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Welcome to Tykwer-World: Tom Tykwer as *Auteur*

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This article argues that German director Tom Tykwer represents a new type of *auteur* distinct from the model prevalent in the New German Cinema. His films foreground a personal style and rework a limited number of themes, but lack the critical dimension of the New German Cinema's *Autorenfilm*. Instead, it can be argued that his status as *auteur* is more a performative gesture that seeks to establish a particular and recognizable brand in the domestic and international marketplace. The article shows how Tykwer's films create a unique and consistently recognizable filmic world that is presented as entirely artificial and that bears only a loose connection to contemporary social reality. It is argued that this self-conscious artificiality constitutes both a key component of Tykwer's personal style and a foregrounding of the creative presence of the director in his films.

1. What Kind of *Auteur* is Tom Tykwer?

Since Tom Tykwer's international success with *Lola rennt* in 1998, it has become common to regard this filmmaker as an *auteurist*, a maker of personal films that can be aligned with a specifically German or European tradition of artistic self-expression in the medium of cinema. The director himself has also stressed the importance of personal self-expression in his filmmaking practice: "was mich am meisten reizt, ist mich selber einzubringen. Nicht so zu tun, als sei ich nicht da. Das wäre ja auch eine Lüge. Ich bin immer da" (Schäfer 2002: 247, cited in Schuppach 2004: 30). He also aligns himself with *auteurist* cinema by citing a personal pantheon of directors such as Alfred Hitchcock, John Cassavetes, Martin Scorsese and François Truffaut (Müller 2002). Ian Garwood's contribution to the excellent *German Cinema Book* (2002) proposes an interesting re-reading of *Lola rennt* in terms of its continuities with the German *Autorenkino* tradition, highlighting the film's resistance to Hollywood narrative models, its "artisanal" mode of production and what Garwood regards as its contemporary reworking of the notion of national representativity in film culture (Garwood 2002). In this article, however, I will argue that Tykwer can be read more

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productively, not by making his filmmaking practice align with or echo that of the past, but by recognizing in him a model of an *Autor* of a different kind.

The notion of the *Autor* or *auteur* in European and more specifically in German cinema is an inherently complex one that cannot be addressed in any depth here (cf. Elsaesser 1989: 74-116 on the German context). Let it suffice to say that in a number of European countries from the late 1950s onwards, there emerged groups of critics and filmmakers who sought to discover retrospectively in the films of Hollywood or indigenous directors a personal vision, working against the constraints of commercial mainstream cinema which could then form the basis of a call for liberation from commercial necessities and the freedom to deal with subjects close to the director's own concerns using a personal cinematic idiom: such ambitions were expressed, for instance, by the directors of the French New Wave (Jean-Luc Godard, François Truffaut, Louis Malle etc.), Britain's smaller "Free Cinema" group (Lindsay Anderson, Tony Richardson, Karol Reisz), and, in the German context, amongst the signatories of the 1962 Oberhausen Manifesto (most prominently Alexander Kluge and Edgar Reitz) and the later New German Cinema filmmakers such as Wim Wenders, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Werner Herzog and Helma Sanders-Brahms. The personal concerns that became key to the New German Cinema and its *Autoren* were also very much national concerns, in that these filmmakers (with the possible exception of Herzog) sought to engage with contemporary social and political issues from a distinctly oppositional or counter-cultural perspective, as well as examining Germany's troubled past and its legacy in the present (see Elsaesser 1989: 239-78; Kaes 1987). In a 1994 reassessment of the notion of the *auteur*, Thomas Elsaesser identifies a number of successful filmmakers, both European and American, who have contributed to a redefinition of the role of the *auteurist* director and amongst whom Tom Tykwer is listed:

> Authority and authenticity has [*sic*] shifted to the manner a filmmaker uses cinema's resources, which is to say, his or her command of the generic, expressive, the excessive, the visual and the visceral: from David Lynch to Jane Campion, from Jonathan Demme to Stephen Frears, from Luc Besson to Dario Agrente [*sic*], from Quentin Tarantino to Tom Tykwer, from Lars von Trier to Jean-Pierre Jeunet – *auteurs* all, and valued for their capacity to concentrate on a tour de force, demonstrating qualities which signify that they are, in a sense, "staging authorship" […]. (Elsaesser 2005: 51)

Adding to Elsaesser's list, one might also mention American *auteurs* working firmly within a Hollywood context such as Tim Burton or Gus Van Saint: like Lynch, Tarantino or

indeed Tykwer, they create a filmic world unmistakably their own, inflected with typical stylistic devices, a characteristic *mise-en-scène* and almost obsessively mined thematic material. What distinguishes them from their older *auteurist* colleagues, one might argue, is that this stylistic self-differentiation from other filmmakers does not necessarily result from strongly held positions as to how a film should be made in order to have a particular political impact on its audience and thus achieve its critical aims (for example the Brechtian devices of Godard or Lindsay Anderson); nor is the focus on particular themes evidence of a deeply felt political commitment. Rather, the creation of a distinctive filmic world both in stylistic and thematic terms, serves as a means of product differentiation in an international film market: this "staged" authorship builds a set of (hopefully positive) audience expectations that help to promote the director's continuing output.

This marks a particular contrast with the German *Autorenkino* of the 1970s and 1980s, in which critical socio-political content was central to most of the key filmmakers involved. Although all of Tykwer's films are unmistakably part of the Tykwer brand, for reasons I will explore below, the films he has directed, in contradistinction to his script for Wolfgang Becker's *Das Leben ist eine Baustelle* (1997) for example, eschew any direct social comment (Garwood 2002: 209). Although *Lola rennt* ostensibly deals with the milieu of small-time crooks in reunified Berlin, it is hard to identify any critique of contemporary capitalism of the kind Fassbinder achieves, for example, in his films dealing with similar figures on the margins of society such as *Liebe ist kälter als der Tod* (1969) or *Faustrecht der Freiheit* (1975); the patriarchal oppression suffered by the eponymous heroine of *Die tödliche Maria* (1993) might be regarded as a critique of the reactionary social mores of the *Wirtschaftswunderjahre* of Maria's childhood, yet the film confines itself almost entirely to the interior of Maria's home, showing only brief glimpses of the streets beyond the building where she lives and frustrating any attempt to draw wider social conclusions with its deployment of fantastic elements; *Heaven* (2002) contains a highly sympathetic portrayal of a woman driven to terrorism and murder, yet this portrayal does not reflect directly on any concrete social conflict, as did for example Margarethe von Trotta's *Die bleierne Zeit* (1981) or Volker Schlöndorff's and Von Trotta's earlier film version of Heinrich Böll's *Die verlorene Ehre der Katharina Blum* (1975) in relation to left-wing terrorism in Germany in the 1970s and 1980s. As one of Tykwer's commentators rightly observes, although we are

often in recognizable locations in Tykwer's films (Turin, Wuppertal, Berlin, for example), these settings nevertheless seem "gegenwartsfern" (Schuppach 2004: 148), as indeed, one might add, do the events portrayed, despite their potential social and political dimensions. Instead, Tykwer presents us in all of his films with a self-consciously artificial filmic world, a world in which the normal rules of our everyday reality do not pertain, and in which the filmic medium itself is foregrounded through a sometimes excessive stylization. This emphasis on the createdness of the visual spectacle unfolding before the audience points to the presence in the film of Tykwer the *auteur*: this is not necessarily Tykwer as an individual, but rather the composite (and ultimately commodified) image of the director Tykwer as the sum total of his own stylistic devices and thematic preoccupations.

2. Stylistic Excess and Generic Hybridity

In interview, Tykwer has himself recognized that his highly stylized approach to filmmaking is potentially problematic (Sterneborg 2000: 7). Whilst on the one hand his narratives are characterized by experiences of great emotional intensity, particularly with regard to his romantic plots (as will be discussed below), there is a clear danger that the audience will be distanced from these experiences by the high degree of aestheticization in terms of the filmic image itself. A case in point here would be Tykwer's use of the camera in collaboration with Frank Griebe. It becomes a detached, floating eye on the world of the protagonists. It circles them repeatedly, sweeps up in crane shots to view them from above or, in a typical Tykwer move, slowly yet inexorably progresses towards them whilst never quite reaching them. At times, spectacular effects are produced, such as in the scene that introduces the male protagonist Bodo in *Der Krieger und die Kaiserin* (2000): as he leans precariously out from a motorway bridge, the camera flies up in a fluid crane shot from underneath him and flies over above his head in a vertiginous swoop. These movements and trick shots, in which the camera flamboyantly calls attention to itself, work against the conventions of classical narrative cinema, in which camera movement is "usually motivated by the action or the interest of the characters" (Rowe 1999: 110). For example, in the instance just mentioned, although it might be arguable that the sense of vertigo produced mimics that of the character, Bodo does not in fact suffer from such fear of heights, as is underlined later in the film, and the camera in no way reproduces his point of view. Instead,

the shot has a value in itself as a piece of virtuoso filmmaking, as can be said of much of Tykwer's more unusual camerawork (cf. Mcnab 2000: 50). At certain moments the camera even becomes entirely separated from the narrative, roaming over the snowy wastes of *Winterschläfer*, flying over the urban landscape of Wuppertal in *Der Krieger und die Kaiserin* or moving slowly over the rooftops of Turin in *Heaven*: here the landscapes are explored primarily in terms of their aesthetic qualities and do not obviously contain any metaphoric value in relation to the narrative. In this way, Tykwer's approach appears at first to recall what Pier Paolo Pasolini identified as the "cinema of poetry" in *auteurist* cinema of the 1960s, in which the audience is allowed to "feel" the camera (Pasolini 1965: 73), suggesting a second level of expressivity beyond the narrative proper. In Tykwer's case, however, such expressivity often seems functionless, only expressing itself.

This self-conscious virtuosity is similarly present in Tykwer's appropriation of visual styles and cinematic genres. Aside from the well-known combination of video, film, animation and still photography in *Lola rennt*, Tykwer's films make reference to the *Heimatfilm* (in *Winterschläfer*; Goodbody 2005), the fairy-tale (*Der Krieger und die Kaiserin* and possibly also *Lola rennt*; Evans 2004; Whalen 2000), the horror film (*Die tödliche Maria*), and the Hitchcockian thriller (the opening sequence of *Heaven*). All of his films are generically hybrid, and thus extend beyond mere postmodern pastiche. However, their citation is by no means critical, in the way for example that certain directors of the New German Cinema such as Wenders and Fassbinder, sought to reappropriate popular genres such as the road movie or the melodrama as part of their oppositional project. Rather, these generic codes are part of that mass of popular culture that the director has at his disposal and that he demonstrates his skill in deploying.

3. An Artificial World

Aside from the visual and generic elements outlined above, which emphasize the created status of the filmic image, Tykwer's narratives very often demonstrate to the audience that his figures exist within an entirely artificial world, indeed that they exist in a world of film that functions according to its own set of rules. This aspect of Tykwer's work can be

considered in relation to two themes: repetition and chance. Both of these are, in turn, closely connected with the theme of love.

3.1 Repetition

Lola rennt is, of course, famous for its repetition of the same twenty minute sequence in three variations. However, this motif is also present in Tykwer's two earlier short films *Because* (1990) and *Epilog* (1992), with the first consisting of three variations on the same argument between a couple lying in bed, with three different outcomes, the second made up of the retrospective account of the events leading up to the shooting of a woman by her boyfriend; the twist here is that the flashback ends with the murderer becoming the victim and vice versa. What is intriguing about such repetition, especially in *Epilog* and *Lola rennt*, is that we are presented here not with alternative versions of reality or possible worlds, as might for example be said of films such as Krzysztof Kieslowski's *Blind Chance* (1987) or Peter Howitt's *Sliding Doors* (1998), but rather a single and continuous filmic world in which time simply repeats itself and where the characters are aware of this repetition. In *Epilog*, we are left with the impression of characters who inhabit a world in which time is stuck in an endless loop, yet a loop which produces a different configuration and outcome each time: not only do murderer and victim exchange roles, but the physical objects which inhabit this filmic world take on a life of their own, shifting position as if by magic in order to alter the course of events, as is particularly the case for the revolver that changes position to be within reach of one figure rather than the other at the end of the sequence in which the couple argue. The question "wie ist das geschehen?" posed at the beginning of each repetition becomes ironic, in that the attempt to replay the past only produces a new past with a different outcome. These different outcomes seem completely beyond the control of the figures who exist in an unreal or even nightmarish world where the director is pulling the strings.

In *Lola rennt*, the protagonists (again a couple) use this repetition to bring about a happy ending. Again, the three versions of Lola's run are not separate and alternative realities, but part of the same (un)reality. Lola in particular learns from the mistakes of her earlier runs, so that her journey through Berlin takes on the character of a computer game in which the player can relive the same sequence, applying experience gained in earlier failed attempts

(Mesch 2000; Schuppach 2004: 54). What differentiates Lola from the characters in *Epilog*, for example, is her active refusal to accept the first version of events. Whereas they adopt a basically passive, observing attitude to a filmic world that seems to militate against them, Lola refuses to die at the end of the first run ("Ich will nicht"), so that her eventual success seems to express the triumph of the will over reality itself, as Alexandra Ludewig and Matthias Keller observe in their Nietzschean reading of the film (Luedwig; Keller 2001).

The key to Lola's success, and indeed to the success of all of Tykwer's figures in so far as they achieve a happy ending to their story, is their commitment to another person in the context of a romantic relationship. Tykwer's feature films, as Schuppach shows, are built around the naïve premise that the happiness of the protagonists is linked to their discovery of and commitment to a person with whom they are destined to be (Schuppach 2004: 83). However, what Schuppach does not point out is the extent to which this commitment to such a relationship actually changes the way the filmic world functions, so that these lovers are apparently rewarded as much for their attitude as for their actions. This can be demonstrated in relation to the theme of chance.

3.2 Chance

Lola rennt again provides a good example of the function of chance in Tykwer's films in general. As Christine Haase has astutely observed, for all of Lola's energy and her refusal to give up until she achieves the outcome she desires, she does not directly contribute to saving her boyfriend Manni, who has lost 100,000 DM belonging to the gangster Ronni (Haase 2003: 408). It is in fact a whole different set of coincidences in the final version of the narrative that leads to Manni recovering the money: ultimately, it is the mysterious blind woman who saves the day by pointing out to Manni the tramp who has stolen the money as the latter rides by on his newly acquired bicycle. This mysterious intervention appears to undercut any sense that the frenetic activity of Lola, and to some extent Manni, has been productive in changing the outcome of the narrative. Instead, the director seems arbitrarily to change the course of events in order to reward Lola's commitment to her love for Manni and her refusal to capitulate.

A similar scenario can be observed in all of Tykwer's feature films. In *Die tödliche Maria*, it is Maria's determination to free herself from the oppressive patriarchal clutches of her

father and her obnoxious husband which drive the narrative, yet that desire rarely manifests itself in any direct action on her part, but rather in an at times supernatural transformation of the filmic world, for example, when we see Maria at the beginning of the film apparently using kinetic powers in order to make a crystal fall from a chandelier as her husband has sex with her. Later in a dream, Maria gives birth to a second self, who places a small statue on the floor in the kitchen so that it can later dispatch her husband when he falls backwards onto it. This coincidence, as if the material world of the film has magically turned against Maria's husband, is echoed in the coincidence that places Maria's potential lover Dieter beneath the window that Maria throws herself out of backwards in the film's final scene. Maria's belief in the power of true love to change her world is rewarded through her survival: it is as if all she has to do is believe that Dieter is her knight in shining armour (a role he seems little suited to) for him to be made to appear at just the right moment to break her fall from the window.

This fall, or leap of faith, is also a feature of *Der Krieger und die Kaiserin,* in which the protagonists Bodo and Sissi jump from the top of a building into what turns out to be a weed-covered pond. The visual trick played on the audience here is to make it appear that Bodo and Sissi, who are on the run from the police for their involvement in a bank robbery, are leaping to their almost certain deaths. Sissi must know the location of the pond, as it stands outside the building, a psychiatric unit, where she has apparently spent her entire life, yet by asking Bodo to jump with her, she is demanding from him that he make a commitment to their relationship by placing absolute trust in her. As Bodo and Sissi hit the water, however, it seems to the audience as if her faith in her romantic destiny with Bodo has supernaturally changed the material world of the film: as with Lola, if she wants something badly enough, this world seems to bend to her will.

Sissi's commitment to Bodo and to the notion that they are destined to be together is a means for her to transform what could otherwise be a chance encounter into life-changing fate. Bodo and Sissi meet when she is run over by a truck, an accident for which he is partly responsible, and he saves her life by performing an improvised tracheotomy. Of course, in terms of Tykwer's carefully constructed plotting, this is by no means a meaningless coincidence, yet the film shows us how Sissi's belief in the fateful nature of these events transforms them in her own mind from contingency into necessity, with her belief being

rewarded by its apparent power to make her environment change to accommodate her desire.

This pattern is also present in *Winterschläfer* and *Heaven*. In the former, the director creates a series of coincidences involving two couples and a farmer and his family. At the beginning of the film, René, an amnesic, is involved in an accident whilst driving drunk Marco's stolen car, killing the daughter of the farmer Theo. Through a series of misunderstandings and coincidences, Marco dies escaping a vengeful Theo, who has mistaken him for the man he blames for his daughter's death. Marco is an unsympathetic character, but René initially appears to be equally unpleasant, so there at first appears to be no moral justification for the former paying for the latter's crime. Throughout most of the film, Theo is in search of the man bearing the distinctive scar that René's accident whilst serving as a soldier has left on the back of his head. It is only towards the end of the film that this line of investigation is abandoned by Theo, who discovers the stolen car in the melting snow. The (false) identification of Marco as the culprit seems to come about by chance, through the presence of his documents in the car that was stolen from him, and which Theo uses to track him down.[2] Indirectly, however, it appears that it is René's new-found ability to commit to a romantic relationship with another person, Laura, that is being rewarded. Equally, fate turns against Marco, a man who fails to commit.

Marco is a deeply materialistic figure who pursues physical gratification (primarily through food and sex) without being able to give his life any meaningful structure: he is involved with three different women in the course of the film, but soon looses interest once the relationship progresses beyond the merely physical. René's life is equally lacking a coherent meaning at the beginning of the film, but this is largely due to the brain damage which has impaired his short-term memory. The past for him becomes a series of disconnected fragments, captured with a small camera or on his tape recorder, that he tries and fails to make sense of in terms of a meaningful narrative. Eventually, however, he is able to save himself from this senseless world of images by committing to a relationship with Laura. In one scene, we see them both skating forwards, the camera tracking their

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[2]   For a different reading of this aspect of *Winterschläfer* see Dora Osborne's contribution to this volume.

movement, whilst discussing "die zehn größten Katastrophen", amongst which Laura lists "heiraten", "alt werden" and "Kinder kriegen". René, however, dismisses her rejection of commitment to marriage and founding a family, and they continue skating forwards into the future, in marked contrast to the stagnant and directionless state of the other figures in the film. Such purposeful movement forwards is contrasted at the end of the film with Marco plummeting out of control over the edge of a precipice. His directionlessness and restlessness have been his undoing, and his demise is presented in parallel montage with the birth of Laura's child some nine months later. Metaphorically, Marco's inability to commit has been the death of him, whereas the man responsible for the crime with which the film begins is saved because he is willing to choose his own future within the context of the family. Whilst the morality of this ending may be questionable, it clearly shows again how, in Tykwer's films, fate favours those who choose or construct their own destiny from the apparently contingent events and chance encounters of the filmic world.

In this respect, there seems to be a basically existential message underlying all of Tykwer's feature films. Søren Kierkegaard, for example, contrasts the "aesthetic" mode of existence with that characterized by "belief". Whereas the "aesthetic" individual submits herself to accident or chance, seeing the world as ultimately contingent and lacking in meaning, and frequently giving herself over, like Marco, to fleeting pleasure as a poor substitute for that meaning, the individual who embraces "belief" overcomes the essentially non-necessary character of events by choosing to choose (Gardiner 2002: 49-53). Not only do Tykwer's figures, and particularly his female figures, create their own destiny by choosing their commitment to their romantic partners, this meaning-giving activity appears to be rewarded in the world of the film by its transformation according to their needs.

This is never more evident than in Tykwer's most recent feature film *Heaven*. There are two highly significant sequences that explore the notion of chance, the first being the opening sequence in which Philippa, an English schoolteacher living in Turin, attempts to assassinate the drug-dealer responsible for the death of her husband and some of her pupils. She leaves a bomb in a wastepaper basket in his office, but this is removed at the last moment by a cleaner and explodes in a lift, killing the cleaner and a father with his two young daughters. Philippa is characterized in her own words as someone who no longer "believe[s] in sense", that is to say in the meaningfulness of the world she inhabits,

following the death of her husband. It is no accident that she confesses to this in a church whilst on the run with Filippo, the young *carabiniere* with whom she has escaped from prison. Filippo's answer to Philippa here is simply, "I love you", offering love as a means to make sense of the world, as if as a private, substitute religion in a secular age.

Filippo experiences his love for Philippa as a bolt from the blue when he first holds her hand after she has fainted during her interrogation for the bombing. This love gives meaning to and motivates all of his actions from that point on, all of which he pursues with absolute conviction, much like Lola, René, Sissi or Maria in Tykwer's other feature films. Significantly, whereas Philippa the nihilist finds that her carefully laid assassination plan fails due to the workings of chance, Filippo's scheme to rescue her from imprisonment, which is arguably far more complex and liable to failure than Philippa's bomb plot, succeeds seemingly without apparent difficulty. The plan, described by British reviewer Anthony Quinn as "ingenious but, on inspection, ridiculous" (Quinn 2002) can be summarized as follows. Filippo gives a diuretic to one of the police guards in his coffee so that he will go and use a particular hand-drier in a particular toilet which has been tampered with to fuse the lights, so that Filippo can pass a message to Philippa; later, Filippo's brother Ariel calls an extension in the police station near a toilet where Philippa, according to plan, is pretending to have stomach cramps, so that a particular guard, who happens to have been sent to accompany her, will answer the phone and be addressed by name by the young boy. As Quinn sourly jokes: "The Turin *carabinieri* must feel inclined to sue on finding their HQ represented as the most lax security system in Western Europe" (Quinn 2002). However, the sheer improbability of this scheme's success should not be viewed as a failing, but rather serves further to emphasise how, in Tykwer's films, fortune favours those who believe, and specifically those who believe that it is their fate to be with a particular person. Such belief allows them to overcome any hurdle, including, in the case of Filippo and Philippa, death itself. At the end of the film, they fly into the sky in a helicopter and apparently disappear. As the audience knows from the opening sequence, in which Filippo is training in a flight simulator, flying so high in a helicopter will lead it to crash, but we do not see this crash at the end of *Heaven*: the film allows them to ascend into another realm together, freed of the laws of physics that apply in the real world.

In *Heaven*, the artificiality of the world that the audience is presented with is announced by the opening sequence mentioned above which was one major element that Tykwer himself added to the narrative contained in the original script by Krzysztof Kieslowski and Krzysztof Piesiewicz (Tykwer 2002). At first, the audience is unaware that the images it is presented with are in fact computer generated, a state of affairs that only becomes clear when the voice-over of the instructor tells Filippo that the wind conditions would make flying slightly different in real life. This opening sequence serves as a commentary on the film as a whole: throughout we are in a simulated world where the rules of the universe of our own experience do not seem to apply. This air of unreality is heightened even further when Filippo and Philippa arrive in Tuscany, emerging from a tunnel during their train journey into an idealized landscape bathed in a golden light. This landscape itself, as we are informed by one of the extras on the British release of the DVD version of the film, has been technologically processed, much like the landscape of the flight simulator: the flowing aerial shots that explore Tuscany's rolling hills are achieved by the use of a new kind of helicopter-mounted steadicam. In this unreal landscape, Filippo and Philippa are able to achieve the impossible, but only because of their commitment to each other in the film's penultimate sequence, as they make love beneath a tree in an evocation of the Garden of Eden. They then ascend into heaven, returned to a state of innocence despite their crimes, as if the power of their love had somehow set history running in reverse (a notion also suggested by their train journey, in which they travel with their backs towards their destination).

In short, *Heaven* typifies Tykwer's approach, in that it foregrounds the artificiality of the filmic world created by the *auteur* both in its *mise-en-scène* and its plotting in which the successful outcome of the protagonists' endeavours relies to a great extent on their commitment to a relationship perceived as their fate. When they have done this, the artificial world of the film accommodates itself to their desires.

4. Conclusion: Tykwer-World

It was my contention at the beginning of this article that Tykwer, in keeping with Thomas Elsaesser's assessment, exemplifies a kind of contemporary *auteurist* filmmaking which

particularly distinguishes itself from the New German Cinema of the previous generation. For these earlier directors, the development of a personal style went hand in hand with particular political and social concerns, whereas Tykwer's widely acknowledged ability to "harness all the tricks of cinema to a highly personal vision" (Roddick 2002: 35) seems divorced from any critical concerns of this kind. Not only his foregrounded and sometimes excessive visual style, but also his obsessive repetition of what is basically the same romantic scenario, serve to create an identifiably personal brand that distinguishes him from his German contemporaries: they tend either to work with sometimes significant commercial success within the conventions of mainstream genre cinema (for example Sönke Wortmann, Katja von Garnier or Oliver Hirschbiegel) or to develop a recognizable personal style whilst remaining committed to socially relevant themes (for example Fatih Akin, Christian Petzold, Thomas Arslan or even Christoph Schlingensief). What the audience of Tykwer's films can rely on being confronted with, however, is an artificial world of the director's creating that, as I have already argued, retains only a tenuous relationship to the world of our everyday experience, and in which a peculiar but consistent morality holds sway. This world is self-consciously artificial, yet allows the audience to indulge in romantic fantasies of a rather old-fashioned type.

Can we say then, with Elsaesser, that Tykwer's *auteurism* is merely a matter of self-conscious "performance"? This would seem to imply a degree of cynicism on Tykwer's part and may be impossible to judge. What is clear, however, is that with Tykwer the creation of a personal cinema becomes an end in itself. By consistently demonstrating the formal and thematic characteristics outlined above, his films create a recognizable product by default or by design, so that one can with justification speak of the commodification of the *auteur*. The success of this commodification can be gauged to some extent from Tykwer's reputation in the international filmmarket: US production company Miramax identified him, for example, as a European *auteur* with a singular vision who might be able to tackle the first part of Kieslowski's unfilmed trilogy *Heaven*, *Hell* and *Purgatory*. Despite the commercial failure of this enterprise, which was so severe that Miramax dropped the rights to the remaining films (Goodman 2005), one can imagine that Tykwer's brand of filmmaking will not ultimately suffer on account of this illustrious association.

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Biodata

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