costume in sugary pink is formfitting, the satin fabric shines and attracts the attention of everyone in the audience, while her silhouette with the refined cut of the sleeves is perfectly modeled. Black stockings sensuously cover her legs, which are accentuated by high heels, whereas her face is partially shrouded by a

black veil—it is no accident that any number of ambivalences are inherent in this outfit as well as in her performance as a cabaret singer. The 'other' Willie, the pure, the private Willie who loves passionately, talks to Robert on the phone shortly before her appearance and naïvely, cloyingly begs him to remain faithful to her without noticing that the whole audience is listening to her conversation. Yet the innocence of the lover that she shows here is long since gone at this point, since shortly before that, while visiting the Nazi officer Henkel, who after all got her the job at the *Alter Simpl*, in his hotel room, she had already rehearsed the mundane elegance of the *femme fatale* and the game of seduction that she confidently showcases in her getup as a singer. As a recurring motif of Fassbinder's heroines, Willie also has to employ 'female' survival strategies in this changing world and become involved in the usual 'exchange relationship.'

After her forced return to Germany, she remembers Henkel, who in Switzerland was very fond of her. Henkel has since become Goebbels's confidant in Munich. In a symphony of red and black, she stands in front of his hotel room and presents all of the trappings out of the repertoire of a dangerous beauty in an American *film noir* from the 1940s. On closer inspection, her sensuous, elegant, partially transparent outfit reveals itself to be a red, low-cut slip that is covered with a net-like, sheer black garment and whose dramaturgical meaning can be interpreted as highly ambivalent. Because as an irresistible *vamp*, Willie lures Henkel into her net, yet has she not herself already stepped right into the trap of the National Socialist regime? The costumes seem to have been designed in such a way as to subtly reflect Fassbinder's recurring motif of being trapped. And the fashionable hat with a veil, the prominent rhinestones and flower appliqués, the gently undulating hair, and



the ruby-red lips simultaneously expose and obscure Willie, with the result that the mask of the *femme fatale* remains ambiguous: is she the seductress or the seduced woman?

Hence when Fassbinder stages German history as a melodrama in *LILI MARLEEN*, lays bare the mechanisms in the dream factory of the National Socialist ideology, and exposes Willie as an artificial figure fabricated by propaganda, then it is the costumes designed by Barbara Baum that visually mark the stages of this construction process and develop an independent discourse on the star as an ambiguous figure between seduction and deception.

Willie is progressively transformed; she entangles herself more and more tightly in the kitsch of the regime. She ultimately allows herself to be seduced by the image of the celebrated singer that she—wearing sleek silk velvet—narcissistically beholds in the mirror.

During her first major appearance on the official 'Nazi stage' of the Sportpalast, Baum draws on a cultural repertoire (of symbols) in which fashion-related memories of UFA screen stars abounding with pathos are merged with the glamour of the Hollywood icons of the Golden Era. Thus in her overall getup, Willie comes across as a remake of the singer Hanna Holberg played by Zarah Leander from Rolf Hansen's *DIE GROSSE LIEBE* (The Great Love, DE 1941/42), in which the controversial idol embodied a revue singer who was as colorful as she was self-sacrificing. Willie sings her *Lili Marleen* in the middle of a monumental set in a



Hanna Schygulla. Stage dresses: pink satin dress for the *Alter Simpl*, and the transparent black-red robe for SS officer Henkel. Production stills.

sparkling revue costume, whose light blue, shimmery sequined fabric caresses her figure, bares her shoulders and stomach, but also shifts her into the proximity of Hollywood goddesses.

And was Zarah Leander also not meant to be established in the entertainment movies of the Third Reich as a Garbo-like star? And was she, too, not meant to embody 'another' figure of longing on the movie screen that would supersede the fascination with the objectionable Hollywood divas and herself occupy the resulting vacancy?<sup>(15)</sup> By using

authentic historical materials, Barbara Baum incorporates Willie's contradictory entrapment as Lili Marleen in the net of National Socialist propaganda in her stage costumes and hence causes (film) reality and fiction to collide. As Willie, Hanna Schygulla slips into the authentic clothes of icons of the silver screen during the Third Reich and exemplarily demonstrates the transfer between past and present that Fassbinder aspired to on a costume-historical level:

"I bought all of the fabrics that were to be used for the film costumes of the UFA stars in Nazi cinema and were sold by the Babelsberg studios in the 1970s for 5,000 deutsche marks and used them for making most of Lili Marleen's costumes." (Barbara Baum)

The costumes therefore completely corresponded to Fassbinder's vision of revealing the contradictions between the singer Willie and her persona Lili Marleen, her progressive descent into the theatrics of UFA cinema, and her merging with the role as a Nazi icon. At the same time, however, the ambivalence inherent in her character is countered by elements of distancing herself from the constructed diva image. The ambiguity of the staged body of the star becomes visible through the creative, indeed uncon-

ventional handling of historical materials and their variations. In doing so, the 'obscuring transparency' that is transported by means of the sheer fabrics symbolizes the protagonist's play with reality and illusion—for instance in a hat with veil that conceals half of her face, in long sleeves made of sheer tulle, or in transparent gloves made of fine lace. However, this also evokes the unmistakable role model Marlene Dietrich as an ambiguous diva, as after all, she was the markedly feminine cabaret singer from Josef von Sternberg's *DER BLAUE ENGEL* (The Blue Angel, DE 1929/30), who in Hollywood was refigured as a highly artificial beauty, and then again later as the female "soldier" who, alongside the Americans, sang for the boys in uniforms that were tailor-made to perfectly fit her body: "She uses the pre-designed role to make it into something unique, radically insisting on a performance that conflates the imaginary with the real."<sup>(16)</sup>

In this context, let us now approach an emblematic piece of clothing, the top hat, which in the course of the Western history of culture and fashion was time and again invoked in its symbolism. As a subversive accessory of the historic dandy George Bryan 'Beau' Brummell, who wore it in early-19th-century England along with a tie, waistcoat, ankle-



Reference to Marlene Dietrich's performance in Josef von Sternberg's *Morocco*.

length coat, and highly polished riding boots, the top hat became a distinctive feature of the bourgeoisie.<sup>(17)</sup> However, it was radically recoded in the 1920s, the era of the 'New Woman' and the "gender confusion," as it advanced to become a key prop in the complexity of standardized gender images. On the stages of the cabarets in Berlin as well as in lesbian-gay subcultures, it belongs to the permanent clothing repertoire of those female artists, dancers, and showgirls who propagated alternative lifestyles. Another of Willie's important appearances, who, in a top hat, sings for German soldiers on the eastern front, therefore also recalls Dietrich's role as the nightclub singer Amy Holly in von Sternberg's *Morocco* (US 1930), who in a snug tailcoat and a top hat and smoking a cigarette makes an appearance in front of a boisterous, whistling, nearly menacingly moaning audience that is at once cool and seductive. The almost oversized gold bow hanging around Willie's neck also makes a connection with the historical space of the cabaret as a stage for the cross-dressing movement. The front-slit dress made of black, shiny satin with a sophisticated train is pure staging: Willie is merely playing the role of Lili Marleen in the service of National Socialist propaganda. However, what it conceals is the secret opponent of the regime, because it is in precisely the costume in this scene that she is hiding the film footage by Polish partisans about the concentration camps, which she wants to smuggle out of Germany to Switzerland. Is it therefore only Willie trying to preserve herself behind the disguise and the illusion of the spectacle who is hiding behind the façade of the pathos-filled diva Lili Marleen?

Hanna Schygulla.  
Photo from the fitting.



(17) Erika Thiel, *Geschichte des Kostüms: Die europäische Mode von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Berlin: Henschel, 2004), pp. 303ff.



Hanna Schygulla in her stage dress for a performance at the Sportpalast. Continuity polaroid.

(15) Cf. Claudia Lenssen, "Zarah Leander: Operation Zarah," in id., *Blaue Augen, blauer Fleck: Kino im Wandel von der Diva zum Girlie*, exh. cat. Filmmuseum Potsdam (Berlin: Parthas, 1997), pp. 11-47.

(16) Elisabeth Bronfen, "A Diva's War: Marlene Dietrich's Glamorous Female Soldier." <http://www.bronfen.info/a-diva-s-war-marlene-dietrich-s-glamorous-female-soldier> (accessed February 2, 2015).





This question concerning the artistic self-image and search for a truth behind the staging, which pervades Fassbinder's oeuvre, is repeatedly framed by way of the language of the costumes—yet never explicitly answered, since whereas veils, hats, gloves, and figure-flattering silk transport pure glamour via the diva's body, they also convey ambiguity and deception. A clothing repertoire that time and again readily demonstrates its reverence for the role model Marlene Dietrich, and addresses the play with masquerade, eroticism, and the entanglement of reality and staged representation by way of Willie. In a scene that is important on a narrative level, Willie, now a celebrated star, is surrounded by fans as she leaves the theater. Smiling, she gives autographs, looks like a Hollywood diva in her silver fur collar and prominent turban, her jewelry gaudy, her gaze nearly disconnected, her fingernails painted a deep red. She now signs her name as Lili Marleen, whereby the woman being portrayed and the woman portraying her seem to have become one. Or not? It is precisely the turban, which strikingly characterizes her appearance in this scene, that remains an ambiguous symbol in her staging. In the 1930s and '40s a fashionable, almost indispensable accessory for any star of the silver screen, it now causes Willie to shine in a supernatural aura. Greta Garbo wore different versions of a turban as a recurring element of the heroines she embodied and as a sign of mysterious exoticism as well as cool eroticism—or perhaps primarily as a mask? For Garbo, whom the costume designer Adrian had stylized as a "goddess" soon distanced herself from her cleverly staged artificial figure with plain men's suits and sturdy shoes. Thus perhaps Willie, too, oscillates between closeness and distance to Lili Marleen, herself works on her public image, but also lets it be worked on.

Giancarlo Giannini and Hanna Schygulla during a shooting break.

Hanna Schygulla and Giancarlo Giannini wearing gabardine trenchcoats. Continuity polaroids.

Other-wordly: The final performance at Sportpalast. Hanna Schygulla in the silver lamé dress.



Greta Garbo in *MATA HARI*.

After the once celebrated singer is banned from performing, arrested, and finally rehabilitated, it is again the virtuosity of the costume that coherently stages her in her final appearance. She is to perform in front of an audience for the last time. She looks luxurious, auratic, almost *other-worldly* in a dress made of silver lamé that makes one forget her physical, hence mortal substance beneath it, and merely holds on to the fictional stage identity of the restored star. The bodily contours of Lili Marleen seem to dissolve in a kind of metallic shell; even her hair completely disappears under the turban. When she trips, she holds on to the train of her dress only and starts to sing. Lili Marleen has now definitely become a discarnate symbol.

However, there is still that final scene in the movie that brings it to a logical conclusion also in terms of the costume dramaturgy. After the end of the war, the Willie of old, who has now definitely cast off the eccentric shell of the diva and is again wearing her trench coat from back then, attends a concert by Robert—who has meanwhile become a famous conductor—and learns that he is married. She frantically leaves the theater. Thus the young woman in gabardine, who is now ultimately confronted with the devastation of her great love, stands in the melodramatic tradition of a Hollywood heroine. The truth of Lili Marleen is not to be found in the reconstruction of historical facts, but rather in the melodramatic “material” of her figure and its oscillation between illusion and subversion.

Barbara Sukowa in her *Capri-Fischer* dress during a shooting break.



### LOLA: CLOTHES AS DISGUISE

Yet another female performer, and yet another—in the literal sense—multilayered costume: When Lola (Barbara Sukowa) sings her legendary excessive interpretive version of the 1940s and '50s hit song *Capri-Fischer* (Fishermen of Capri), a kind of train that gradually opens out when she extends her arms upward forms from the full petticoat of the stage dress that plays around her. They are the fishing nets from Capri being sung about, here in black tulle and golden sequins, that evoke the yearning for untroubled times. Or do they conceal a reference to Lola's connection with the two other performers Willie and Veronika Voss, who will be introduced below? In the era of calf-long, wide swirling skirts and gently rounded shoulders, the train seems completely passé. Yet its use in *LOLA* is surely no accident. In terms of the history of fashion and culture, it stands for the crossing-over of dominance and submission, whose contrariness Willie, Lola, and Veronika constantly blur in the staging of their bodies. Was the train at one time



Colorful hustle and bustle at the *Villa Fink*: Lola playing the role of the cabaret singer. Udo Kier (Waiter 2), Barbara Sukowa, Raúl Gimenez (Waiter 1), Elisabeth Volkmann (Gigi).

not one of the most important regalia of the power of kings and queens, the textile ‘extension’ of their god-given dominance symbolized in their stately robes?<sup>(18)</sup> However, as the power of the monarchy began to wane and the young tailor Charles Frederick Worth designed a particularly sumptuous train, which aroused general and not just monarchical interest at the World's Fair in Paris in 1855, it was no longer regarded as an exclusive symbol of royal distinction. It now represented a purely decorative element on the bodies of the various dazzling women who donned one.<sup>(19)</sup> The once majestic queens were superseded by new identification figures: Glamorous stars from the opera and theater and highly coveted courtesans occupied their place as new objects of desire. Endued with a train, they were now the ones who radiated power.

As a celebrated fashion designer, Worth, the founder of *haute couture*, was always available to give advice to his female clients, and he made no distinction among them, as he was

(18) *Ibid.*, p. 109.

(19) Cf. Juliane Vogel, “Die doppelte Haut: Die Moden der Kaiserinnen im 19. Jahrhundert,” in Regina Schulte, ed., *Der Körper der Königin: Geschlecht und Herrschaft in der höfischen Welt seit 1500* (Frankfurt am Main and New York: Campus, 2002), pp. 221–22.



less concerned with glamorously shaping a political body than with lending the women who wore his creations a unique textile radiance. Besides upper-class women and aristocrats, courtesans, who occupied their place at the side of powerful men with originality and their own style and overtly demonstrated their extravagant lifestyle by means of excessively luxurious dresses, also patronized Worth's fashion boutique, which he opened in Paris in 1857. The infamous representatives of the elegant yet disreputable *demimonde* appeared at balls, concerts, and theater performances in shimmering ball or evening gowns made of precious tulle or silk, with sleeves and collars adorned with the finest lace, wide hats with bizarre feathers, red lips, and—naturally—a long train. They became ambassadors of fashion, emulated by their 'respectable' female competitors, and as trendsetters brought about the suspension of the prevailing comparison of 'decent' and 'indecent women.'<sup>(20)</sup>

Lola also basically lives as a modern courtesan in a dazzling *demimonde*, the high-class bordello in a small German town in the 1950s that is regularly frequented by the married and corrupt representatives of local power—building tycoon Schuckert (Mario Adorf) and mayor Völker (Hark Bohm). On the stage of the bordello, which is brightly illuminated in colors ranging from a sensuous red to a mysterious blue, the women, who blatantly flaunt their bodies in costume-like, sexy lingerie, resemble the 'masked' wives: billowing hips in crude petticoats, gaudy necklines in push-up bras, and sheer negligees surround their voluptuous bodies. The blond, harsh beauty Lola, Schuckert's lover, does everything to become a member of the town's respectable high society. All of the other women romping about in the bordello wearing prissy aprons on their naked bodies and serving ordinary sparkling wine to their customers like devoted wives, likewise want to one day belong to it. When in terms of dramaturgy Fassbinder stages the economic miracle as a farce in *LOLA*, then the frivolous, occasionally exaggeratedly burlesque-like style of the costumes ironizes the image of 'super-femaleness' that characterized the fashion of that decade. Opulent fabrics and starched petticoats, full breasts and slender waists molded the women into visually appealing 'presents' just waiting to be 'unwrapped,' because the eroticism of the lingerie, whose imaginative names themselves



*The Day the Rains Came*. Lola playing the role of the seductive siren in her red sequined dress.



Barbara Sukowa in the white organdy dress during a shooting break.

sounded like a propitious promise, always shimmered below the attractive surface. Corsets, cleavage bras, and lace panties were called *Romance* or *Merry Widow* and caused the otherwise socially legitimized opposition between wife and whore to disappear in a phantasmagoria of flesh under the prominent opulence of the New Look.

Lola's identity in the movie is built on different roles that are repeatedly structured by means of new costumes and are filled with her tremendous vitality and physical presence. There is surely no other Lola behind the performer's mask who, as in Willie's case, falls for the seduction of her own reflection. Lola is mask, acting, pose: sometimes a master prostitute, other times a stage hog or a woman of the world. Here, costumes, too, are always sensual and excessive, anarchist and theatrical, multifaceted and ambiguous. The singer Lola appears on stage wearing a red mermaid dress. The glitter dust and sequins cause her to sparkle as she sings, full of expression, *The Day the Rains Came*; the corseted décolletage and the black garter belt signal her service as a whore, and an elegant, formfitting tailored suit with prominent sleeves trimmed with white fox fur represents the uniform of the efficient businesswoman. The lady-like encounters the animal-like, elegance is accompanied by dominance. Full, swashing, and innocent flared skirts flatter her figure during a walk with the new building department head von Bohm (Armin Mueller-Stahl), the only man in town who is "simply not corrupt" and who initially considers her to be a respectable woman and still ignores her other identity. They sing together in the village church, Lola's hands enveloped in white lace gloves. Tears even sparkle behind the white veil of the small toque, the women's hat without a brim on her pinned-up hair. Is she by any chance play-

ing the emotional teenager in love, or are they real tears?

When the tantalizing Lola sings her *Capri-Fischer* in front of the customary bordello visitors and suddenly catches sight of von Bohm in the audience, her performance on the stage becomes characterized by excess. And it is once more a stage costume that virtually speaks for itself that envelops her body: a strapless, low-cut dress made of black tulle with golden sequins and a sheer bolero, complete with shimmering elbow-length gloves. Von Bohm,



Costume sketch.

Lola  
 B44/198 Villa 3 - Jedecke Andekunst  
 + Schuckert Lola ist Günstige  
 die nicht der Sel. verdrückt  
 sagt das & für 200 zahlte! Schuckert!  
 + Esslin gibt 100.- für Lola!  
 Lola tritt auf schreit (so wie auch  
 Schuckert lix  
 Lola läßt sich in Strahl vor  
 Spiegel fallen schlägt Hände vor  
 Kopf!  
 (deshalb sieht Esslin von Dolm  
 in den Puff holen!!)  
 B44/104 Schuckert Selbu  
 Lola tritt auf (manne Pointe  
 ihre sagt sie zu von Dolm!!)  
 sehr verführerisch - lange Handschuhe  
 hängt an er nicht!  
 aggressiver selbstzerstörerischer wieder  
 B44/104 ja in rosa!!

Lola Salon cont'd  
 Lola steht halbnackt auf  
 Schuckerts Tisch -  
 zerschmettert sie, wirft sie  
 Fetzen ins Publikum  
 2 x oder 3 x  
 B50/1114 gegen Schuckert  
 Lola + Esslin + Gertrude!  
 Hoppe Hoppe Pater Speck!  
 E. Esslin darf & noch Kunde  
 geht!  
 (Entl. Haus Lola!!)  
 B55/1124 Villa Jedecke Lola Andekunst  
 Esslin in Dunkelheit  
 H. sagt ihm, wer sie ist und er  
 will sie haben!  
 kein Schuckert Selbu!!

Script breakdown for the Capri Fischer scene:  
 "B44/104 cont'd Salon Lola appears [...] very seductive - long gloves, begins to sing!! aggressive self-destructive savage strip guests frantic!!"

"Lola Salon cont'd - Lola stands up half-naked on Schuckert's table - tears her dress, throws the rags into the audience 2 x or 3 x"  
 Baum refers here to the necessary multiples (two or three), because the dress will get damaged shooting the scene.

who learns her true identity in this way, leaves the establishment, while Lola, after briefly hesitating, continues to sing. She ultimately tears up the different layers of her skirt in an increasingly aggressive, truculent way, rabidly lets down her hair, smears her lipstick in a defiant gesture, and wildly rolls her head while the hit melody recedes more and more into the background.

The focus of the unnerving performance is her body dressed in line with the fashion-related ideal of femininity of the period. In the beginning, she presents it covered and adorned, her hair sensuously pinned-up, her make-up geared to the outfit. She eventually leaves the stage in corset and garter belt on Schuckert's shoulders, her hair disheveled, her whole body characterized by radical disorder. Her excessive gesture of self-exposure lays bare the hypocrisy of postwar German society, which ultimately also finds expression in her wedding dress—somewhat more subtly nuanced—for Lola marries von Bohm, who in the end



Lola plays the businesswoman in an elegant costume. Lighting test.

Mission accomplished. Lola marries von Bohm, all in white.

yields to the town's prevailing laws. At his side, she can finally present as the respectable lady she always longed to be. However, at the same time she concludes another lucrative deal: With the support of Schuckert, who continues to be her best client, she advances to become a bordello owner. Lola meets up with him directly after the wedding ceremony, still wearing her asymmetrical-length dress made of luminously white satin, which ironically features a small train and is supplemented by a veil—a sophisticated variation of her stage costumes, which presents whore and lady in one person. Lola remains the mistress of the situation, even in her final clothes-cum-disguise.

## VERONIKA VOSS: STAGING IMMATERIALITY

The search for the truth in the artificial, the wish to relate the authentic with the help of art and construction: Fassbinder repeatedly addressed this motif in his female figures, and Barbara Baum always trenchantly rendered it visible on the actresses' bodies in the language of costumes with her own variations, dissolutions, and surprise effects. Veronika Voss, a one-time movie star, is characterized as virtually incorporeal in volatile apparel. Whereas *LILI MARLEEN* was based on the autobiography of Lale Andersen—the controversial interpreter of the legendary song who successfully performed as a singer after the war—*DIE SEHNSUCHT DER VERONIKA VOSS* was based on the biography of Sybille Schmitz. Once a celebrated UFA star, after the war she, too, tried to tie into her earlier success, yet her attempts were in vain, and she ultimately committed suicide.

At the beginning, Veronika Voss (Rosel Zech) is sitting in a movie theater watching a film in which she had played the lead character: a drug-dependent woman who liberates herself from her addiction in the end. In her fantasies, the film figure on the screen merges with the seductive diva in a negligee from past, happier days who, wearing ruffles and lace, was idolized by her husband (Armin Mueller-Stahl). Now, in reality, she is sitting in the dark theater, forgotten, anonymous, and hidden under a plain raincoat. And in fact, after leaving the movie theater and returning to reality, the continuation of the black and white seems to confirm the odd immateriality of her person. Her chin-length, light-blond hair, which seems to shine in the darkness; her shaven eyebrows drawn in with kohl; and the darkly painted lips on her pale face cause Veronika Voss to manifest as a phantasm on her first encounter with the melancholy Robert Krohn (Hilmar Thate), who had also been in the theater and had recognized her. She resembles a hybrid creature between death and life, fiction and reality, past and present.

When she meets Krohn a second time, she has removed her raincoat and embodies all of the roles of her screen past with bravura in an upscale coffeehouse in Munich: the mysterious female, the seductress, the inscrutably dangerous woman. Her clothing now exudes mundane, old-fashioned elegance; the fabrics are fluid, gently play around a body that always seems to lack contours and stands in stark contrast to the marked femininity of the female players who surround her: skin-tight blouses around ample, swelling breasts and round hips in narrowly cut pencil skirts strikingly present 'women without secrets' in line with the fashion of the 1950s.

As a survivor from a lost era of film, Barbara Baum has her slip into a costume that is reminiscent of the undead of cinematic history par excellence. Unsettling and somber, Veronika unexpectedly stands outside the door of Robert and his girlfriend Henriette (Cornelia Froboess) wearing a sophisticated, velvety double-faced cape that evokes the iconography of Count Dracula as a past screen star. At the same time, however, she also revives the fashionable silhouette of the 1940s, which preferred softly falling shapes that subtly flattered the female body. The shape, color, and material of Veronika's outfit clearly stray from the



*DIE SEHNSUCHT DER VERONIKA VOSS*.  
Rosel Zech as Veronika Voss,  
wearing the double-faced cape.



Rosel Zech and  
Rainer Werner Fassbinder  
on the set.



The uncanny Dr. Katz  
(Annemarie Düringer).

prevailing fashion norm of the 1950s, which craved the carnal. She therefore seems to be a deviant figure that negates physical materiality. The cape reflects this dualism, the oscillation between aggressiveness and vulnerability, dominance and self-destruction. Veronika, now playing the mysterious woman, lures the eager Krohn, possibly fascinated by her bold radiance, into her net. She repeats the same ritualized scene of seduction on the stage of her abandoned villa that had always been played out the same way between film and reality, set and marital intimacy, with her former husband and director. Veronika briefly disappears into the darkness while Robert lights the candles on heavy candelabra, and then appears as an inaccessible vamp. The contours of her body shine through the long, sheer negligee; very bright light blurs her silhouette, dissolves her. The camera meanwhile remains at a distance, and Veronika seems sensual, auratic, yet nevertheless radiates a strange coldness. The words "When an actress plays a woman who wants a man to like her, she of course tries to be all women in one" emerge from her memory—her husband had already heard them countless times. Seducing, even beyond the screen, also means 'playing,' dissolving oneself and becoming a phantasm. Diaphanous organza, shiny satin, and netlike fabric from the costume collection of a past film era are therefore also used in the seduction scene with Robert, although the viewer is barred from seeing it. In the subsequent scene, all that is presented is Veronika's naked body wrapped in sheets. Any disguise has disappeared; all that is left to see is solely her wounded body, in which self-destruction and alienation are inscribed. The magic out of light and shadow created by her attractive shell has cruelly vanished. It may be that the morphine-dependent Veronika sees her hero and rescuer in the average man Robert, which is why she

seduces him like in one of her earlier movies. But the plan proves to be unsuccessful. She remains trapped in the hands of the neurologist Dr. Katz (Annemarie Düringer), who continues to sell her morphine. Her rescuer will fail, Veronika will perish.

Theatrics and excess, otherness and sensual self-staging ultimately intensify in Veronika's triumphant death and are disturbingly announced in a dress, which in turn is full of quotes and links her with emblematic models. Veronika now appears before all of the people who sought to suppress the demons of the past and demonstrate their power with the symbols of feigned wealth. In opulent evening gowns, with heavy necklaces and ringed fingers they embody nothing other than posh wolves wearing mink. The uncanny Dr. Katz, her perfidious assistant (Doris Schade), and her accomplice Dr. Edel (Erik Schumann) look contentedly at Veronika, whose "resurrection" as a diva of old they decided collectively—a last grand appear-

ance before she permanently disappears, since Katz has cold-bloodedly planned Veronika's suicide for the following day. In a sensuous garment made of darkly shimmering lamé, she performs, stylistically confident, the illusion of seduction a final time. As an unsettling reminiscence of the national myths of the silver screen Marlene Dietrich and Zarah Leander, Veronika once more becomes the hypnotizing *femme fatale* of Nazi cinema. Wearing a high-necked, flowing dress with a train, she asserts herself as a "specialist of cold ecstasy"<sup>(21)</sup> one last time and ultimately still embodies an illusion, because the fabric simultaneously constitutes both her false diva identity as well as its fading-away. Like Willie in her lamé dress, Veronika Voss also holds her own as a paradigm of that diva whose compulsive quest for endless beauty is inextricably linked with impermanence and self-destruction.



Resurrection and  
requiem: Rosel Zech  
in her darkly  
shimmering gold  
lamé dress.

(21) Cf. Knut Hickethier "Spezialistinnen der kalten Ekstase: Zarah Leander und Magdalena Montezuma," in Konstanze Görres-Ohde and Andreas Stuhlmann, eds., *Reflexionen in Texten—Bilder vom Menschen: Für Horst Ohde (Beiträge zur Medienästhetik und Mediengeschichte 5)* (Hamburg: LIT, 1997), pp. 31–48.

(22) Cf. Elisabeth Bronfen and Barbara Straumann, *Divas: Eine Geschichte der Bewunderung* (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 2002), pp. 45ff.

## STAGING OF MASCULINITY: (ANTI-)HEROES, HUSBANDS, SOLDIERS

Although it seems as if the textile language of femaleness dominates in Barbara Baum's oeuvre, the male figures are defined with the same artistic intuition by means of a multifaceted fashion vocabulary. This likewise feeds on the diversity of movie and fashion history and creates multiple expressions of maleness in various dramaturgical contexts. Like the female figures, the male figures are assigned to social role patterns through the language of their costumes. They are primarily husbands and soldiers, but also outsiders who position themselves beyond socially standardized male role models. Exemplary for this are Rainer Werner Fassbinder's cameo appearances, which Baum says she outfitted with a great deal of love and pleasure and which are full of film-historical quotes and fashion allusions. In *DIE EHE DER MARIA BRAUN*, the director plays the part of a black market peddler who supplies Maria with a black satin dress. The rebel's leather biker jacket *à la* Marlon Brando and the faded jeans that defined the body of the outsider as an obvious indication of the proletarian milieu in the characters that Fassbinder himself embodied, have now been replaced by a pinstripe suit with a slouch hat. Might it be a self-quote from Fassbinder's feature film debut *LIEBE IST KÄLTER ALS DER TOD* (Love Is Colder than Death, DE 1969), the model for which was in turn Alain Delon wearing a trench coat and hat in Jean-Pierre Melville's *LE SAMOURAI* (FR/IT 1967)? Or a kind of venomous comment about himself, who as a director now stands up to commercial cinema and as a criminal filmmaker or ruthless businessman downright squeezes his actress into the role of a *femme fatale*?

In a dark back courtyard, Maria exchanges her mother's ring for the dress, which she will need 'for business purposes' as a hostess in order to increase her value. So is Fassbinder, in the shady character of the greasy crook with a loose tie knot above his unbuttoned collar, lampooning himself as an 'evil' director who fits out, manipulates, and exploits his actress behind the scenes as a callous businessman? Is there perhaps another level behind the round sunglasses with a metal frame, which complete the black marketeer in his dubious getup? Is it not also reminiscent of the black-rimmed glasses of the uncanny, murderous showman and shadowy neurologist in an ankle-length coat from Robert Wiene's *DAS CABINET DES DR. CALIGARI* (The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, DE 1920), who haunts Fassbinder's oeuvre as the embodiment of the dualism of good and evil? It is surely not coincidental that Fassbinder wears the same sunglasses in a second cameo appearance: In *LILI MARLEEN* he enters the scene as a leader of the resistance movement wearing a black leather coat and a hat pulled down low over his forehead, which places him more in the proximity of a Gestapo man than a partisan. The ambivalence of the split between Self and Other, the familiar and the foreign, the truth and illusion, finds complete expression in this leather coat— in equal measure a grim fetish object and a highly symbolic piece of clothing. These are recurring motifs in Fassbinder's oeuvre that find their suitable dramaturgic expression in the costumes made by Barbara Baum.

*DIE EHE DER MARIA BRAUN.*  
Rainer Werner Fassbinder  
as black market peddler,  
photographed by Barbara Baum.





**BETWEEN UNIFORM AND SUIT:  
HUSBANDS AND SOLDIERS**

These constants in Fassbinder's oeuvre also characterize the stagings of two husbands who harbor a thoroughly flawed maleness behind their socially legitimized role model.

The image of maleness that Fassbinder creates for Baron von Innstetten in FONTANE EFFI BRIEST is homogeneously communicated by means of the clothed body of the actor Wolfgang Schenck. Karin Tebben, editor of the volume *Abschied vom Mythos Mann: Kulturelle Konzepte der Moderne* (Taking Leave of the Male Myth: Cultural Concepts of the Modern Era), describes the male image that von Innstetten embodies in Fontane's novel in a single sentence: "He can be regarded as a literary paradigm of male fragility behind male strength."<sup>(26)</sup> On the face of it, this fragility seems to be hidden behind von Innstetten's stately figure. In fact, he seems to fit perfectly into Effi's description, who characterizes him as "manly" and "very dashing." In accordance with men's fashion at the turn of the 20th century, he is staged with a wealth of detail and the allure of physical strength. He therefore conforms to the ideal of masculinity that prevailed in the German Empire, which was one of rigor and respectability. Yet the fragility mentioned above is definitely perceptible, despite the impenetrability of his suits.

The baron wears the frock coat befitting his social status like a uniform. Around 1900, the dark, smooth frock coat was in fact the formal daytime clothing donned by urban dignitaries and was worn by dukes, lawyers, or businessmen. It could be combined with lighter-colored pants, and the vest could also be made of a different fabric. Additional key elements for the staging of the maleness that prevailed in that epoch were the cravat with collar needle and the high, stiff collar, also called a choker, essential symbols of moral strength and social superiority.<sup>(27)</sup> The fact that bourgeois men represented personal and social authority in the monotony and uniforming of their outward appearance in the early 20th century becomes apparent in the scene in which Effi and the baron meet for the first time in the presence of her parents. The uniform frock coats worn by the

father (Herbert Steinmetz) and the husband place emphasis on the male role in imperial society in the private sphere. Mr. von Briest transfers his paternal guardianship to the future husband. He looks, silent and proprietorial, at Effi; she is small and delicate, he is tall and overbearing, with the result that the future power relations are already suggested visually. As a husband, his body always comes across as stable and calculating, both in public as well as in the privacy of his own home. Unpretentious simplicity, plain materials, and a perfect fit characterize his clothing. Whether dressed in a winter coat with a slouch hat, fur collar and suede gloves, or in a velvet dressing gown and more comfortable pants at home—his body constantly seems to be hidden behind these fashion elements, almost invisible.

The impenetrable shell expresses his moral integrity and thus seals the fusion of his private with his social role. His clothing remains immaculate even when von Innstetten



FONTANE EFFI BRIEST.  
Wolfgang Schenck.



becomes aware of the fact that his self is taken up in the social persona that he incessantly and seamlessly, in the truest sense of the word, represents. After learning of Effi's affair with Crampas (Ulli Lommel), the baron carries on a conversation with Privy Councilor Wüllersdorf (Karlheinz Böhm) and anticipates the inevitable duel with Crampas with a startling lack of emotion. There is not a single break in the wealth of details that Barbara Baum carefully reconstructs, thereby essentially defining von Innstetten's identity: the neckband is not a millimeter out of place, the tips of his collar seem as stiff as ever, the frock coat also remains untouched and fits perfectly. The baron calmly and unagitatedly expresses his doubt; however, he has to surrender to the law of the duel. A man's dignity, as he understands it, knows no ruptures. The identity of his 'doppelgänger,' whom he previously encountered every day in the mirror, always appropriately dressed and with

Representatives of the social order of the *fin de siècle*: Baron von Innstetten (Wolfgang Schenck), his wife Effi (Hanna Schygulla).



Dueling for the male honor: Baron von Innstetten with his adjutant, Privy Councilor Wüllersdorf (Karlheinz Böhm).

(26) Karin Tebben, "Männer männlich? Zur Fragilität des 'starken' Geschlechts," in id., ed., *Abschied vom Mythos Mann: Kulturelle Konzepte der Moderne* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2002), p. 16.

(27) Thiel 2004 (see note 17), p. 314.



DIE EHE DER MARIA  
BRAUN. Klaus Löwitsch  
and Rainer Werner  
Fassbinder during the  
shooting.

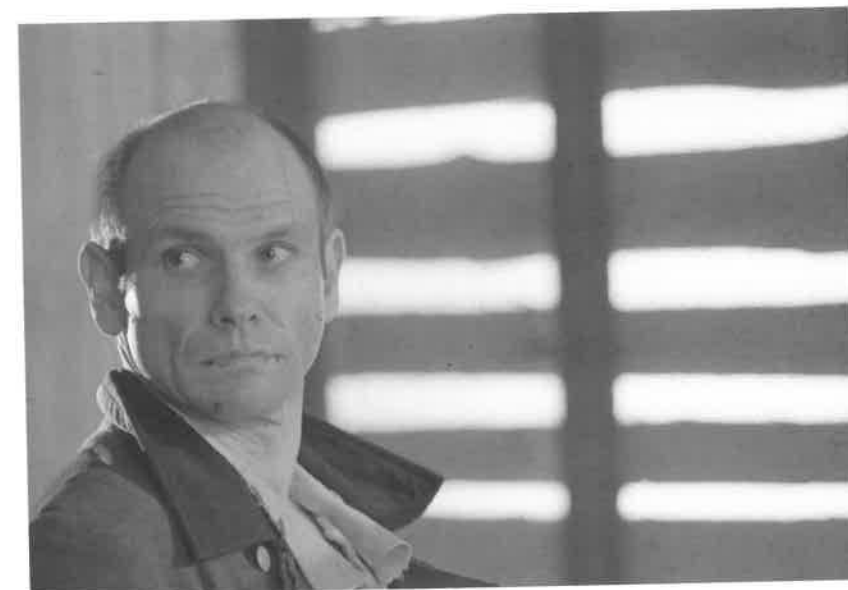
a perfectly clipped beard, continues to cling to him and ultimately plunges him and his wife into ruin.

Whereas Baron von Innstetten embodies an image of masculinity that causes him to appear cased in armor in his suit and as unassailable as he is unwavering to the very end, Hermann Braun, Maria's husband, experiences several transformations in his outward appearance that, as always, express themselves symbolically in his clothes. In the beginning he is a faceless groom at Maria's side, a soldier like many others, in a Wehrmacht uniform and visor cap, who immediately disappears into the anonymity of the war. One day after the 'bombed-out' wedding ceremony with Maria, he goes into battle and for the time being will not come back. However, when he returns and catches Maria in their conjugal bedroom with her lover, Hermann is completely broken; his male identity seems obliterated. The officer's coat of the soldier he still wears is now a meaningless shell, because underneath it is a demasculinized, traumatized body marked by hunger, pain, and desperation.

Hermann initially secretly watches their foreplay as a powerless voyeur, then his violence erupts; he hits Maria when she sees and tries to embrace him. He could not survive a physical confrontation with his rival. And so Maria is the one who intervenes in the conflict between the two men and strikes Bill, who seems overpowering in his nakedness, dead with a bottle. When Maria is held responsible for the manslaughter of Bill, Hermann can become a husband, a man again, for a brief moment on the stage of the court. 'Disguised' in a thick camel hair coat, with wide shoulders and a slouch hat, he assumes responsibility for the death of Bill, and goes to prison in Maria's place. The prisoner's garb now signals his status as an outsider, which once again denies him the role of husband. Maria promises to wait for him and to work on their future together. She wears a hat every time she visits him—sometimes a red, brimmed hat like a man would wear; sometimes a small, brimless toque; or another time a black hat with a veil: surely a reflection of the way fashion changed over the decade, but also of the change of roles. In the beginning, her 'male' head covering still stands for supervision, care, and the reversal of the gender relations in her marriage, in which she is now the one who embodies male power and social mobility. Maria's ever more sophisticated hats gradually indicate growing affluence and her increasing social authority. Hermann attempts in vain to fill the husband role by—having been released from prison—chancing his luck in Canada. And when he one day, after the death of Maria's lover Oswald, stands in front of the door of her luxury home wearing a gray flannel suit and a dark slouch hat, he looks like he emerged from a 1950s American melodrama.

Exemplary for this is the movie based on the American novel from 1954 by Sloan Wilson, whose title already contains the medium par excellence for staging dominant masculinity: *THE MAN IN THE GRAY FLANNEL SUIT* (US 1956, dir. Nunnally Johnson). At this point in time, the flannel suit symbolizes the embodiment of the average American man per se. A war veteran and career climber, Tom Rath (Gregory Peck) wears the classic and proper suit with wide shoulders, narrow hips, and wide pants that would become the uniform worn by the successful, white family man in 1950s America. In reality, however, the insecure and emotionally unstable war veterans put into the immaculate suits now had to again adopt the role of the strong breadwinner. The suit, mostly with a single- or double-breasted jacket, which made reference to propriety and integrity, was intended to give the traumatized heroes the appearance of invulnerability and communicate virility and (reclaimed) male superiority. Hidden behind the assimilated man in gray flannel with a secure job in the city and a wife and children in the suburbs were the male neuroses of postwar American culture.<sup>(28)</sup>

Hermann also returns as a 'new' man in a gray flannel suit, which now attests to his restored male authority, while Maria, in a black corsage with garter belt, returns to the conventional role of the wife in an oddly indifferent way. In a gesture of passive devotion,





she lies down on the bed, and Hermann goes for her without taking off his hat. However, in reality the gray suit is only a temporary shell, a mask behind which disempowerment and weakness can be hidden, which Hermann for good reason wants to quickly leave behind. He slips into a silky robe, which suddenly makes him vulnerable. And in fact: Hermann is killed during the final gas explosion along with Maria. In the end, the husband in *DIE EHE DER MARIA BRAUN* remains a caricature, possibly a void.

### BARBARA BAUM AS AUTHOR

If we now recall and reflect on the wives and husbands, the female performers, liminal women, and outsiders that Barbara Baum co-created over the course of her career, it can be concluded that her costumes made a substantial contribution to the cinematic construction of gender roles. The clothed bodies of the movie characters reflect notions of femaleness and maleness in a specific time, and their body images can therefore not be appreciated without their essential aesthetic and dramaturgical element: fashion. The language of fashion and its strategic use in the staging of movie characters reveals how the realities of women and men and their outward appearance transformed over decades. In her oeuvre, Barbara Baum has consistently made reference to the language system of fashion and in doing so created her own fashion world, even though she developed the changing silhouettes in the service of screenplays and directors. The emergence of specific fabrics connoted as 'feminine' or 'masculine,' such as, for instance, silk, satin, tulle, or flannel, or the recurring accessories befitting period, such as veiled hats, toques, or fur caps, not only make reference to a decade, a style, a change in fashion, or a specific milieu. They 'inhabit' the bodies of the actors and actresses and become one with them—even beyond the narrative.

The oeuvre of Barbara Baum, which has developed over a time span of 40 years, testifies to her extraordinary experience as a craftswoman, her aesthetic intuition, and her unconventional, original handling of fashion history. Today, the wealth of costumes that she created, for example, in the spirit of the 1940s or the New Look do not seem to have been designed for film characters, but rather for reality. In times of retro and nostalgia, her cocktail dresses, peplum jackets, pencil skirts, and transparent-look boleros exude an amazing fashionable up-to-dateness. It is no accident that Fassbinder's oeuvre provided Miuccia Prada with inspiration for her fall/winter collection 2014, which she suggestively realized in her creations at the Milan Fashion Week. This kind of collision between past and present confirms what Barbara Vinken aptly accounted for in her book *Angezogen: Die Geheimnisse der Mode* (Attired to Attract: The Secrets of Fashion), namely that "female fashion in the modern era has a central theme: the period. The female body becomes the stage of the period."<sup>(29)</sup> And is this not exactly the message that Barbara Baum's oeuvre communicates to us?

(28) Marisa Buovolo, "Filmhelden im Anzug," in Gudrun M. König and Gabriele Mentges, eds., *Medien der Mode* (Berlin: Edition Ebersbach, 2010), pp. 64-75.



CATHERINE THE GREAT. Fabric swatches with notes on the texture, intended use and price for the costumes for Catherine Zeta-Jones.