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## Transnational System Schlock

### The Case of Uwe Boll

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This project came into being in January 2008 when I, an American Ph.D. candidate in German and film studies, went to see – as an act of alternative film consumption<sup>1</sup> – the fantasy film *In the Name of the King* (2007) starring Jason Statham and Burt Reynolds at a nearly vacant cineplex in Iowa. What struck me about the film was not only its overdetermined use of Hollywood clichés and special effects in a strained attempt to keep my attention, but its credits in particular: the film was a German-Canadian co-production between Boll Kino Beteiligungs-GmbH & Co. KG and Brightlight Pictures. Its enterprising director, Uwe Boll, had culled the screenplay from Chris Taylor's Microsoft videogame *Dungeon Siege* (2002), shot it for a modest \$70 million on Canadian soil with his own German film company, and distributed it through the French-based media giant Vivendi Entertainment. I asked myself what might qualify as 'German' about the film, as well as what the Germans would think. Thus began a nation-spanning intellectual journey into the transnational, political and economic flows of recent "bad" cinema.

In the history of the medium, never has a film director been so reviled by such a vast number of dedicated anti-fans as Boll. At the time of this writing, 355,213 individual e-mail addresses stand on the "Stop Dr. Uwe Boll" on-line petition,<sup>2</sup> an informal group trying to raise one million signatures in an effort to have Boll cease his filmmaking enterprise. Comments posted on the Internet Movie Database about his films are regularly couched in terms of halting his production using consumer buying power, such as: "Seriously, don't pay to see this. It will only encourage them to give Ewe [sic] more projects".<sup>3</sup> Brett Martin's discussion of his latest film, *Postal* (2008), in the March 2008 issue of *GQ* tirelessly compares him with other fringe

directors condemned in the court of public opinion, namely Edward D. Wood Jr., Roger Corman,<sup>4</sup> John Derek and Eric Schaeffer.<sup>5</sup> In Julia Kristeva's resonant definition of the *abject*, Boll and his films within an American film discourse have now attained the stage of possessing "only one quality of the object – that of being opposed to *I*."<sup>6</sup> The normative, cinema-going *ego* is somehow expressively, violently repulsed by Boll's *oeuvre*, inviting a closer look not only at how his films support and subvert this norm, but how – to use Michel Foucault's formulation about the author – "the empty space" surrounding Boll as a media figure inflects a fascinating web of national, cultural and economic relationships in addition to the director's mere exercise of authorship.<sup>7</sup>

In this article, I assert that the present media discourse and analysis of Boll's films has been intensively American-centric, constructed largely around the journalistic interests of reviewers like Eric Vespe (*Ain't It Cool News*) and Richard Kyanka (SomethingAwful.com), and ignores the way in which Boll's case illustrates the transnational networks that shape contemporary entertainment cinema. Eschewing the mythology of Boll's kinship with bad directors such as Wood and other *auteurist* presumptions made within this limited discourse, I posit that both Boll's continued entrepreneurial filmmaking and status as a filmmaker are products neither of his entrepreneurial "genius" nor of egomania, but rather of transnational investment, production and distribution laws, as well as globally-held conceptions of video games, Hollywood production values, media coverage of the United States and representations of gender and whiteness. Furthermore, substantive differences between Boll's two American "shooting spree" films – *Heart of America* (2003) and *Postal* (2008) – show how transnational distribution networks now help market a global cinema fully capable of flaunting its anti-Americanism while still embodying a Hollywood aesthetic.

This business model's success has caused anxiety in an American populace convinced of the continuing greatness of Hollywood during their childhood, a myth that idealizes blockbuster and other feature films as high-quality, special effects-laden productions based on their "favorite" material with fitting actors made by cinephilic directors. Yet the simultaneous banality and apparent global success of Boll's fringe films show not only how global networks reward shoddy cinema with reasonable profits, but also how the effective distance between Boll's films and the Hollywood blockbusters against which his films are uncharitably measured may actually be quite small.

### Definition of Terms

In examining such broad institutions and conceptions as Hollywood, German cinema, or even transnationalism, a definition of terms seems to be in order. There are two referents for Hollywood used here. One would be the oligopoly of the six major studios – Columbia, Fox, Warner Brothers, Paramount, Universal, and Buena Vista – under their respective multi-national parent companies – Sony, News Corporation, Time Warner, Viacom, General Electric/Vivendi, and Disney. This *institutional* Hollywood encompasses the production, distribution and legal mechanisms that circulate film, along with other media, in a global marketplace presently imbalanced in their favor. As of 2005, only 0.75% of all films distributed in the United States were made outside of this studio system<sup>8</sup> though, as James Chapman notes, Hollywood output accounts for only "6 percent of total film production in the world."<sup>9</sup> The other referent besides the institution, however, is the more elusive Hollywood seen as a "mode of filmmaking." A number of film theorists, Janet Staiger and David Bordwell figuring prominently among them, have outlined what the Hollywood mode means in terms of other modes such as the documentary or the experimental film, emphasizing specific relations between continuity editing and cinematography that allow a story to be told through clear systems of signification addressed to a broad section of a white, middle-class film-going populace.<sup>10</sup> Yet Ella

Shohat and Robert Stam brush aside Staiger and Bordwell's formalism to suggest a kind of gut-level working definition of the Hollywood mode among those rudimentarily educated in film: the "massively industrial, ideologically reactionary, and stylistically conservative 'dominant' cinema."<sup>11</sup> This definition allows for the Hollywood aesthetic's regular co-option of styles and methods from other modes while retaining its more-or-less hegemonic character. The mode emphasizes high concept, effects-laden genre narratives in which stylized action, chase, and sex sequences guide the dialogue (rather than vice versa) and social problems are simplified so that they can be overcome by ever-victorious heroic protagonists. Paul Schrader contrasts this style and structure to so-called "European films" in that...

*American movies are based on the assumption that life presents you with problems, while European films are based on the conviction that life confronts you with dilemmas – and while problems are something you solve, dilemmas cannot be solved, they're merely probed.*<sup>12</sup>

Solving problems with big-budget, illusionist spectacle over more contemplative filmmaking practices has certainly been a hallmark of the Hollywood style since the emergence of the blockbuster and New Hollywood in the 1970s.<sup>13</sup> Those very assumptions about the "nature" of national cinemas underlying Schrader's argument, however, have been seriously problematized since the beginning of the twenty-first century,<sup>14</sup> and require re-visiting in order for us to seriously attend to the transnational questions raised by Boll's cinema.

What constitutes "European cinema" and/or "German cinema" in the age of global finance and mutually beneficial transnational co-productions, for example, should not be seen as self-evident. Thomas Elsaesser's and Randall Halle's recent respective studies of these two long-held cinema conceptions demonstrate the pressing need to look beyond national and continental borders in order to understand contemporary film production. Must German films be in the German language, for example? Is German cinema analogous to Hollywood films financed by

Germans such as *The Lord of the Rings* (2001) or *Mission Impossible 2* (2002) that made a profit in Germany, both of which were produced without the involvement of any other Germans in the production process? Or is it when Germans take a combination of German and foreign money to work on a picture on their soil, such as *Valkyrie* (2008) or *Inglourious Basterds* (2009)? Is German cinema only made when the *dirigiste* film boards decide to back an Oscar-winning picture like *The Lives of Others* (*Das Leben der Anderen*, 2006), catapulting its cast and crew into the national spotlight as “German filmmakers?”

Boll’s cinema is, in fact, German in many respects save its original language:<sup>15</sup> he uses a German company and crew financed with German money to shoot his films, and both the films and their profits return to German soil. Thus I unhesitatingly consider Boll’s films such as *Alone in the Dark* (2004) or *Bloodrayne* (2005) to be German cinema, despite their being in English and their conscious deployment of the aforementioned Hollywood mode. European cinema, on the other hand, tends to be both externally and internally defined in terms of its “art-house” output,<sup>16</sup> which certainly – as Anne Jäckel asserts – exists primarily to distinguish itself “faced with the pervasive dominance of Hollywood film.”<sup>17</sup> Thanks to European cinema presenting itself as primarily a branding device for a limited group of coveted art-house producers, it becomes difficult to label Boll’s cinema as distinctly “European,” given that he has positioned himself in the market specifically for the global mainstream over the statistically tiny art-house/festival demographic. Thus Boll can paradoxically be considered a German filmmaker, but not necessarily a European one. Such are the consequences of universal efforts to “brand” regional, national and continental cinemas with specific qualities: many transnational film productions and exchanges, the primary output of the international cinema industry, fall through the cracks of traditional film studies modes of classification.

Within the context of this analysis, transnationalism itself concerns the asymmetrical, negotiated flow of people and cultural, political, economic and other capital across national borders.<sup>18</sup> It governs phenomena occurring within historically specific contexts, but which also simultaneously historicize and create their

own subjects and identities. As Prasenjit Duara argues, “a transnational, global system of nation-states shapes the nation form as the object of historical inquiry and establishes the terms upon which individual identity is formed.”<sup>19</sup> A competing term such as “globalization,” which lacks the specificity of the national, often elides this important network of agent-network, power-subject relations that shape nations and, by proxy, human identities. Though the ideological frameworks and territorial boundaries of these nation-states constantly shift between one negotiated meta-narrative (i.e., Christianity, ethnic diaspora, scientific progress, neo-liberalism, etc.) and the next, it is important to situate all actors and actions within these frameworks and boundaries, as their very existence and fluidity carry a tremendous import for the abilities and identity of any given subject, even one existing so vehemently between nations such as Boll. Thus the adjective “transnational” inflects both the relationship between multiple nations and national identities, while also acknowledging the tensions, shifts and problems between nation, identity and differing national subjectivities in this framework.

One more term requiring elaboration is “anti-Americanism,” encompassing diverse prejudices against both objects and practices considered American and the moral qualities of those belonging to its nation-state. Brendan O’Connor and Gerrit-Jan Berendse’s post-9/11 assessments of the term both highlight how anti-Americanism has transitioned over the decades from a romanticist, conservative ideological aversion to the U.S. held prior to 1945 to a widely held prejudice against the U.S. among global leftists for the duration of the Cold War, and then after 1989 into a firm discomfort with the combined levels of American cultural capital and perceived moral degeneracy impacting their nations.<sup>20</sup> In the wake of America’s *hyperpuissance* in the 1990s, Berendse argues, “the German intelligentsia started a process of evaluating [America’s] cultural scene that glorified hedonism and erotic and violent lifestyles, known as the ‘*Spaßgesellschaft*’ or ‘*Erlebnisgesellschaft*’.”<sup>21</sup> Within a twenty-first century context, however, global anti-Americanism increasingly signifies anxiety about the overall dominance of neoliberal market forces and their concomitant destruction of local cultural industries. Just

as scholar Dipesh Chakrabarty and others have “provincialized” European nations so as to deconstruct their quasi-mythic power over history, resources, and even subjectivity itself, so have Europeans resorted to similar means of provincialization to attribute an image of backwardness and socio-moral turpitude to the United States in order to confirm their suspicions that something inherently “rotten” exists there.<sup>22</sup> Yet such anxieties are themselves mediated by the very multinational news corporations and entertainment industries feeding these fears back to their consuming populaces, with up-to-date anti-Americanism increasingly reliant on eye-catching news coverage and commentary to connect the world’s latest violence with both American foreign policy and its “way of life.” Anti-Americanism is a social construct like anything else, but its specific constructions of American arrogance and “degenerate” modes of thought are what lie at the core of our definition for the study of Boll’s filmmaking, rather than an incisive cultural critique of the “Americanization” of the rest of the world.

### Methodological Approach

In studying Boll and his films as products of their time, I have assembled a three-part methodology: a *capital flows analysis*, which addresses the political economy of his filmmaking and distribution within a transnational context; a *transnational discourse analysis* of their reception across the United States, Germany and other national sites of consumption; and a combined *tropic-paratextual analysis* of two films that illustrate the impact of the above transnational material and discursive realities on Boll’s recent work. These three frames of reference situate Boll at the center of material, aesthetic and discursive flows between Germany, Canada, the United States, Japan, Taiwan, Indonesia, Italy, Spain, and Portugal, among other nation-states. Though many more methods of analysis seem to present themselves – including but not limited to the analysis of Boll’s films in terms of race, genre history, gender, psychoanalytic, and structural components adapted from video games – I see more merit in a lim-

ited-albeit-multi-dimensional portrait of Boll’s work at this juncture.

For constructing Boll’s films as sites of established capital flows between nations, I turn to the model established by German film historian Tim Bergfelder in *International Adventures*, an exhaustively-researched monograph on Germany’s lesser-known genre cinema and B-movies produced in West Germany following the Nazi-controlled UFA cinema and before the rise of the New German Cinema as a cultural and national phenomenon.<sup>23</sup> Thanks in no small part to the scholarly model established by Siegfried Kracauer and the cultural pessimism of the Frankfurt School, this particular period of German cinema (roughly 1948-1966) has been largely ignored due to its ‘low’ aesthetic value, transnational character and the apolitical (i.e., reactionary) quality of the films. Bergfelder draws upon a new theoretical framework to construct a thorough economic and generic history of the period; one that approaches a sociological network history of transnational genre cinema rather than one shaped by formalism or structuralism. He suggests through demographic viewing data, co-production agreements, distribution deals and profit-margin analyses that German film history can only be rendered complete and coherent by following money, film production crews, and film reels across borders and through products such as cheap Edgar Wallace stories and the soft-core pornography popular during this era. Toby Miller has even suggested minimizing discussion of *auteurs* within isolated national cinemas altogether in favor of exploring the institutional circle of sovereign states, multinational corporations, regional customs unions, international clubs, international civil society and international governance as they intervene in *all* film production.<sup>24</sup> As ‘low’ films are being re-assessed in terms of their place within the German national “canon,” so can Boll’s films also be considered representative of German cinema while offering production histories in which the construct of Germany only plays a tiny role.

In terms of a discursive analysis, scholars at present must now delve into the near overwhelming array of sources, particularly online, to gauge public opinion about a director and a film.<sup>25</sup> Given Boll’s contemporary stature on the Internet as the quintessential bad

*auteur* (and therefore bad object) of global filmmaking, web discussions and reviews of his work are not only quite revealing, they anchor the discussion of his work at the intersection between multiple national interests. The two obvious discursive sites for analysis are Boll's *self-representation* in the media across different national and linguistic borders and the *reception of him and his work* by viewers in different countries. In theorizing these different discourses as well as their positions, Elizabeth Ezra and Terry Rowden remind us that all cinema "arises in the interstices between the local and the global,"<sup>26</sup> which includes most notably its various stake-holding audiences at specific sites of reception. It is thus important not to lose sight of national dimensions within global phenomena, just as Miller reminds us that though the world's present generations are accustomed to being surrounded with Hollywood film texts, Hollywood itself is a *dirigiste* film industry serving the national interests of the United States and also plays a major part in determining individual national cultural policies across the globe.<sup>27</sup> In Boll's case, these discursive ruptures between nations are actually what fuel his film production, since strictly-followed *dirigiste* film policy designed to promote high-art cinema in Germany is actually what allows him to create superficial entertainment films that more easily cross borders. The ease of transport of both the cinema and ideas reminds us also to consider Lila Abu-Lughod's proposal that scholars begin to "study up" on existing global power networks before seeking an effective defense against what are perceived as detrimental socio-cultural effects (e.g., homogenization of global media culture, marginalization of indigenous cinemas, etc.).<sup>28</sup> Thus language and representation must be situated within national contexts containing human agents with unique socio-political interests.

Keeping these interests in view, my tropic-paratextual analysis of Boll's bad cinema deals with his films as objects located within distinct generic conventions (the tropes) as well as objects requiring extensive paratextual cues demarcating its borders of signification. The work of Gérard Genette naturally comes to mind with regard to the latter: his literary study of the paratext, or the packaging and marketing materials of a book that mediate between the book, the author and

the reader, has pushed both literary and film scholarship toward a holistic perspective of how texts inside the book (peritexts) and promotional materials outside of it (epitexts) form the very boundaries between meaning and nonsense, signification and abjection.<sup>29</sup> Peritexts in terms of the cinema are DVD covers, special features such as director interviews, and even the opening and ending credits displaying the companies involved, whereas most epitexts in this regard tend to be public advertising, such as trailers, posters and press promotional dossiers for the use by sales reps.<sup>30</sup> Such an analysis will also refer back to national genres and transnational methods of cinema marketing that play on relationships between respective nationalisms. With regard to the content of the films themselves, the work of Jean Baudrillard on the simulacrum – the truth and reality inherent in the copies and re-renderings that make up modern media production – and the "restaging of [events] as global attractions"<sup>31</sup> suffices in explaining many qualitative aspects of Boll's work. Rather than seeing his *oeuvre* as singular and autonomous, I rather take the perspective that Boll draws upon a vast repertoire of mediocre genre cinema universally consumed around the world to produce films that are atomized reproductions of specific tropes whilst lacking ideological 'coherence'. His work should be viewed as stemming from other work. Such mass-produced cultural products retain their market value primarily in relation to its profitable predecessors, which in turn have been marketed and consumed across national borders. One should not forget that Boll's work has more in continuity with past German and Hollywood productions, as well as with their asymmetrical relations at the global distribution level, than it does mark a rupture in transnational European-Hollywood film history.

## Uwe Boll – Figure and Films

To properly examine Boll in the Foucauldian sense as a kind of void containing processes that point toward an author, we must regard not only Boll's biography in relation to his social location and works, but also to the very model of filmmaking and distribution that he



fig. 1: Boll relaxing with his dog Laura. Photo by Michael Heilemann.

appears to represent and its position within the global market. Born in Wermelskirchen near Cologne in 1965, Boll could be securely counted among the second generation of post-war Germans: those who grew up during the aftermath of the 1968 shift to identity politics, the normalization of color television as a medium, and the heavy influx of glossy, high-concept Hollywood blockbusters into West Germany after 1975, coming of age in an era when the country became the source of a full 10% of Hollywood's gross foreign revenue.<sup>32</sup> Boll grew comfortable as an enthusiastic consumer and producer of such media, reviewing films for a local radio station in the 1980s and studying filmmaking in Munich and Vienna. His first film *German Fried Movie* (1991) – a direct homage to the irreverent slapstick of the Jewish-American team Zucker, Abrahams and Zucker's *Kentucky Fried Movie* (1977) co-written with Frank Lustig – was produced with a mere 60,000 DM and toured over 100 local theaters in Germany in 1990 as Boll physically transported the print himself from theater to theater. Like many Germans in the time shortly after the *Wende*, Boll saw the German unification as a site of opportunity to explore new career possibilities and exploit the new German-speaking consumer market opening in the East. It was a time for entrepreneurial experiments in all spheres, and Boll unambiguously seized the moment in two of them: the commercial filmmaking sphere and the academic sphere. In the former, Boll contributed two films – *Barschel – Mord in Genf?* (1993) and *Amoklauf* (1994) – to a profitable cycle of what Randall Halle dubs the “German unifica-

tion horror” cycle lasting from 1993 to 2000.<sup>33</sup> These films displayed another side of Boll's filmmaking capacity: that of claustrophobic, low-budget thrillers with psychologically disturbed men and intersecting systems of oppression conspiring to unleash the violent potential within them. His encounter with the hypocritical high-art pretensions of post-unification German *Filmförderungen*, caustically documented in a 1992 publication, marked the beginning of his long-term polemics against German film culture.<sup>34</sup> Meanwhile in the academic sphere, Boll defended his dissertation in German Studies entitled *Die Gattung Serie und ihre Genres* at the University of Siegen in 1994,<sup>35</sup> in which Boll extensively details the formal, generic characteristics that constitute established television series and concludes that “*alle Serien weisen in ihrer Struktur immer auf das Familiengenre oder Kriminalgenre hin.*”<sup>36</sup> A picture of a budding filmmaker and media scholar begins to emerge from these facts – a tenacious, white West German male seeking both to understand the formal functions of the mass culture with which he grew up and to profit from this understanding.

Yet Boll actually languished within the German film scene throughout the 1990s, a fact that ought to shift the discussion toward factors leading to the success of his production model by 2003. Up until 1998, post-unification Germany primarily funded its private-sector film production through public subsidy money raised through taxes levied on mainstream Hollywood ticket sales.<sup>37</sup> Such subsidies were (and still are) distributed by film boards that typically favor established *auteurs* such as Wim Wenders or Tom Tykwer, transnational co-productions and prestige films over unabashedly for-profit genre cinema productions, to preserve national high-art film cultures at the expense of European taxpayers. In 1998, however, *Medienfonds* were introduced that allowed German private investors to support German-staffed film and television productions for general interest audiences without having to pay taxes on their investment, unless the film made a profit. Thanks to the legal expertise of the Hollywood conglomerates, these tax-free funds were successfully allocated to the budgets of such blockbuster films as *Mission Impossible 2* (2000) and *Gangs of New York* (2002), providing a lucid pic-

ture of how national cultural policy and investment in Germany directly impacts the film culture of Hollywood in unexpected ways.<sup>38</sup> In fact, the Medienfonds generated over \$1 billion annually for Hollywood between 2001 and 2005, often justified with the argument that many of the films funded – like the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy – would turn a profit in Germany anyway, and some were “even shot in Germany.”<sup>39</sup> But German lawmakers became dissatisfied both by their unwitting support for the very cinema against which they had exercised *dirigiste* measures to defend as well as their creation of a “tax shelter”<sup>40</sup> that cost them over a billion dollars in lost revenue by the time they closed the loophole – the infamous clause § 15a Abs. 1 Satz 2 of the Income Tax Code – in 2005.<sup>41</sup> Hollywood was surprisingly dissatisfied with the epiphenomena caused by the Medienfonds as well, since the immediate influx of capital into the film industry drove up actors’ salaries to unsustainable levels in practice. Despite their notoriety, however, these tax shelters and their accompanying loophole provided an entrepreneur like Boll with the necessary means of enticing German investors – most notably over 200 German dentists – to finance a slew of video-game films to the total sum of 267 million euros.

Boll’s production model has since become an object of notoriety, though among German filmmaking interests in the early ‘00s, Boll AG was not even the first company to turn to computer games as a cheap, reliable source of film adaptation material. *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (2001) and *Resident Evil* (2002) were both German co-productions enabled by the Medienfonds system, backed by major prestige film companies Constantin Film and the Tele München Gruppe (TMG) and making impressive returns on investment in both cases.<sup>42</sup> Though Boll failed to get distribution with the non-video-game-based *Heart of America* (2003), his debut video-game film *House of the Dead* (2003) actually grossed \$10 million against its \$7 million price tag, producing a small profit to investors not initially expecting one. This success paved the way for a film production model thoroughly embedded in notions of minimal-risk investment and tight control over production and distribution.

As a first step, Boll bought the rights to dozens of major video game properties and made six films – *House*

*of the Dead*, *Alone in the Dark*, *Dungeon Siege*, *Bloodrayne*, *Postal* and *Far Cry* – that came with both a relatively cheap price-tag and a built-in global audience of young, male gamers accustomed to the Hollywood aesthetic. He would then cast the nascent film project, enticing Hollywood stars as diverse as Ben Kingsley, Kristanna Loken, Christian Slater, Jason Statham and Burt Reynolds using guaranteed contracts paid in euros. The films were shot using Boll AG’s primarily German production crew – in contrast to *Tomb Raider* and *Resident Evil*’s Hollywood staff – on location in Vancouver, where the Canadian government provides generous tax breaks to large-scale feature film projects.<sup>43</sup> Content-wise, the films are what Jigna Desai would deem “tasty, easily swallowed, apolitical global cultural morsels,”<sup>44</sup> running at exactly 90 minutes for later television licenses and marketing themselves in a fashion instantly legible to the 18-30 demographic worldwide. A key subsequent step was then for the film to have an unprofitable 35mm release in the United States and/or Germany, which established two important foundations within Boll’s profit model, namely guaranteeing the investors’ money in the Medienfonds against the net loss and acquiring the cachet of being somehow linked with institutional Hollywood alongside aesthetic Hollywood.<sup>45</sup> This associative signification still aids Boll in the final step in his model: the licensing of television and DVD rights to over 70 countries, including Italy, Spain, Thailand and Japan (his most lucrative markets outside of the U.S. and Germany), where his films look identical to the hegemonic Hollywood fare to which they are now accustomed within the global media marketplace. It is through Boll’s absolute control of this distribution back-end that allowed him to turn an overall profit on each film, money that he always sank into the next production. Thus Boll’s career sits at the convoluted nexus of hands-off international video-game-to-movie licensing, Germany’s tax code and surplus of trained filmmakers, Canada’s photogenic landscapes and film incentives, Italy, Spain, Thailand and Japan’s anti-piracy laws and growing DVD-consuming demographics, and globally-held notions of the primacy of Hollywood in the aesthetic and institutional senses. From a transnational perspective, Boll’s films prove anything but simple to

understand. Within Mette Hjort's taxonomy of film transnationalisms, Boll's is a strong, unmarked *opportunistic* transnationalism with *globalizing* and *milieu-building* overtones.<sup>46</sup>

Even if one were to laud Boll's remarkable business acumen or condemn his exploitation of loopholes and gullible film markets, the above production and financing model cannot even be considered novel within German and/or international film history. Boll's choice to work with the same, selective German crew on each project regardless of content resembles the model of contemporary French-Hollywood director Luc Besson (*The Fifth Element*, *The Messenger: The Story of Joan of Arc*), who in turn has, as Sue Harris notes, a "preference for working almost artisanally with a core technical and artistic crew in ways reminiscent of the collectivist practices of directors such as [Jean] Renoir and [Marcel] Carné in 1930s France."<sup>47</sup> This is one way in which Boll keeps his production company staffed mostly with German nationals. Rather than subscribing to the mania of B-film directors like Wood or Derek, Boll wholeheartedly embraces the producer/director model utilized by Corman (*Little Shop of Horrors*), in which the film's poster is many ways more important than its content, as well as the German soft-core pornography producer Wolf C. Hartwig (*Horrors of Spider Island*), who also held an outsider-as-insider relationship with the German film industry as a profit-making transnational co-producer of terrible films based on readily marketable generic models. Boll himself idolizes directors John Ford and M. Night Shyamalan, both men who found commercial success through frugally executed, generically predictable Hollywood cinema. In short, Boll as a filmmaker may be more the latest incarnation of a specific directorial archetype – the working man's producer/director – than a historical anomaly, another sign that one should not neglect the means by which Boll's work is received and disseminated.

## Discourse and Reception

Outside of Boll's own texts and paratexts, there exists a vast field of media discourse surrounding the director, to the extent that many contemporary consumers across the global market may hold prejudices toward the director without having seen a single film of his. Yet this discourse, though most present on the Internet, proved necessary for Boll's continued success until 2008, as well as necessarily constrained by national borders; specifically those of the United States, Germany and – based on its relative discursive uniformity in comparison – the Rest of the World. The United States generally frames Boll as the abject of world cinema, though the invokers of this discourse are predominantly white, male gamers and Internet users. In contrast, Germany frames Boll as a successful entrepreneur within the world cinema market, a sober leader of a publicly traded company in the DAX. Within Malaysia, Japan, Spain or any other market with little stake in preserving the sanctity of Hollywood against a Germanic threat or Germany's clout within the film industry, the discourse either assumes the default anti-Boll stance of the Americans (presumably among young, Internet-savvy men in those countries) or simply codes Boll's films as straight products of Hollywood, a seamless mapping of Boll's paratextual elements onto a complicated web of non-Hollywood film relations. The tension between these different nationally specific frameworks for Boll's work functions as a feedback loop for his production model: one discourse produces attention, another prestige, and the third the anonymous capital required to stay profitable.

The United States media phenomenon concerning Boll has been thoroughly documented, both in its grassroots origins among gamers on the Internet who detest his ostensibly shoddy adaptations of video-game narratives they hold dear and in the momentum of curiosity of those not spurred by the passion and proliferation of this trend called "internet bashing."<sup>48</sup> From the release of *House of the Dead* in 2003 until that of *Postal* in 2008, Boll could rely upon free publicity from Internet critics relishing the opportunity to eviscerate his video-game-related films, doing so most prominently on the IMDB, Rotten Tomatoes and

Ain't It Cool News web forums. Metaphors of protecting America's national borders and Hollywood against the films made by this "Nazi" abound. Samples include Stuart Wood and Rafe Telsch's Cinema Blend article "Uwe Boll: Money for Nothing," which casts the director as a kind of scam artist ripping off American viewers, states that "there is another war with Germany brewing and it's one Hollywood can't afford to lose,"<sup>49</sup> to the factually incoherent "demotivational poster" found at Motivatedphotos.com boldly asserting: "Uwe Boll: Funding His Films with Nazi Gold since 1999."<sup>50</sup> Boll-bashing in America has quite literally become a dominant cultural mode of expression, meaning there is social and commercial capital to be gained in its practice. The alternate discursive mode is that of mainstream media publications such as GQ, Variety, Entertainment Weekly and the Fox infotainment show Red Eye, in which Boll's career and the "hype" generated by the Boll-bashing are meticulously chronicled as a kind of stranger-than-fiction contemporary oddity.<sup>51</sup> The apex of such coverage was reached in conjunction with *Postal*'s U.S. release in mid-April 2008 and some arrogant comments the director made about George Clooney and Michael Bay in FEARnet magazine, after which point Boll ceased obtaining U.S. theatrical releases of videogame-related films. Such discursive poles frame Boll as either a threat to institutional Hollywood (and therefore the American public interest) – given his deliberate misrepresentation of video game content through a decisively Hollywood aesthetic – or as a curious charlatan to whom some technologically privileged consumers with disposable income have paid inhospitable attention. It is rarely pointed out that such attention on a national level actually encourages investment and participation in Boll's media fiefdom and the highly restrictive and competitive nature of commercial cinema dominated by Hollywood's hegemony cultivates transnational entrepreneurship such as Boll's. His films and DVDs should be viewed neither as offensive kitsch nor mere cultural curiosities, but serious commodities within an asymmetrical system of exchange and profit between nations.

Such a level of seriousness can be found to a certain degree in the German-language discourse covering Boll's work, which sees the director as an independ-

ent player on the level of Hollywood and a sincere participant within the German national economy. In the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, for example, reporter Steffen Uttich covers Boll only in the context of the closure of the tax loophole, describing the director as a relaxed, efficient businessman: "Und so sitzt das 41 Jahre alte Multitalent in diesen Tagen in seiner Villa am Stadtrand von Mainz, schaut sich die Werbetrailer zu seinen gerade abgedrehten Streifen an – und bereitet die nächsten drei vor. Dann ist das Geld erst einmal alle."<sup>52</sup> Christoph Boecken's review of *Postal* on his website Jeriko insists that Boll's appearance in the film is "nicht der echte Boll, stattdessen eine monströse Karikatur seiner selbst – der anstößige Deutsche, den jeder hasst,"<sup>53</sup> suggesting that Boll is simply manipulating his media image *vis-à-vis* his negative American national publicity to (hopefully) generate more thereof. Critic and author Michael Cholewa even lashed out at fellow critic Oliver Nagel's *Titanic* article "The Filminator" over having believed the hype, reiterating the point that "Boll dreht Filme, die sich, weil sie so amerikanisch sind, weltweit gut verkaufen."<sup>54</sup> The two major Boll fan-sites, Boll KG-run Bollfans.de and the now-defunct BollBashers.com site, are both run by Germans with an interest in promoting accurate statements from German media alongside those from the U.S. media. Just as the U.S. sites reflexively generate international hype surrounding a Boll production, the German sites lend the operation homegrown legitimacy as a solid German-run business with a now-extensive portfolio and a stream of current updates. Boll needs no "defending," as his privilege and legacy within post-*Wende* entrepreneurial culture is secure: he is a "renaissance man" aware of how the world works with his eye on the real prize in the film industry, namely profit.

In a special feature on the *Bloodrayne* DVD entitled "Dinner with Uwe," Boll divulges exactly how this profit is earned:

*[What] I've learned is that foreign buyers – [say] a Spanish company and an Italian company – they have no problem to buy a movie I shot in the U.S. with U.S. actors in English, but if I would do the same in Germany with German actors, I would not get any sales in Italy or Spain ... The U.S. market is, even in a direct-*

*to-DVD market, a very good market in which to sell movies from U.S. to whatever – Thailand and Japan, Spain. Everybody's used to it, and everybody grows up with U.S. movies, so the strongest export article of U.S.A. is actually movies. And I thought always oil.*

Boll's lucidity here about the mechanisms by which he earns money is telling – both the Hollywood aesthetic of his films and their entry into the U.S. market actually privileges the films in their further circulation to mostly non-white audiences abroad. This begs the question of how his films are received within these destination markets. The answer is that his films' Hollywood aesthetic and white Hollywood stars coupled with their public epitexts (e.g., trailers, posters and DVD packaging) allow them to seamlessly integrate into a system of international distribution that already holds such texts as the norm. An informal survey conducted by this author among young teachers in Kawanishi, Japan,<sup>55</sup> for example, revealed that not a single one of them had heard of Boll, but several had seen his work – most notably *Bloodrayne* – “out of general interest in American movies.” Boll as a brand name for bad cinema or as a clever entrepreneur fades into the background abroad leaving only his films, which are then read as products of Hollywood. On the Chinese review website Thmz.com, *Bloodrayne* is marketed alongside international mega-hit *Spiderman 3* and another video-game film, *Resident-Evil: Apocalypse*.<sup>56</sup> The film's Chinese-language cover foregrounds main actress Kristanna Loken's sexuality with her revealing top juxtaposed with her twin blades and is sold uncensored – a notable fact in a country that heavily filters incoming cultural content. On the Spanish site Cine Fantástico, the interviewer Sergei treats Boll as a semi-controversial but otherwise conventional Hollywood interviewee, asking rudimentary questions about what films he likes and how he made the film *Bloodrayne*.<sup>57</sup> This is to say that while the United States discourse treats his person and production model as abject and Germany's discourse abjects the films themselves in favor of the man and his enterprising production model, the nations constituting his other profitable markets abject both the man and his production model in favor of the films. As one would expect, these national discourses

also align precisely with what nations have to gain within the model: the Germans receive both returns on investment and retain film industry workers, the Americans provide crucial-yet-unwitting publicity and (therefore) legitimacy for the films, and markets in China, Thailand, Spain, etc. now deal with Boll's modest German company on par with any Hollywood multinational corporation. Thus institutional Hollywood's unstated position as a national cinema comes under threat by Boll's films' aesthetic masquerade as products of Hollywood.

Since the closure of the German tax loophole in November 2005, Boll has turned to “presales and private equity” to finance his cinema, which roughly translates to Boll AG becoming a financially independent, shareholder-contingent corporate entity like any other moderately successful transnational entertainment company.<sup>58</sup> Despite his mixed reception across virtual and national discursive boundaries, Boll has demonstrated the relatively closed world of international capital that his model does, in fact, maximize shareholder profit while allowing him to ply his trade as a filmmaker.

## Two Case Studies: *Heart of America* and *Postal*

*Heart of America* (2002) presents itself as a strange starting point for an analysis of Boll's filmmaking for several reasons. The film about a school shooting marks neither his first film (*German Fried Movie*), his first English-language production (the television film *Sanctimony* (2000)), his first film produced as part of Boll AG (*Blackwoods* (2002)), his first film about a shooting (*Amoklauf*), nor a film based on a video game (*House of the Dead*). It is also neither a particularly outstanding film nor – though a personal favorite of Boll's<sup>59</sup> – not particularly original. Yet it provides a suitable object lesson for how Boll – branding himself as a lone German art-house director using the Medienfonds to give German nationals careers in the film industry – initially attempted to break into the horizontally-closed film distribution networks with a timely, serious, professionally controlled drama



fig. 2: A shooter with pathos - Turton as Daniel in *Heart of America*.

created in the Hollywood mode for little money before he turned wholeheartedly to video games as source material.

In the years between 9/11 and the Iraq War, international cinema leveled its attention on the bizarre psychology found in the institution both most representative of American suburbia and the site of a recent wave of massacres: the American high school. Larry Clark controversially highlights the interweaving worlds of suburban boredom, random violence and teen sexuality in *Ken Park* (2002),<sup>60</sup> while Gus Van Sant's *Elephant* (2003) depicts repressed sexual energy and casual cruelty leading to a shooting similar to that found in *Heart of America*. The difference between Van Sant's and Boll's film, however, proves to be in their respective festival exposure. "I saw [*Elephant*]," Boll said. "And I think it was super-boring. But [Van Sant] got all the A-list invitations. I got shit."<sup>61</sup> In other words, Van Sant's independent film successfully drew on the conventions of European art cinema – experimental camera work, long takes and existentially frustrated characters played by non-professional actors; Boll's life-long antagonist – whereas Boll's film turns to the melodramatic formulas of the Hollywood "social problem" film and the "unstable man" action-thriller.<sup>62</sup> The directors were correspondingly rewarded for their artistic allegiances.

Financed with Medienfonds by Cinemedia and Herold Productions, *Heart of America* presents the viewer with a suburban family melodrama in the mode established by German-exile Hollywood director Douglas Sirk, that then transitions into the "unstable man" or "shooting spree" genre within the last ten minutes. The ninety-minute span of the diegesis matches the ninety-minute run-time of the film, much like Brian De

Palma's *Snake Eyes* (1998) or John Badham's *Nick of Time* (1995). There are effectively three main characters – the working-class loner Daniel (Kett Turton), the clean-cut middle-class boy Barry (Michael Belyea) and the drug-addled, promiscuous rich girl Robin (Elisabeth Moss) – all of whom are white and somehow live in the same neighborhood despite blatant class differences. One knows this because their houses are metaphorically linked together with an astoundingly long tracking shot that begins at Daniel's window and follows a newspaper boy through the streets to the houses of various characters. This expensive cinematic gesture necessarily links the characters together as part of an American national unity, binding their socially atomized lives together into a collective problem, as well as textually signifying Boll's affinity to big-budget Hollywood. A sound bridge a few minutes later between the aggressive rock music in a football player's car and that of the delinquent seniors led by Ricky (Brendan Fletcher<sup>63</sup>) performs a similar function: it demarcates a shared American teen culture that is both raucous and rebellious, and yet unconscious and establishment-bound. Boll is eager to establish the characters as psychologically complex, but then generalizes the American experience through his aesthetic; the *heart of America* is on display for critique and visual consumption.

While Boll's film embraces both the alternative Hollywood aesthetic and mainstream critique of America expressed by Sirk and De Palma, the framing device at the beginning and end of the film, as well as its paratexts, has a more conventional inspiration, namely the headline news representations of the United States. The opening to the film is white text on a black background read by a serious male narrator: "A child who spends 13 years in average public schools has one chance in roughly 107,000 of a violent death in school, on school property, or while commuting to school. 83 percent of the school victims and 96 percent of the offenders were male." This presentation of statistics frames the melodramatic violence of the story as directly relating to contemporary American issues, as well as provides a suspense element for the film: one of the shooters turns out to be Robin. The film's conclusion depicts the students' parents watching the aftermath on television, followed by news clip-

pings detailing actual school shootings in the U.S. since 1998: Jonesboro, AK; Springfield, OR; Littleton, CO; Tabor, Alberta; Santee, CA; Caro, MI; Tampa, FL. The film serves to answer the question “why” such events occurred, but the question itself is merely framed by German/Canadian discourses *vis-à-vis* television news about shootings in the United States. Simply put, *Amokläufer* or school shooters are coded as a white American problem, with their origins in peer abuse and the insecurities of high school. Boll’s question is obvious even from the film’s posters and DVD cover, where lines cross through the names of towns where the events occurred, such as Columbine or West Paducah. This is quite literally the re-staging of events for global consumption of which Baudrillard spoke, and comes from a transnational position not so much in dialogue with the United States as hoping to proselytize to that country about the “source” of its problems. The film’s failure to receive cinema distribution demonstrates Boll’s simple lack of access to the discursive feedback loop previously mentioned, which he attained with his use of Medienfonds for video-game films.

Five years later, Boll created another shooter film *Postal* (2008) that demonstrates the effects of this discourse loop and transnational capital flows on his cinema. Naturally, these mechanisms function with clear points of tension, most clearly manifested in the filmmaker’s 2006 public boxing match against five of his harshest critics, which was likely held as a publicity stunt to generate buzz for his firm after the tax code was revised in 2006. This boxing match also reflected Boll’s increasingly public anti-American stance, of which *Postal* became its most prominently marketed manifestation.

Like *Heart of America*, *Postal* is a film about a man pushed to the limits of his patience who goes on a shooting spree. Unlike that social problem film, however, *Postal* was designed to be a bit of light entertainment at the end of a series of genre films, and is based on a video game with little discernible plotline. Boll states to this effect: “I made horror, action, fantasy, western, sci-fi video game based movies and comedy with *Postal*.”<sup>64</sup> The protagonist, a man named Postal Dude (Zack Ward), has a bad day in small-town America and discovers, after meeting up with his

Uncle Dave (Dave Foley) the cult leader, that Osama bin Laden is trying to conduct a biological terror attack using a smuggled set of corporate toys. From Boll’s vantage point, the “unstable man” genre that he continues to revisit is relegated to a stylistic device in the midst of an action parody *à la* the United Kingdom’s *Hot Fuzz* (2007) as he unleashes his most vitriolic critique of American society yet. The film both demonstrates his power as a transnational filmmaker as well as the limitations of a Hollywood-styled genre parody in expressing his anti-Americanism. Using tropes combined from *Falling Down* as well as from Dimension Films’ “Movie” parody cycle (*Scary Movie*, *Epic Movie*, etc.) in both the film and its advertising, Boll completely abandons the attempted psychological complexity in *Heart of America* for hard-line Hollywood character types: the Obnoxious Boss, the Chick with a Gun, the Hippie Drug-Addict (Foley) and, of course, the Sympathetic Mook (Ward). Instead of the glossy, quiet suburbia of his earlier film, Boll locates



fig. 3: A shooter with satire - Ward as Postal Dude in *Postal*.

Postal Dude in a dog-dropping-laden trailer park with a hideously obese wife who's having an affair, cops who senselessly shoot old women, and religious fanatics coming out of every corner. America itself is not so much critiqued as it is publicly abjected, like Boll himself. He even incorporates the very discourse that made him successful – that of the despised Nazi German director – in a sequence set in the fictional “Little Germany” theme park, in which he wears Lederhosen, gives an interview that confirms that he finances movies with Nazi gold, brawls with the *Postal* video game's creator playing himself, and declares his hatred of video games as his dying words amidst an absurdist shootout. His irreverence and abjection as world film *provocateur* becomes a distinct commodity to be consumed within a film promising a wealth of irreverence: “Some comedies go too far... others start there,” is the film's tagline.

The shift can be explained by Boll's improvement in the apparatus and capabilities of producing a budget Hollywood aesthetic while adopting an increasingly anti-American stance to increase overall publicity and sales. The film provides an almost continuous generic exploration of that which foreign audiences enjoy about Hollywood films – explosions, gunfights, and scantily clad white women – while culling its plot primarily from clichéd media headlines about the U.S. propagated abroad: the American obesity epidemic, George W. Bush as a pandering idiot, reclusive cults and, of course, the apparently American-only phenomenon of psychotic rampages.<sup>65</sup> Most of these references are made once in passing, such that the film seems more a tirade of recognizable, global citations than a true polemic against either America or Hollywood. Even *Postal's* cynical framing devices – the opening joke on 9/11 and the ending that shows Bush and Bin Laden hand-in-hand as atomic explosions go off in the background – are themselves fantasies of participation in the American media phenomenon. The film is more astutely seen as an action-comedy distributed by the French conglomerate Vivendi Entertainment, owner of news companies (NBC) and video game companies (Activision Blizzard), designed to further sell its products while keeping Boll in business as a side effect. Thus Boll's production model, including the competing national discourses that made it

thrive, has been absorbed into the flows of global capital, which may explain why he has recently turned to smaller budget, independent projects such as *Darfur* (2009) and the upcoming *The United States of America* (2011) to test his horizontal networks established after *Heart of America*.

## Conclusion

The question still remains of how Boll and his model fits into transnational paradigms invoking Global North/South, postcolonial and “Third World in the First World” power constellations, by which I refer to Anibal Quijano's “coloniality of power”<sup>66</sup> – the interrelation of race, Eurocentrism and capital exploitation that has shaped the vast asymmetries of wealth and power today – as well as the notion that cultural studies scholarship of this kind should be advocating *for* the sectors of the global populace traditionally disenfranchised by race, class, gender, age and disability. What do the films of a privileged German genre-film director exploiting, and limited by, transnational political, cultural and market forces have to contribute to a body of film studies scholarship that prioritizes critical political advocacy and social justice issues? The above analysis has demonstrated that the “ideologically reactionary and stylistically conservative ‘dominant’ cinema” of Hollywood discussed by Shohat and Stam is actually quite *vulnerable* to the same transnational distribution networks and modes of discourse that give it so much power, and that this same power is thoroughly inscribed with the interests of the American nation. As Toby Miller observes...

*... the neoclassical vision of Hollywood asserts that the supposedly neutral mechanism of market competition exchanges materials at costs that ensure the most efficient people are producing, and their customers are content ... As an historical account, it is of no value: the rhythms of supply and demand, operating unfettered by states, religions, unions, superstition and fashion, do not exist as such.*<sup>67</sup>

Miller's argument is effective in dismissing the myth that the Hollywood-promoted mechanisms of global competition produce good movies: on the contrary, the present global imbalance in film financing, production/distribution options and narrow range of film aesthetics (i.e., Hollywood vs. art cinema) necessarily produces cinema of markedly 'low' quality that ultimately is sold to consumers explicitly conditioned to expect little else. One should see Hollywood and German competitors like Boll as neither autonomous global nor nationally constrained agents, but as thoroughly national agents reliant all at once on internal *dirigiste* mechanisms, the external friction produced by national cinema discourses and the unequal transnational flows of entertainment product and capital. Boll has managed to straddle "staying at home and buying in Hollywood talent, or moving to Los Angeles and selling [his] talent to Hollywood," as Peter Krämer describes the contemporary U.S.-German film dilemma, but only at the price of producing several years of expressly cheap video-game cinema in the Hollywood aesthetic mode and exploiting the same raced, classed and gendered export markets that institutional Hollywood has since the advent of cinema. Hollywood can now be mimicked and distributed independent of itself, but only now that non-western consumers have embraced at least the paratexts corresponding to this aesthetic – thanks to the handicapped distribution of non-Hollywood cinema. Thus there are many links in the global chain of feature film production and distribution that Boll's model and films highlight, not the least of which is the very tension produced by national discussions concerning a body of films and their producer. Anti-German sentiment expressed by American film consumers aggressively protecting their national cinema has, for example, brought out such an equally visceral anti-American sentiment within Boll's recent films, which in turn *look* as if they were made in the United States and certainly make their returns on investment. Brett Martin poignantly discusses Boll's struggle to remain a working German filmmaker against the grain of Hollywood in class-laden terms, as he argues that "it must be hard for Boll to always be on the outside looking in. Especially since he knows this: [the Cannes producers] may take meetings at Craft in-

stead of a mall; they may be financed by Weinsteins instead of dentists; their genre may be Oscar trash instead of horror trash; but every [one of them] is, in one way or another, a Raging Boll."<sup>68</sup> His drive to be a transnational German filmmaker, as opposed to a European filmmaker, has forced him into networks and discourses that defy lay expectations, but which nevertheless reinforce a historically established production/distribution model *vis-à-vis* the rest of the world where white Europeans and Americans foist nationally-financed film exports into new markets conditioned to accept them. Daniel Clancy's recent forum post on *The Auteurs* thus reveals the logical fallacy to any non-transnational and/or materialist approach to Boll's work, stating that "he doesn't care that all his movies are shitty[sic]. He likes to do it and people give him the money to do so, so let him go. Don't criticize him. Criticize his financiers."<sup>69</sup> To Clancy's statement, I pose one simple question: who are these financiers? For if they are, in fact, the German dentists, 15 year-old Thai boys, Canadian and German taxpayers, and the very Americans purported to hate his movies, then these financiers are not all created equal in the eyes of global capital, and should be critiqued accordingly.

## Endnotes

1. My consumption of the film was directly related to "snarking," or providing constant sarcastic commentary, a cultural practice popular among my demographic. See Jancovich 2008, *Cult Fictions*.
2. <http://www.petitiononline.com/RRH53888/petition.html>. Accessed 3 May 2010.
3. <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0093051/>. Accessed 10 August 2009.
4. The comparison with Corman actually has some merit, given their similar handling of producer and director roles.
5. Martin 2008, *Award*, p. 214.
6. Kristeva 1982, *Powers*, p. 1.
7. Foucault 1987, *Author*, p. 121.
8. See Miller 2005, *Hollywood*, p. 190.
9. Chapman 2003, *Cinemas*, p. 33.
10. See Bordwell /Thompson / Staiger 1985, *Classical*.
11. Shohat / Stam 1994, *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, p. 7.
12. Schrader 1972, as quoted in Elsaesser 2005, *European Cinema*, p. 44.
13. The pivotal movie that revived the efficacy of the studios has almost unanimously considered to be *Jaws* (1975).
14. In particular, see Naficy 2001, *Accented*, Hjort 2010, *Plurality and Seeßlen* 2000, *Kino*.
15. This proves to be no problem for a country (Germany) accustomed anyway to consuming voice-dubbed material from around the world.
16. See Elsaesser 2005, *European Cinema* p. 67.
17. Jäckel 2003, *European* p. 4.

18. For an overview of transnationalism in German film studies, see Halle 2008, *German Film*, pp. 28-29, Ezra / Rowden 2006, *Transnational Cinema*, pp. 1-12, Jahn-Sudermann 2009, *Film u. Transnationalität*, pp. 15-26, Naficy 2001, *Accented Cinema*, pp. 10-16, Seeblen 2000, *Kino / Le Cinema / The Cinema*, pp. 22-29.
19. Duara 2002, *Transnationalism*, p. 26.
20. See O'Connor 2004, *Anti-Americanism*.
21. Berendse 2003, *German Anti-Americanism*, p. 335.
22. See Chakrabarty 2007, *Provincializing*.
23. See Bergfelder 2005, *International Adventures* and Bergfelder 2005, *National, Transnational*.
24. Miller 2010, *National Cinema*, p. 140.
25. The Internet presents enough of a logistical challenge to the film studies discipline to warrant a major panel series at the 2010 Society for Cinema and Media Studies conference under the title "Popular Cinema Criticism in Media Culture" addressing these issues.
26. Ezra / Rowden 2006, *Transnational*, p. 4.
27. See Miller 2005, *Hollywood*.
28. See Abu-Lughod 1991, *Recapturing Anthropology*.
29. Genette 1997, *Thresholds*, p. 347.
30. See Kernan 2004, *Coming Attractions*, p. 6.
31. Baudrillard 2002, *Screened Out*, p. 151.
32. Krämer 2008, *Germany*, p. 242.
33. See Halle 2003, *Unification*, p. 285; see also Haase 2007, *Heimat*, p. 52.
34. The director launched a litany of tirades against, among other items, "Aufnahmekriterien an den Filmhochschulen, Personal der Filmförderung und Fernsehfilmredaktionen, Bewertung der Verleihvorkosten, u. überzogene Gagenvorstellungen aller Beteiligten." Boll 1992, *German*, pp. 194-198.
35. Boll's dissertation also appeared at a time when *Mediengeschichte* was still a nascent field within the German academy, representative of transnational scholarly trends that also inform Boll's work.
36. Boll 1994, *Gattung*, p. 51.
37. See Jäckel 2003, *European*, p. 51.
38. See Halle 2008, *German Film*, p. 2.
39. Krämer 2008, *Germany*, p. 245.
40. A definition of tax shelter may be in order: wealthy individuals working in high-income tax states such as Germany could invest a large sum in a movie, coupled with a larger sum from a bank. If the movie made money, both the investor and the bank made money. If the movie lost money, then the investor still paid far less tax on the original sum invested than initially owed. Columbia exploited this system during the mid-70s for international co-productions such as *The Man Who Would Be King* (1975) and *Sinbad and the Eye of the Tiger* (1977), pulling in over \$150 million before a similar loophole was closed in 1976 (see Pirie 1981, *Anatomy*, p. 14). Such a model is not without risk, however: if the movie failed to recoup enough box-office receipts to reimburse its investors at least in part, whole German investment companies became open to collapse. The most spectacular of these in contemporary history has been the Kirch Group (see Krämer 2008, *Germany*, p. 244).
41. This author, however, cynically suspects that this "accidental" support for Hollywood through legislation for national film promotion was likely both intentional and profit-motivated.
42. *Resident Evil*, a film based on the zombie-slaying video game of the same title, made \$18 million in its first 3 days of release (see Bergfelder 2005, *International Adventures*, p. 244).
43. For more details about Canadian tax incentives, see <http://www.canadafilmmcapital.com/taxcredit/cftip.pdf>, accessed 11 August 2009.
44. Desai 2004, *Bollywood*, p. 90.
45. When Boll's English-language films are screened in Germany, they are German-dubbed exactly like Hollywood films and thus only read as "German" films via the German names in the credits.
46. See Hjort 2010, *Plurality*, p. 19.
47. Harris 2004, *Cinema*, p. 230.
48. The thorough examination of the United States discourse on Boll would actually require at least another full academic article worth of analysis, as the media phenomenon is that pronounced.
49. Wood / Telsch 2009, *Uwe Boll*.
50. <http://www.motivatedphotos.com/?id=20271>, accessed 11 August 2009.
51. A comprehensive record of Boll's media exposure from 2005 to 2009 can be found at the German-run site <http://www.bollbashers.com>.
52. Uttich 2007, *Medienfonds*.
53. Boecken 2008, *Postal*.
54. The full text of Cholewa's comments is available at <http://www.bollbashers.com/?p=478>. I would like to thank Jan-Mathis Schnurr for alerting me to this discussion.
55. I would like to thank Aaron Kempf for his assistance in conducting this research.
56. <http://movie.thmz.com/>, accessed 11 August 2009.
57. <http://www.cinefantastico.com/entrevista.php?id=41>, accessed 11 August 2009.
58. See Hagen 2009, *Interview*.
59. *Ibid.*
60. Also featuring actress Maeve Quinlan, who plays a picture-perfect suburban mother in both *Ken Park* and *Heart of America*.
61. Martin 2008, *Award*, p. 212
62. The "social problem" film tradition in Hollywood actually dates back to Fritz Lang's *Fury* (1935) or even D.W. Griffith's *Intolerance* (1915), whereas the most famous "unstable man" action-thrillers are clearly *Taxi Driver* (1976) and *Falling Down* (1995).
63. Fletcher, interestingly enough, plays the disturbed lead in Boll's fourth shooter movie *Rampage* (2010) the trailer of which promises even more gore and explosions than *Heart of America* or *Postal* could deliver.
64. See Hagen 2009, *Interview*.
65. Though Germany itself has been wracked by such violence in Ansbach, Erfurt, Munich and other locales, denoting this as a wider global phenomenon. Recent school-knifing rampages in China ca. April 2010 remind us it is not only present in the Euro-American context as well.
66. Quijano 2000, *Coloniality*.
67. Miller 2005, *Hollywood*, p. 191.
68. Martin 2008, *Award* 214.
69. Clancy 2009, *Auteurs*.

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## Illustrations

fig. 1: source: <http://www.bollfans.de>

fig. 2: source: *Heart of America* DVD, BOLL AG

fig. 3: source: <http://www.bollfans.de>

## Summary

This article discusses the transnational processes and intermedial contexts of recent international feature cinema via the example of Uwe Boll, a German producer-director responsible for multiple video-game feature adaptations. Major structural shifts in German film financing between 1998 and 2008 have had a more significant impact on German film production and aesthetics than the contemporaneous digitalization of the media. Boll's *oeuvre* is a fitting example to depict these shifts, as his international success and infamy only came about after the foundation of German *Medienfonds* in 1998 and only then with respect to the cheaply acquired video game material he filmed. The article posits Boll as an agent maneuvering between multiple transnational networks in Germany, the USA, Canada, Spain, Indonesia and many other countries, such that his films circulate via a constellation of subsidies, affordable rights, Hollywood star power, Internet criticism and consumer naiveté. The mechanisms of his film operation are explained, as well as how his films are received differently across national boundaries. The essay then delves into two of Boll's "shooting spree" genre films in particular – *Heart of America* (2003) and *Postal* (2008) – to demonstrate the aesthetic effect of these transnational mechanisms on his overall work over the last decade. It concludes with the assertion that contemporary entertainment cinema can only be rendered intelligible through the elaboration of such mechanisms, rather than through the oft-invoked discourses of film *auteur* and genre.

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## Title

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