Postcritical Anime: Observations on its 'Identities' within Contemporary Japan

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In Japan, interest in anime has risen tremendously since the late 1990s.[1] In the name of *soft power* and contents industries, Japanese politicians eventually discovered the once subcultural medium of anime. This culminated in Doraemon's appointment as anime ambassador by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in March 2008. Doraemon was a good choice: quite exceptional for Japan, the respective anime and manga series are familiar to a large part of the Japanese populace, and unlike the protagonists of Studio Ghibli's films, the character Doraemon lends itself to various appropriations, not only by the state, but also by children and anime fans. Remarkably, the Doraemon committee (just like the jury for the International Manga Award) had no anime creator or critic among its members—instead representatives of major media companies as well as two professors of Tokyo University who are interested in anime apparently first and foremost as a political tool.[2]

Yet, while anime is being watched on a global scale, there are significant differences in its contemporary reception. The gap between regular consumers and critical spectators, sometimes appearing in the form of Japanese audiences vs. foreign Japanologists, deserves special attention since it raises a number of questions, such as

- what sort of animated film is identified as *anime*;
- who relates anime to politics, history and society;
- what kind of meaning is at play in anime's performative images, and
- to what extent one can read 'Japanese society', or even 'culture', out of anime.

Comparing Kurosawa's "Seven Samurai" (1954) and Gonzo's "Samurai 7" (2004), this lecture focuses on aesthetic and cultural identities ascribed to anime in modern

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[1] This paper is mainly based on a lecture which I gave at The Japan Foundation's seminar on *Anime and Contemporary Japanese Society* in Canada (Edmonton, Toronto, Montreal), March 01-07, 2009.

[2] Hamano Yasuki/Environmental Studies and Shiraishi Saya/Education & Cultural Anthropology (research interest: understanding of the political nature of culture, and the cultural nature of politics). Their names can only be found on the Japanese homepage of the ministry, not its English version.

Japan, or more precisely, its identity in relation to "cinema" in general and to "animation" in particular and also to "Japan".

(1) Identified as *anime* proper

One symptom of the rising *general* interest is the word *anime*, which lost its pejorative meaning between 1997, when *Princess Mononoke* was released, and 2003, when *Spirited Away* received an Oscar. Yet, within Japanese Animation Studies,[3] one remembers very well, that the director of these prestigious films—Miyazaki Hayao—did actually not want his works to be named *anime*. Indeed, there is a certain irony to the fact that Miyazaki's films which have pursued a different path than anime since the 1980s, helped anime to get acknowledged beyond subcultural communities and commercial necessities.

Not all animation made in Japan has been regarded as anime, even if the word is in wide use now, for the sake of convenience. The name anime was, of course, also applied to Katô Kunio's Oscar-winning short-film *Tsumiki no ie* (*La Maison en Petits Cubes*, 2008, 24 min.), although many Japanese found its look rather 'French' at first sight—which does not come as a surprise since it is based on a picture book, not a manga, and it favors individual expression above the shared visual language. But its dream-like private world, its restraint in regard to explicit social and political issues is not that far away from the usual anime.

So, what is anime proper? Or to rephrase, which kind of animation has been circulating under the name of anime since it gained currency in the 1970s? As for example the first animated feature film of *Space Battleship Yamato* (1977, directed by Masuda Toshio), suggests, typically anime is, of course, the limited or selective[4] mode of animation

- which creates the *impression* of movement instead of representing it,
- which invites the viewer to participate with her imagination,
- and which, among other things, exhibits a lack of lip-sinc and thereby a gap between body and voice.

Mentioned in passing, the first voice-actor (*seiyû*) boom occured precisely at the time of *Uchû senkan Yamato*, which indicates how closely Japanese voice acting is related to a fascination with the invisible as facilitated by limited animation.

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[3] 津堅信之『日本アニメーションの力 85 年の歴史を貫く 2 つの軸』NTT 出版、2004 年、などを参照。
[4] Term suggested by GAN Sheuo Hui/顏曉暉「セレクティブ・アニメーションという概念技法」、加藤幹郎編『映画学的想像力 シネマ・スタディーズの冒険』臨川書店、2006 年、pp. 245-308.

Typically anime in regard to the theme of *Uchû senkan Yamato* is less the Science-Fiction story in particular, but the otherworld setting in general and its addressing non-infant viewers. Equally important is the fact that the movie rested mainly on a TV anime series, broadcasted by Yomiuri TV and NTV in 1974-1975. Of the initially planned 39 episodes, only 26 were completed—due to the *Heidi* competition which aired at the same time on Fuji TV, that is, on Sundays 7:30 p.m.. However, the second broadcast was so successful, that it received even coverage by mainstream media. Because of its historical subject matter—the allegedly unsinkable *Battleship Yamato* which was sunk in April 1945—the film attracted adult audiences. Yet, whereas intellectuals related it to the critical issue of coming to terms with the nation's problematic past, articles in anime-fan publications[5] left the historic war completely untouched, focusing instead on character and mecha design. These young people also praised the minimalist rendering of movement for its dramatic impacts—which deserves to be mentioned, since some foreign authors still regard limited animation as a shortcoming instead of a stylistic choice with specific possibilities.

These differences in the reception of *Battleship Yamato* may be traced back to what Carl Silvio observed as follows: "... animation's drawn and more overtly artificial nature heightens the audience's awareness of the split between the materiality of the medium and its dignified narrative contents."[6]

That is to say, the audience of *Battleship Yamato* was split, between fans' exclusive attention to "the materiality of the medium" and critics' foremost interest in "narrative contents". And this split points to even larger issues, first of all the fact, that fans usually experience anime as a practice rooted in communities[7] rather than in society at large, and related more to fantasy, private pleasure and consumption than to serious issues of public interest such as politics, social criticism and also cinema.

(2) *Anime* as distinct from 'cinema'

The understanding of anime differs fundamentally from modern discourses of

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[5] 例えば、『テレビランド増刊　ロマンアルバム　宇宙戦艦ヤマト』徳間書店、1977；『映画テレビマガジン　宇宙戦艦ヤマト』秋田書店、1977 年。佐野明子「戦艦大和イメージの転回」、奥村賢編『映画と戦争　撮る欲望／見る欲望』（日本映画史叢書 10）、森話社、2009 年、特に pp.　289-297 を参照。

[6] Silvio, Carl: Animated Bodies and Cybernetic Selves: *The Animatrix* and the Question of Posthumanity, in: Brown, Stephen T., ed., *Cinema Anime: Critical Engagements with Japanese Animation*, Palgrave Macmillan 2006, p. 128.

[7] See the discussion of fan cultures as 'knowledge communities', for example by Henry Jenkins: *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*, New York University Press 2006.

film, or cinema.[8] Regarding anime as cinema allows, among other things, for relating it to society at large and as such also to Art; but it also runs the risk of generating arguments which are irrelevant to the practice of watching anime—at least, if apparently selfevident methodological preassumptions stay unchallenged. To support this with a historical fact: in the 1950s, the *Tôei dôga* Studio aimed at becoming the 'Disney of the East' and positioned itself in relation to national cinema.[9] Yet since around 1970, the main format for anime production has not been the single work for a more or less universal audience, but TV series addressed to specific taste groups. And in TV anime, commodification plays a crucial role. The following definition sums it up:

"By making a complete world easily accessible to the fans they can all become actively participating consumers, and the animated film enters the realm of anime. In other words, anime is not a genre strictly defined in terms of content or form, it is a complex organizational principle of various goods and activities."[10]

This does not mean that discussions of anime's form, style and perception are to be completely dismissed. However, anime calls for challenging key notions of modern aesthetics, such as 'authorship', the art work's alleged autonomy or the desire for deep meaning. All of these notions are related to society at large, and they are obviously taken for granted when (mostly non-Japanese) critics give preference to aesthetic exceptions and single movies.

My intention here is not to promote a *normative* notion of anime. Anime is, above all, a matter of perspective. Animated movies from Japan (less TV series though) can be watched as both: cinema *and* anime. Oshii Mamoru's famous *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) is examplary in that regard. On the one hand, it invites deep readings as a film, with respect to grand issues such as religion, nationalism[11] and gender;[12] on the other

[8] Caroline Ruddell: From the 'Cinematic' to the 'Anime-ic': Issues of Movement in Anime, in: *animation. an interdisciplinary journal*, vol. 3, no. 2, july 2008, pp. 113-128. The 'cinematic' and the 'anime-ic' are notions proposed by Thomas LaMarre and developed in his monograph *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation*. Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press 2009.

[9] 細萱敦編『日本アニメの飛翔期を探る』読売新聞社（川崎市市民ミュージアム他）、2000; 高畑勲「60年代頃の東映動画が日本のアニメーションにもたらしたもの」、『アニメーション研究：東映動画の成立と発達/The Document on Animation Studies, vol.1: *Establishing and Expansion of Toei Doga Studio*』日本アニメーション学会編、2002年、pp. 47-79、などを参照。

[10] Alexander Zahlten: Something for everyone: Anime and politics, in *Ga-Netchû: The Manga Anime Syndrome*, Deutsches Filmmuseum Frankfurt/Main & Museum für Angewandte Kunst Frankfurt/Main 2008, p. 82.

[11] Alleged common reading: break-up of the subject; in contrast to Cazdyn: break-up of the nation. Eric Cazdyn: *The flash of capital: Film and geopolitics in Japan*, Durham: Duke UP 2002.

[12] Livia Monnet: Towards the Feminine Sublime, or the Story of 'A Twinkling Monad, Shape-Shifting Across

hand, it can be appreciated as anime, at least in regard to its battles, technical devices and posthuman beings, not to mention its treatment of motion and sound.

According to recent (especially American) publications, anime deserves critical consideration because:

- it offers not just entertainment, but *serious thematic content*;

- that is, information about *Japanese society*, according to the early book by Antonia Levi (1996),[13] or to quote a more recent statement by a German critic: "Anime and manga provide insight into a society with rigidly codified rules..."[14]

- Susan Napier, too, relates anime in general to the whole of Japanese society, although with a positive twist, when she regards it as "a site of resistance to the conformity of Japanese society".[15] (Mentioned in passing, stylistic 'conformity' is an obvious and very welcome characteristic of anime, at least conformity as 'loyalty' to specific subcultural and media traditions.)

- There is also Tim Iles' recent assessment of "animation as a venue for the questioning of identity", and his observation that "animated film seems to be the site of a sincere optimism about identity".[16]

Not only foreign scholars, but also young Japanese researchers, for example from the field of modern Japanese history, disapprove of the apolitical, community-oriented status quo of animation studies in Japan and call for a broader view.[17] Unfortunately, such analyses are often confined to extracting ideological and social meanings from anime in a way which may ultimately lead to monologizing. I would like to propose an alteration of view, namely in two regards:

- firstly, a shift of focus *from contents to form and context* which reveals how anime actually undermines solid identities in favor of patchwork identities—the 'optimism' mentioned above often turns out to be an uninhibited acknowledgement of flow and hybridity; and

Dimension': Intermediality, Fantasy and Special Effects in Cyberpunk Film and Animation, in: *Japan Forum* 14 (2), 2002, pp. 191-209.

[13] Antonia Levi: *Samurai from outer space: Understanding Japanese animation*, Chicago: Open Court 1996.

[14] Ralf Vollbrecht, in *Ga-Netchū: The Manga Anime Syndrome*, 2008 (see footnote 5), p. 29.

[15] Susan Napier: *ANIME from Akira to Princess Mononoke: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation*. New York: Palgrave 2001, p. 26 （スーザン・J・ネイピア 『現代日本のアニメ： 「AKIRA」から「千と千尋の神隠し」まで』神山京子訳、中央公論新社、2002）。

[16] Timothy Iles: *The crisis of identity in contemporary Japanese film: personal, cultural, national*, Leiden: Brill 2008, p. 115, 185.

[17] 木村智哉「アジア・太平洋戦争期のアニメーションに見る自己と他者のイメージ―『くもとちゅうりっぷ』を例に」『イメージ＆ジェンダー』第 6 号 (彩樹社、2006)、pp.41-49 ;「[コラム] 日本のアニメーション史研究が抱える一課題」『歴博』第 147 号 2008 年 3 月 20 日、p. 23 ;「アニメーション映画『海の神兵』が描いたもの 戦時期国策映画の文脈から」、乾淑子編 『戦争のある暮らし』水声社、2008、pp. 132-158.

● secondly, while the very possibility of extracting 'Japanese society' from anime works is problematic, anime texts and practices confront the critic with a meta-issue, that is: What is 'society' in contemporary Japan? Has it transformed into a plurality of coexisting parallel worlds (scenes, communities) which do not need to refer to a meta-level anymore?

(3) Discussion of *7 Samurai* & *Samurai 7*

In order to illustrate what I mean, I will turn now to a famous example, Kurosawa Akira's *The Seven Samurai* (1954), which even Japanese youth know, and its anime remake of 2004, *Samurai 7* (*Samurai sebun*), a TV series consisting of 26 episodes.

As is very well known, Kurosawa's film is set in the late 16th century. Its narrative is about peasants who hire masterless samurai in order to defend their village against bandits. The film features, firstly, the peasants' search for samurai in the nearby town; secondly, the preparation for defense, and thirdly, the victorious battle. Only three samurai survive: their wise leader Kanbei, his right hand Shichirôji, and the young Katsushirô. At the end of the live-action film, Kanbei voices Kurosawa's moral that the real victors of history are the peasants.

The mere fact that there is a message deserves our attention. This message has been given various interpretations;[18] but the way how peasants and samurai are positioned against each other on the screen, and furthermore, the visual link between the samurai and the graves under an extremely high horizon, suggest not only the anachronism of the warriors, but also the primacy of the group over the individual.[19] Significantly, Kurosawa's film illuminates that this *social* condition applies to both sides.

As distinct from Kurosawa's film, the last sequence of the anime exhibits two formal aspects which are of some semantic relevance: firstly, the use of the zoom, a device which Kurosawa rejected in favour of authenticity effects, but also in order to avoid straight identification with individual characters; and secondly, the indirect or

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[18] See for example André Bazin: Seven Samurai, in: James Goodwin, ed., Perspectives on Akira Kurosawa, New York 1994, pp. 113-114; Audie Bock: *Japanese film directors*, Tokyo/New York: Kodansha International 1985; Bert Cardullo: The Circumstance of the East, the Fate of the West, in: James Goodwin, ed., Perspectives on Akira Kurosawa, New York: Macmillan/G. K. Hall & Co. 1994, pp. 115-119; David Desser: *The samurai films of Akira Kurosawa*, Ann Arbor/UMI books on demand 1983; Stephen Prince: *The warrior's camera: the cinema of Akira Kurosawa*, Princeton: Princeton UP 1991.

[19] See Cazdyn's discussion of *sengo*/戦後 as the second moment characterized by the tension between individual and collective.

selective kind of animation which confines the literal *representation* of movement to so-called sectioning (that is to say that only one part of the picture plane actually moves), while evoking the *impression* of movement by other means, such as sound and editing.

In *Samurai 7*, the characters' social reality is of as few significance as any visual 'authenticity effect'. Fully digitally rendered, the anime's colorful images invite us into an explicitly artificial world without clear identities. Identities usually rely on distinction or demarcation. Whereas Kurosawa establishes spatial contrasts and differentiates also with the help of musical leitmotifs, the anime prefers blending. Consequently, the tension between individual and social role diminishes. While in Kurosawa's film the meaning of *bushidô* was shifted from loyalty towards one's lord and class to a more universal humanist obligation, in *Samurai 7*, it looses its weight and becomes playful—up to and including a stage adaptation[20] which looked very much like a kind of CosPlay. Many merchandise articles were available at the theatre, among them the light-novel version by Tomioka Atsuhiro.[21] The PlayStation2 game and the mobile game can be obtained via the internet. Remarkably, the stage adaptation was produced by FIELDS, a company also involved in the production of the pachinko version *CR Shichinin no samurai*, which even the mass media noticed upon its release in August 2008: it was directed by Nakano Hiroyuki (*1958) probably best-remembered for his film debut *Samurai Fiction* (1998), and it features popular actors, such as Sonny Chiba/Chiba Shin'ichi who also starred in Tarantino's *Kill Bill vol. 1*.

The lightness of *Samurai 7* rests, among other things, upon its ahistorical retro-futuristic setting as well as the extension of the initial group of characters. In its depiction of a dystopian future, *Samurai 7* is not at all brand-new, but rather confirming (or recycling) a tradition initiated by *Blade Runner*, *AKIRA* and other films. The series is set in a postwar steampunk world, where all battles have already been fought, and the future appears just to be another past. The end of Kurosawa's film becomes the anime's point of departure: samurai are not needed anymore. However, not the peasants are the victors of history, but the merchants. They support the regime of the emperor and his capital, they raise his cloned offspring, they buy the peasants' rice and women from the bandits, now giant cyborgs.

This setting reflects, of course, populist aversions against neoliberalism and

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[20] Shinjuku Koma-gekijô, Nov. 2008.
[21] 7 vols, published in 2005-2006.

economism. But in its game-likeness, it rather draws upon existing resentments than provoking new looks at society. Intertextuality is at the center of this series, that is, the parodic interplay with Kurosawa's film as well as other anime.

Compared, for example, to *Samurai Champloo*, which exhibits history as a Hip-Hop-remix of disparate pieces,[22] *Samurai 7* can hardly pass as stimulating discussions of Japan's modernity. Nevertheless, even *Samurai Champloo*'s historical references do not prevent experienced viewers from taking this anime lightly: intellectuals may enjoy its ironic play with orientalism and self-orientalism, while anime fans may receive the very same motifs as recycled jokes (*neta*) —and be disappointed by their foreseeability. It does not make much of a difference whether you recognize the appropriation of Itô Jakuchû's paintings for the protagonists' background or not. The fact that these paintings were created in the Edo era, in which *Samurai Champloo*, too, is set, does obviously matter less than the vague atmosphere they radiate.

Anyhow, it is probably safe to say that *Samurai 7* is no master-piece. But it is a *typical* anime and as such indifferent towards unequivocal identities: not only in a social, but also historical and ethnic sense. Kanbei appears as a kind of 'Jesus' in white clothes; Shichirôji runs a guesthouse together with his geisha lover; Gorobei earns his living as a street artist; Heihachi is an engineer; Katsuhiro, the youngest, has green eyes; Kyûzô works at first as a merchant's bodyguard, and cooperates later only because he claims the right to kill Kanbei by himself; and Kikuchiyo, the farmer-samurai who in Kurosawa's film mediates between the classes, chose to become a cyborg, just like the bandits, and negotiates now between the technologically outdated samurai and the new killing machines. Whereas the bandits are eventually robbed of their souls, Kikuchiyo remains a model-hybrid of man and machine until his death. Symptomatically, he feels best understood by little Komachi wo exhibits a kind of cuteness which the real girl on stage was not able to generate. As can be expected from anime, the posthuman is linked to the prehuman.

In contrast to Kurosawa's film, *Samurai 7* does not present a dominantly male world. Various women play their part in the narrative; Kirara who leads the search for samurai, to begin with. And the evil attraction of Ukyô, the new emperor, owes much to a gender ambiguity reminiscent of *bishônen* (beautiful boys, the protagonists of Boys'-Love manga). By deploying such elements which, last but not least, allow for

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[22] 2004/05, Studio Manglobe, directed by Watanabe Shinichirô.

blending traditional genres (like Science Fiction, Romance, Action, Comedy etc.), the anime addresses the broadest possible audience—and this is not confined to the domestic market.

(4) Identified as 'Japanese'

Keywords such as blending, hybrid and ambiguity lead to the issue of 'Japaneseness', or more prescisely: its ascriptions. Undoubtedly, this is an important issue in regard to anime's 'identities'. Regular viewers in Japan, however, would prefer characterizations such as 'typical' (*anime-rashii*). They show usually no inclination to nationalizing their taste, unless they enter the public realm, be it as a university student, an exhibition curator or a panelist abroad. This again indicates the problematic relation between the everyday practice of watching anime and society at large. The discursive explication of 'Japaneseness' always points to something bigger than fan communities.

A good example is how *The Seven Samurai* and *Samurai 7* picture the battle against the bandits. With respect to Kurosawa it is noteworthy, how the camera follows the actors, and how the sound enhances the intended reality-effect. A sheer gun-shot kills the outstanding sword master Kyûzô—not so in *Samurai 7*. After this battle, which takes place in episode 16 (out of 26), the samurai turn to the capital, to liberate the abducted women and to tackel the root of the misery which they believe the emperor to be, not the merchants. In that battle, Kyûzô finally dies. Yet, more important than this plot is something else. Unlike Kurosawa's protagonists, the anime's samurai stay clean despite of the bad weather, and Kyûzô fights as if he were a ballet dancer.

In Europe and America, Kurosawa's film was appreciated as specifically 'Japanese'. Critics pointed out that, unlike its remake *The Magnificient Seven*, it provided the viewer with the opportunity to discover scenes by himself instead of being instructed by panoramatic shots, and that it often *showed* things without relying on verbal explanation. In addition, screen compositions reminiscent of Japonisme, such as the lattice in the battle sequence, or subject matter, such as the "interactionist self",[23] meaning a highly relational kind of personality, were supposed to prove 'Japaneseness'.

Japanese film critics, on the other hand, refused such readings.[24] They

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[23] Stephen Prince 1991. "The essentialist notion of an 'interactionist self' [...] cannot explain the dynamic human interactions in the film." (Yoshimoto 2000: 243). Bert Cardullo (in James Goodwin, ed., 1994: 117, 118-119) is "distinguishing between Western tragedy and the Eastern 'work of circumstance'" ... "Circumstance unites man ... Tragedy divides and isolates man. ... it is precisely thsi excessive emphasis on the individual in the West, and in the tragic literatur of the West, that condemns man to further suffering. It is the total fascination and absorption with self...".

[24] See Sato Tadao: Traditionelle und westliche Kulturelemente im japanischen Film, in: *Filme aus Japan*.

emphasized that Kurosawa did not present a timeless Japan, but a historically and socially specific one. And they claimed that his samurai were too dirty and too transgressive with respect to their social status to appeal to audiences in Japan.[25] In contrast, convincingly 'Japanese' looked films by Ozu and Mizoguchi on the one hand, and genre cinema (*jidaigeki*, *chanbara*) on the other. While inheriting some elements of traditional expression,[26] Kurosawa's film *The Seven Samurai* distanced itself from others, especially stylization which seems to re-surface in anime such as *Samurai 7*.

Samurai 7 has not been critically related to the issue of 'Japaneseness' yet. Like many other anime, it has not generated much critical discourse at all, especially not in Japanese. This lack of criticism, or reflexive verbalization related to society at large, presents a major obstacle to researching anime's reception by its regular consumers. At the same time, it indicates the irrelevance of crossing discursive borders and, closely related, the irrelevance of deep readings. *Samurai 7* favours a semantically light, stylized movement which does not aim at referring to the nation in times of crisis, as did Kurosawa's film. Precisely this lightness may appear to some as lapsing back, behind Kurosawa's realism, to the poses and ballets of generic 'sword movies', a discussion of which is beyond the scope of my presentation.

Let me finally point out two related aspects:

- firstly, the border-crossing potential of the stylized line which began to inspire modernists in the late 19th century in the wake of Japonisme,
- and secondly, different attitudes towards hybridization in modern Japan.

To begin with the stylized line: Precisely because it does not serve representation and clinge to depth, it allows for mobility, visually as well as allegorically. This met the cosmopolitan intentions of many modernists and upset, for example, the Nazis. Against this background, abstract painting—as a supposed incarnation of universality and democracy—flourished in postwar Europe as well as in Japan. As is widely known, abstraction has one of its roots in Japonisme, and 'decorativeness' is the other side of the coin.

Typical anime contain 'decorative' sequences, so to speak, sequences which do not contribute anything to the progress of the narrative. Sometimes they illuminate a

Retrospektive des japanischen Films, Berlin: Freunde der deutschen Kinemathek 1993, pp. 11-18.
[25] "Kurosawa's films have often been accused of being historically inaccurate" in Japan (Yoshimoto Mitsuhiro: *Kurosawa: Film Studies and Japanese Cinema*, Durhma: Duke UP 2000, p. 242).
[26] See pictorial traditions highlighted during Japonism: "The camera angle often forms a flattened image, which brings out the constant lateral movements." (Gilles Deleuze: Figures, or the Transformation of Forms, in: James Goodwin, ed., 1994, p. 246).

character's state of mind; more often though, they provide purely sensory (or even sensual) pleasure. While watching anime, the viewer may enjoy images as images instead of illusions. Often, one watches and continues watching, surprised by sheer optical and sonic sensations and their formal complexity. This kind of experience can even be hindered by a search for deeper meaning, or to put it the other way round, whoever neglects this aspect of *anime* misses one of its major attractions. To put it simply, some *anime* (and even animated films) are better 'watched' than 'read'. 'Reading' would mean to decipher the background picture in the sequence of Kyûzô's death, less with respect to art history and Rinpa screens, but rather to ideology, that is, the symbolization of a samurai's death by blossoms (here not *sakura*/cherries though). 'Watching', on the other hand, relies upon an acknowledgement of non-representational functions of images. To quote Philip Brophy, who speaks of the 'calligraphic momentum' and the 'decorative surface':

"... Japanese art—including anime—emboldens visual pleasure at surface level while presenting the dense data-encoding that resides with its superstratum. ... Anime is thus only superficially an allusion to the real or natural world. Ultimately, its decorative surface requires a 'realignment of one's optical system' in order to focus on its depth."[27]

In the name of society, 'decorativeness' has often been dismissed as something shallow, uncritical, politically irresponsible. However, since so many people consume it voluntarily, it needs to be taken seriously. And as Thomas LaMarre has pointed out, as an aesthetic practice where imagination outweighs documentation, and multilayered coexistence takes precedence over coherence-seeking, *anime* "*does produce subjects in time*".[28]

With respect to anime, critics show an inclination to understanding hybridity as a general characteristic of modern Japan. But the 20th century has seen various kinds of hybridity in Japan. Attempts at amalgamation, especially in the 1930s and early 1940s, prove that explicit hybridity was not always welcome in modern Japan. This applies to the so-called imperial-crown style in architecture (*teikan yôshiki*) which 'Japanized' modern building by means of adding oriental roofs, as well as to the first feature-length animated movie made in Japan: *Momotarô, umi no shinpei* (Momotarô,

[27] Philip Brophy: *100 Anime. BFI Screen Guides*, London: bfi Publishing 2005, pp. 14-15.
[28] Thomas Lamarre: The First Time as Farce: Digital Animation and the Repetition of Cinema, in: Steven T. Brown, ed., *Cinema Anime. Critical Engagements with Japanese Animation.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2006, p. 177.

divines soldiers of the sea, dir.: Seo Mitsuyo, 1944/45, 75 min.), which promoted ideological oppositions—the technically well-educated 'Japanese' animals vs. uncivilized domestic animals, or the hard-working 'Japanese' vs. the lazy Caucasians. But for the purpose of coveying 'Japanese' (or imperial) contents, it employed forms which carried the connotation of being 'American' (characters' dynamism, smoothly animated movements, musical numbers, occasional spatial depth, swinging palm trees etc.).[29] Furthermore, this cel-animation film contains a sequence of silhouette or cut-out animation. The latter was regarded as specifically Japanese in the late 1930s/early 1940s, because it was different from 'American' cel animation, and close to Asian theatrical traditions. The cut-out sequence was created by Masaoka Kenzô, who in 1943 made the now-legendary short piece *The spider and the tulip* (*Kumo to chûrippu*). This animated film exhibits a reverse relation between 'Japaneseness' in regard to content and form. Here, the story itself—about an attempted seduction of a ladybird by a spiderman who fortunately dies during a heavy thunderstorm—does not evoke Japanese traditions; its visual form however does. Especially the storm sequence is characterized by formal device reminiscent of Japonisme, such as planarity, diagonals and asymmetrical compositions, decorative patterns instead of 'mimetic' representation, rhythmized forms and graphic stylization. But also the narrative structure can be related to traditional storytelling, first of all, *kishôtenketsu*, especially when the rain continues to fall for a while although the spiderman is already dead, and the viewer ready for a change of scene. Such comparison may further include the early works by Ôfuji Noburô, for which he used traditional colored paper (*chiyogami*) as a signifier of 'Japaneseness', for example, the 3-min. film *Village Festival* (*Mura matsuri*, 1930) which illustrated the then song of the ministry of education.

In Kurosawa's *The Seven Samurai*, there is no eclecticism at play and no apparently arbitrary juxtapositing either. His film is rather characterized by dialectical sublation (which leads to Eisenstein's montage theory and and its influences on Kurosawa). Keeping this in mind, one might realize that anime's hybridity is only one among others, historically too specific to be traced back to a *general* Japanese condition. Above I have tried to demonstrate that there is a gap between regular consumers and critical spectators in the reception of anime, and that this gap cannot be reduced to

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[29] 佐野明子「漫画映画の時代：トーキー移行期から大戦期における日本アニメーション」、加藤幹郎編『映画的想像力』人文書院、2006 年、pp. 96-127; Jaqueline Berndt: Zeichentrick-Japanisch: „Japanimation" und Anime, in: Steffi Richter & J. Berndt, eds, *Japan-Lesebuch IV: J-culture*, Tübingen: konkursbuch Verlag Claudia Gehrke 2008, pp. 48-70.

'Japanese audiences vs. foreign scholars', because under the conditions of globalization, dedicated viewers show a similar habit worldwide. This includes different attitudes towards modern cinema and hermeneutics. On closer inspection, anime has the potential to challenge traditional notions of society, identity, art and critical thinking. This potential is waiting to be met, by critics and scholars as well as by anime viewers.