

# 「東京大飯店」・翻譯德國流行文化

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## 摘要

德國流行搖滾音樂通常傾向在地化，通常與亞洲議題毫無關係。然而，深入探討德國青少男樂團「東京大飯店」的現象，即使是亞洲國家也會深感興趣。這個德國樂團的成員，雖然主要是用德語演唱，但也許正因為唱的是德語，逐漸打響國際知名度，受到矚目。在音樂的領域，德國和德語常常與古典音樂連結，比較不會令人聯想到當代流行音樂。如今許多國家如荷蘭，法國，瑞典，西班牙，以色列，阿根廷，巴西和美國的青少年喜歡聽該樂團的音樂，購買他們的 CD。甚至在 2008 年，該樂團還獲得了美國 MTV 音樂獎（「最佳新人」），這似乎是一個全球性現象了。這怎麼可能？

我的論點是，東京大飯店樂團的主唱外型，深具挑釁意象，呈現出「日本連環漫畫」和/或「動畫」的意念，經翻譯轉化後，引入了西方流行搖滾音樂界。這種日本漫畫人物意念和西方流行音樂的混合體，證明產生一種新的跨國（後）現代社會變型體，且其超越的力量克服了語言的界限。它限定在特定的年齡層，重新闡釋了在不同國家的音樂論述界限。本文將從文化翻譯的概念來探討這個現象，並參考重要理論家 Homi K. Bhabha 闡述的翻譯概念。

本論文屬於跨文化研究領域的範圍，說明單一純粹的文化並不存在，質疑單向文化翻譯的概念以及反對東西方文化為對立文化。

**關鍵詞：**流行音樂、日本漫畫、文化翻譯、女性流行樂迷、性別

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## Tokio Hotel. Translating German Pop Culture

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### Abstract

The German popular rock music scene usually seems localized, and far away from Asian related topics. Still, the German boy group “Tokio Hotel” can be considered an interesting topic even for Asian countries. This group is pursuing an international career in spite of being teenagers who sing mostly in German, or because of that. In the discourse of music, Germany and the German language are often connected with classical music, not with the popular music of today. However, teenage youth in many countries like Holland, France, Sweden, Spain, Israel, Argentina, Brazil, and the US are listening to the music of this quartet and buying their CDs. In 2008, the group even won an MTV music award (“Best New Artist”) in the US.<sup>1</sup> It almost seems to be a global phenomenon. How is this possible?

My thesis is, that the provocative imagery of the band’s lead singer represents a translation of the imagery of “manga” and/or “anime” into Western pop rock music style. This hybridity of popularized manga imagery and Western popular music is evidence of a new kind of transnational (post)modern social transformation, which in its transgressive force overcomes the boundaries of language. Restricted to a certain age group, it restates the boundaries of music discourse in various countries. This issue is discussed in context with the ideas of cultural translation, referring to the critical theorist Homi K. Bhabha’s approach to translation. The topic of this paper

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<sup>1</sup> “Tokio Hotel bei den MTV Music Awards erfolgreich.” Focus Online, 8 Sept. 2008, see online at <[http://www.focus.de/panorama/welt/rock-musik-tokio-hotel-bei-den-mtv-music-awards-erfolgreich\\_aid\\_331888.html](http://www.focus.de/panorama/welt/rock-musik-tokio-hotel-bei-den-mtv-music-awards-erfolgreich_aid_331888.html)>, 16 June 2009.

belongs to the area of intercultural studies discourse, and demonstrates that the purity of culture is an untenable thought, and questions the concept of one-way cultural translation, destabilizing the East/West binary opposition.

**Keywords:** popular music, manga, cultural translation, female pop fans, gender

**(Not) about sound**

Translation is generally known to be observable in transcultural storytelling. The word “translation” derives from the Latin word “*translatio*”, which is the past participle form of the verb “*transire*”. One dimension of the term means ‘crossing over’. It can relate not only to translation from one language to another, but according to Bhabha it also can be used to describe a kind of cultural translation. He circumscribes translation as “the foreign element that reveals the interstitial ” (2004 326),<sup>2</sup> and argues that cultures can be understood to interact and transform each other in a much more complex manner than the traditional binary oppositions can allow (ibid. 37 et seq.). Employing Bhabha’s concept of translation, we will analyze the phenomenon of the German pop music group “Tokio Hotel” and their transnational success, reading it especially as a cultural constellation which can influence the audience through its imagery in musical discourse, and initiate a creative form of identification process.

We first consider the phenomenon of Tokio Hotel by taking a close look at the band’s mysterious name. At first glance the word “Tokio” in the name “Tokio Hotel” reminds us of the capital of Japan, Tokyo. It holds the promise of an exotic place like the capital of Japan, far away from European or South and North American experience. Read together with the second word, “Hotel”, the first presumption would be that “Tokio Hotel” is signifying the name of a hotel or a boarding house. It makes a connection to the experience of traveling in a foreign territory, and the association of staying there in a room

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<sup>2</sup> Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. (1994) With a new preface by the author. New York: Routledge, 2004.

over night. It seems to signify a hotel by that name where we don't have to tidy our room, and where anything we are not allowed to do at home could be possible. The name lets us imagine a space which could have space not only for stress relaxation, but also for romance, and sexual promiscuity.

Looking closer, it is noticeable that the name is not written in English, because it lacks the letter “y” in the word “Tokio”. Instead, “Tokio” is written in German using the letter “i”. The difference between “y” and “i” in the spelling opens the question of naming. The symbolization in the process of naming will never strike the ‘real’ identity, as there is not one side of it but more than that.<sup>3</sup> Our first reading of the name seems to mislead, and the reference to Japan may not be accurate, since this spelling attracts the association of a foreign way of thinking. The difference of y/i produces a semblance of exoticism to English native speakers (and other non German speakers) that could appear confusing, exciting, and attractive all at once. In the alien utopia of “Tokio Hotel” with the letter “i”, we can visualize a non-existing place where we are self-determined, but not necessarily accountable, like in a foreign hotel room that is only imagined. When the band members of Tokio Hotel were asked about the significance of the band’s name, they told reporters that they like to travel.<sup>4</sup> If this does not sound like a lucid explanation of why this band has its name, at least we can say that the band’s name echoes associations of an exotic space, unsupervised and unconstrained like a German

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<sup>3</sup> A name inscribes the uniqueness of the named into a representation that actually does not represent him, but describes and fixes just one attribute of him. The figurativeness of language causes the failing of the representation, as there is no possibility of a full presence (i.e. no real re-presentation).

<sup>4</sup> “Interview with Tokio Hotel.” *Pop Culture Madness*. 11 Feb. 2008, <<http://www.popculturemadness.com/interview/Tokio-Hotel.html>>, 16 June 2009.

hotel room for foreigners would be, a room which is called “Zimmer” in the German language. But for a special connection to Japan, we will have to look elsewhere.

Let us examine the current Tokio Hotel videos widely available through YouTube on the Internet, and filmed during their tour “Zimmer 483 Live”, to see ways in which the band can be read. On the videos their music displays little diversity of style, and not many electronic sound effects, but mostly straight forward musical arrangement and a strong beat. Their music seems deliberately designed for easy listening and enjoyment, though only from a very young audience’s perspective. The style of their music ranges between ordinary pop and rock music. The action of the band is mostly limited to playing instruments, with the exception of the vocalist and frontman of the band, Bill Kaulitz. The band seems not as threatening as a heavy metal band, as they don’t use misogynistic lyrics and seem to have less direct inscription of male power. The band members are well mannered on stage, and appear provocative only in terms of claiming self-determination. Watching the lead singer on stage controlling the crowd, the show is not perfected to the last detail and looks spontaneous. The interaction happens mainly between the lead singer and the audience *en masse* in an atmosphere of unity. Most notably, the audience consists predominantly of female pop fans, primarily in their adolescence between 10 and 18 years old. Some of the younger fans seem to be accompanied by their parents.



Bill Kaulitz

<[http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tokio\\_Hotel](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tokio_Hotel)>, 27 June 2009 (Bill Kaulitz at ‘Olympic’ sport center, 27.9.2007 in Moscow, Russia. This photo was released into public domain by its author and copyright owner, NTigger on en.wikipedia.org)

### **Manga looks**

In a close-up view, the attraction of Tokio Hotel can partly be explained by their looks and manners on stage. Their immaculate faces mirror childlike characteristics, corresponding to Konrad Lorenz’s biological term

“Kindchen-Schema”:<sup>5</sup> big round eyes and a sound round face. The teenagers are especially fond of lead singer Bill Kaulitz. In particular his long black hair seems consistent with the roundness pattern, with an exaggerated hair style that causes his head to resemble a very big fluffy ball, with many single ends. In comparison with the older generation of popular rock music bands, Tokio Hotel seem to withstand the signs of aging, like one of the fourteen year old female models we may see in advertising. Bill Kaulitz was born in 1989, and hails from the Eastern part of Germany like the rest of the band. His new style of hair – formerly he wore his hair long and loose – seems to be a symbol of protest. It could be read as a reference to the tradition of protest and hope of change from the rock music bands of former East Germany. We can name especially the famous old East German rock music band called “Silly”<sup>6</sup>, founded 1978, who enjoyed a little bit of freedom from the dominant regime using their special high hairstyle as a means of protest against the communist regime in the former German Democratic Republic.

Bill Kaulitz’s visual presence impresses his audience most, displaying not a totally self-absorbed narcissistic, but a flirtatious and friendly persona. Unusual for a popular rock star, he has a unique self-conscious, childlike charm that partly emerges from his friendly and pleasant behavior on stage, something that is unheard of in today’s rap, hip hop, hard rock and metal music scene. Only in the friendliness of the rave communities do we find a parallel, but this is probably more attributed to the Ecstasy use there. Another

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<sup>5</sup> Eibl-Eibesfeldt, Irenäus. *Grundriss der Vergleichenden Verhaltensforschung*. 3rd ed. München: Piper & Co 1967, 499.

<sup>6</sup> This East German music band was famous because of its popular female rock music singer Tamara Danz, see e.g. Wikipedia Deutsch <[http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silly\\_\(Band\)](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silly_(Band))>, 17 July 2009.



distinction from the rave style is the absence of childish phrases or childish adjunct objects like lollies, dummies and whistles which mark the rave style (cf. McRobbie 169).<sup>7</sup> Regardless of just having left childhood behind, the members of Tokio Hotel use adult attributes and phrases in their songs. The clear voice of the lead singer is combined with his politeness (for example in thanking the audience [“Vielen Dank”], or often apologizing [“Entschuldigung”]). This politeness, instead of the usual taunting and mocking behavior of a hard rock band, delights their young fans. Their foreign fans sometimes start trying to learn the German language,<sup>8</sup> even though German albums of “Tokio Hotel” never received official releases outside the German-speaking world. In difference to other all-male rock bands who might appear menacing to the audience, they do not look intimidating to anyone (except perhaps to identities who are based on a phantomatic unity of maleness).

Looking closer, the genre of the band can also be read as a fusion between the discourse of Gothic style pop rock music (an offshoot of the post-punk genre), and the imagery of the modern popular art forms of manga and anime since the 1990s. Japanese comic books and graphic novels are called “manga”, whereas the Japanese word for Japanese animated films is “anime”, which seem to be over 90 percent inspired by manga (c.f. MacWilliams 6).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> McRobbie, Angela. *Postmodernism and Popular Culture*. London: Routledge 1994.

<sup>8</sup> Gruner states on a French-German cultural exchange website, that French teenagers are encouraged to learn the German language by listening to songs of the band Tokio Hotel. See Gruner, Nadine. *Durch den Monsun: Tokio Hotel im Aufwind/A travers la mousson, puis dans le vent: le phénomène Tokio Hotel*. [FplusD](http://www.fplusd.org/kultur-und-alltagsleben/musik/durch-den-monsun-tokio-hotel-im-aufwind/?PHPSESSID=rtkd3m3rph61qr). <<http://www.fplusd.org/kultur-und-alltagsleben/musik/durch-den-monsun-tokio-hotel-im-aufwind/?PHPSESSID=rtkd3m3rph61qr>>, 16 July 2009.

<sup>9</sup> MacWilliams, Mark W. Introduction. *Japanese Visual Culture. Explorations in the World of Manga and Anime*. Ed. Mark W. MacWilliams. Foreword by Frederik L.

Bill Kaulitz's exaggerated hair style reminds us of a feature of Japanese animation, which emphasizes hair and hair movement (ibid. Poitras 62), often with non-Asian or unnatural hair colors. The slim, pale stage persona of Bill Kaulitz has striking Gothic looks, and he usually wears white and black clothing. And since he underlines his eyes with heavy black eye shadow, his eyes stand out as well. So the emphasis on hair is combined with another one of the visual aspects we notice in manga and anime: the extremely large size of these characters' eyes (ibid.) that mirrors their feelings and seems to symbolize childlike innocence.

Bill Kaulitz's androgynous appearance, especially his effeminate hair style and make-up, confuses the audience. In playing with gender concepts the attitude seems playful, but at the same time serious and not a parody like most Western males playing females. In difference to other members of the band, he not only wears well-fitting T-shirts and jeans, but emphasizes his hands, wearing black nail polish and black accessories like wristbands or fingerless gloves. The young audience does not feel embarrassed by him but fascinated by his charisma, and plays a guessing game about his sexual identity. The singer's image is also discussed in forums on the Internet, attacked by some and defended by his fans.<sup>10</sup> His face and body offer nonverbal clues and seem to reveal the singer's inner feelings, similarly to the characters in manga and anime. This effect seems at first more important than the actual meaning

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Schodt. Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe publishing, 2008. 3-26. Manga and anime are both intensively connected, as the source for stories used in the majority of anime is manga (c.f. Poitras, Gilles. *Contemporary Anime in Japanese Pop Culture*. MacWilliams, *Japanese Visual Culture*, 48-67, here 61).

<sup>10</sup> See on YouTube

<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mu82GpTHTWc&feature=email>>, 15 Feb. 2009.

of the lyrics he is singing, at least for fans from Non-German countries. Young people whose concepts of aesthetics were influenced by modern visual culture do not necessarily need to understand the words of the lyrics to appreciate new visual and aural art like the music of Tokio Hotel. Bill Kaulitz's image acts as a wish-fulfilling promise for his fans, and in the correlation to Gothic style and its Romantic predecessors seem to connect them to associations of a new identity and the feeling of belonging. In their quest, what they find in the model of the lead singer is a stereotype of the other, in which they can mirror themselves.

The importance of visual style is further in evidence when we consider the different forms of cultural significance that manga has acquired outside of Germany. In Japan, most manga books for the youth show action or adventure stories for boys, with little focus on the inner thoughts and feelings of the main characters. But we also find a special kind of manga for teenage girls named "*shōjo manga*" (少女漫画). According to Takahashi (c.f. 115), the socially conservative gender role reflected in the term "*shōjo*" refers to teenage girls who are not allowed to express their sexuality. He argues, that even if sexually mature physically, socially they are considered immature and therefore regarded as neither male nor female (which according to Takahashi demonstrates the state-sanctioned patriarchal hierarchy that privileged boys over girls in the modern Japanese educational system of the early twentieth century). Accordingly, with few resources to negotiate the adolescent process of identity formation for girls, Japanese magazines with images of *shōjo* aim specifically at middle class urban girls.

The genre of *shōjo manga* uses a distinctive emotional power with characteristic themes revolving around girls' insecurities and anxieties about

adolescence and growing up into a mature woman, capable of reproducing. Classic *shōjo manga* often show romantic couples, irrespective whether biological male or female, both with feminine features and similar faces and bodies (for example in the internationally known *shōjo manga* “The Rose of Versaille” by Riyoko Ikeda).<sup>11</sup> Often the male characters shown in these *shōjo manga* depict the figure of a beautiful boy, “*bishōnen*” (美少年) in Japanese, which traditionally represents the ideal of youth,<sup>12</sup> being interstitial between both childhood and adulthood, and male and female, regardless of the sexual orientation. It is not a primarily sexualized male image that attracts girls, but an unfinished image, rather in the open process of becoming. The acceptance of gender-challenging figures in Japanese art probably emerged from the tradition of swapping gender roles in all-female Takarazuka and all-male Kabuki theater (Buruma 151 et seq.).<sup>13</sup> *Shōjo manga* with the figure of *bishōnen* operate within an aesthetic of sameness, which allows for rather nonthreatening love stories (c.f. Shamoan 141)<sup>14</sup>. The *bishōnen* can be read as “the repressed desires of female readers” (ibid. 142), inviting the girl readers to identify with them, and standing in place for the girls’ displaced selves, presenting a fantasy world without the accustomed patriarchal order.

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<sup>11</sup> See Wikipedia English <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rose\\_of\\_versaille](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rose_of_versaille)>, 6 Sept. 2009.

<sup>12</sup> For an example of a *bishōnen*, see <<http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bish%C5%8Dnen>>, 6 Sept. 2009.

<sup>13</sup> Buruma, Ian. *Japan hinter dem Lächeln. Götter, Gangster, Geishas*. Frankfurt/Main: Ullstein 1988.

<sup>14</sup> Shamoan, Deborah. “Situating the *Shōjo* in *Shōjo Manga*. Teenage girls, Romance Comics, and Contemporary Japanese Culture.” MacWilliams, *Japanese Visual Culture*, 137-154.

We can build on this, and additionally refer to Yukari Yoshihara's approach to the Japanese fashion style of "Gosurori"<sup>15</sup> (also called *goshikku rorīta*, ゴシック・ロリータ), i.e. Gothic-Lolita, to bring us one step closer to Bill Kaulitz's style. *Gosurori* fashion has been inspired by Gothic fashion since the late 1970s in the UK and US, and tends to put an emphasis on sexy, dark gorgeousness. But in comparison to these classic examples of Gothic fashion, *gosurori* is peculiar in its emphasis on exaggerated cuteness, or *kawaii* (Yoshihara 2008). It goes back to the Japanese "cutie look" that was popularized by the doe-eyed anime characters, particularly the 14-year-old Lolita-esque manga character "Sailor Moon" (美少女戦士セーラームーン, 1992–1997),<sup>16</sup> a super heroine with magical abilities, created by award-winning author Naoko Takeuchi and also internationally successful as anime. The name "Lolita" was the title and protagonist of a novel by the Russian writer Vladimir Nabokov, written in the 1950s in the United States of America. (If we refer to Nabokov it implies again that cultural translation is an ongoing border crossing process.) According to Yoshihara, *gosurori* means both, cute and creepy, and appears attractive and repulsive at the same time, challenging the societal attitude about femininity, maturity and conformity. We can now read the style of the stage persona of Bill Kaulitz as a form of cultural translation, so that he seems to represent a male version of the *gosurori* style, i.e. a male Gothic-Lolita outside of manga and anime in a new musical discourse.

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<sup>15</sup> Yoshihara, Yukari (Associate Prof., Tsukuba University). What does Gosurori (ゴスロリ; ゴシック・ロリータ) have to do with the Gothic? Unpublished abstract of a lecture at National Taiwan Univ., 24 Sep. 2008.

<sup>16</sup> For more information about the comic figure Sailor Moon see Wikipedia English <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sailor\\_Moon\\_\(character\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sailor_Moon_(character))>, 14 Sept. 2009.

## Cultural translation

Tokio Hotel appeals to young fans in many countries outside of Germany, accustomed to the manga style through manga books,<sup>17</sup> translated into their own language (or in better words, ‘transformed’ into their own language, because there will never be a precise translation), and through manga characters who sometimes transgressed from paper into other forms of goods, like the yellow pocket monster *Pokémon*, which can be found as plush toy, computer game, and a TV series. The manga style was introduced outside of Japan much earlier through many animated Japanese films, such as the classic “Heidi, Girl of the Alps (*Arupusu no shōjo Haiji*, アルプスの少女ハイジ)”<sup>18</sup> which relied on Western storytelling. This series, made by the animation studio Zuiyo Eizo in 1974, and directed by Isao Takahata, was internationally popular. It was based on the children’s book from the novel “Heidis Lehr- und Wanderjahre” by Swiss author Johanna Spyri, written in 1880. This Japanese animation series was produced in Japan, but connected to a long tradition of Europhilia in Japan,<sup>19</sup> and actually shows landscapes and

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<sup>17</sup> Kinko Ito states that manga have spread to France, Italy, Spain, and to Germany where two translated Japanese manga magazines are published. In October 2002, the first independent Japanese manga corner was part of the international book fair in Frankfurt, Germany, one of the oldest and largest fairs in the world (Ito, Kinko. “Manga in Japanese history.” MacWilliams, *Japanese Visual Culture*. 26-47, here 46).

<sup>18</sup> The series was shown in 27 countries around the world. For more information regarding the series “Heidi, Girl of the Alps” see Wikipedia English <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heidi,\\_Girl\\_of\\_the\\_Alps](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heidi,_Girl_of_the_Alps)>, 30 May 2009.

<sup>19</sup> Concerning the fictional Europe in Japan as the illusion of memory out of absence of memory, see Van Staden, Cobus. “Heidi in Japan. What do anime dreams of Europe mean for Non-Europeans?” *The Newsletter*. 50<sup>th</sup> Issue. CyberAsia. International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS). <<http://www.iias.nl/newsletter-50>>, 24, 20 July 2009.

figures of a visual aesthetic style that mixes Japanese and Western caricature styles. This Japanese anime became an icon all over the world and seems easy to recognise as such, but is ultimately partially attributable to predecessors from comic strips and cartoons in Western cultures. For example, Phillipps (72) mentions Osamu Tezuka (1928-1989), known as the “god of Japanese comics”,<sup>20</sup> who’s main sources amongst others included German fairy tales. He was artistically active for more than forty years and one of the developers of the so-called ‘story manga’. MacWilliams (11) especially cites Rakuten Kitazawa, one of the founding fathers of Japanese manga, who particularly studied Western work like the American comic strip “The Katzenjammer Kids”,<sup>21</sup> first published in 1887 in the New York Journal, and created by German immigrant Rudolph Dirks. “The Katzenjammer Kids” shows boyish pranks of three and later two kids. Using partially stereotypical German accent, the story tells about twins, Hans and Fritz, who rebel against their mother, and a surrogate father as well as other authoritarian characters. This comic strip is considered one of the oldest comic strips, and later developed into two competing strips, still in syndication. “The Katzenjammer Kids” again obviously seems to be inspired by German author Wilhelm Busch’s famous illustrated book “Max und Moritz”,<sup>22</sup> from 1865, one of the first comic books

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<sup>20</sup> “In Tezuka’s romantic fantasies one can see influences from three main sources: German fairy tales, from which he borrows plots; Disney characters, from which he takes stylistic features; and the Takarazuka women’s revue, from which he takes scenes that he incorporates into his manga tableau.” Phillipps, Susanne. “Characters, Themes, and Narrative Patterns in the Manga of Osamu Tezuka.” MacWilliams, *Japanese Visual Culture*. 68-90, here 72.

<sup>21</sup> See Wikipedia Deutsch <[http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Katzenjammer\\_Kids](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Katzenjammer_Kids)>, 9 Sept. 2009.

<sup>22</sup> Busch, Wilhelm. *Max und Moritz und andere Bildergeschichten*. Köln: Könemann, 1994. 7-45.

(which was written in rhymed verse). It shows the story of the pranks of two other bad – or shall we say ‘non-conformistic’ – boys, as mentioned in the title. So we have come full circle, since ironically it was a popular comic by a foreigner from Germany, which was adapted by the Japanese Kitazawa.

Many of the leading characters in manga and Japanese animation, which is heavily influenced by manga – and by the way also the new style of the Taiwanese puppet theater “Budaixi” (布袋戲),<sup>23</sup> – have similar features that look Caucasian: oval heads, and big round eyes. This shows the influence of Western culture in this alleged ‘pure’ indigenous Japanese style, and supports MacWilliams’s (6) claim, that they are cultural hybrids originating from Japan’s contact with modern Western cultures. Interestingly, he identifies a trend towards a “culturally odourless” of Japanese animation (ibid. 16), meaning that in the process of becoming global consumer products the imagery of anime tends to omit national or cultural characteristics. This doesn’t mean that we can deny a strong Japanese cultural influence in manga and anime, but this calls a pure distinctive Japaneseness of manga and anime into question. On the other hand, the aesthetics of the young fans of Tokio Hotel, who came into contact with commercialized anime figures on TV screens in early childhood, are not only influenced by their own traditional Western aesthetics, but partly influenced by Japanese culture. In conclusion, we can say this cultural translation from Asian to Western countries in its turn refers to previous cultural translations from Western Countries to Asia. In this process we can demonstrate a certain quality of culture: a continuing

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<sup>23</sup> An email to the author from Robin Ruizendaal, Director of the Lin Liu-Hsin Puppet Theater Museum in Taipei, 19 Feb. 2009.



permanent process of cultural transformation that goes parallel to the permanent process of cultural translation.

### **Behold the openness of the future**

The appeal of the band Tokio Hotel is not so much in the lyrics as in the emotive power of their image. This seems to parallel *shōjo manga*, which is not about action or adventure, but focuses on the psychological development of the characters (c.f. Takahashi 125).<sup>24</sup> The facial and body features of the stage persona of Bill Kaulitz can be traced back to the “*bishōnen*” figure. We could compare this boyish character with the bud of a flower, that is about to burgeon, but has not opened yet. It shows a phallicistic character in which the question of gender is suspended, so that the phallicism of this figure only appears to be, but is not, and death has no place in it (cf. Leipelt-Tsai 328). It is not a representation of sexuality, rather a fascinating blank, a gap or space, that can be filled with the fan’s fantasies. That means, (s)he seems to be neither male nor female, but gender indifferent. His/her position appears to be a position of androgynous gender that is aimed at the openness of the future. This gender practice breaks the symbolic order, and produces an effect of androgyny through the translation of a *bishōnen* in *gosurori*-style into Western pop music in the fusion of maleness and femininity. In this process, not only are the structures of meaning more fluid than before, but combined they also produce the semblance of divine perfection that promises a healing of the fragmented human self.

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<sup>24</sup> Takahashi, Mizuki. “Opening the Closed World of *Shōjo Manga*.” MacWilliams, *Japanese Visual Culture*, 114-136.

Bill Kaulitz's style and appearance made him immediately noticeable in the Western pop music scene. His Gothic clothes, eye make-up, and the manga-like hairstyle acquired symbolic significance among fans. Different from many other male vocalists who tend to show a more one-sided, unilateral picture of manhood, he shows a (or the) soft side of a boy. His androgynous thin body, combined with long, raven colored hair, and a soft, feminine face behind the make-up sends ambivalent visual signals of male and female characteristics in one image. Combined with a not quite sophisticated Gothic fashion that is easy to recognize, body piercing and tattoos invoke a distinction and also a kind of open modern identity. Underlined by the androgyny of his appearance, the tension between him and the fans in the audience is not a clear sexual one, but he is an object of the gaze of teenage youth. They may (un)consciously recognize the cutie looks of manga and anime they were exposed to before. His stage persona transgresses the gender border, and liberalizes it to an extent that has not recently been seen in European musical discourse. It seems as if his appearance is not parodistic cross-dressing, but an expression of a new kind of hybrid identity that can be used as a model. Sometimes he shows extreme emotions and cries, which may seem to elderly bystanders like overdoing it, assuming that they can not mirror themselves in the music band. This brings him nearer to the audience despite being on the stage, because he represents one of their own. Together with the common interests of the band and their young fans, the performance seems to allow the crossing of borders.

Comparing Bill Kaulitz with classic rock stars, the British singer/performer David Bowie's bisexual image as "Ziggy Stardust" during the 1970s comes to mind. Even if also deviant and sexual elegant, Bill Kaulitz's

stage persona shows less ‘direct’ sexual charisma than Bowie, and includes less theatricality, but seems much more playful. He also does not pronounce sexual autonomy to such an extent as Bowie did (c.f. Cagle 2 et seq., 13), nor is he a fashion pioneer in the way Bowie was. In combination with his Gothic style, Bill Kaulitz’s looks tend to put more emphasis on cuteness. But compared to Bowie, the shake-up of the status quo seems not only for the stage, but shows even more seriousness. The idealized image of a sexually ambiguous *gosurori*-style vocalist not only provokes the audience to question the dominant gender system with its fixing of concepts, but serves as a temporal escape from reality, and simultaneously makes way for a new mode of femininity, playful and self confident. The appeal of the visual display is rooted in the ambiguous contrast between the hard, masculine popular rock music sound and the feminine charisma of the male lead singer. The role offered to the audience is one of otherness and exclusiveness, like many Gothic music bands, but combined with a gender question in a liminal space which is new in musical discourse, and sets them apart from the established pop rock music. In this articulation of protest and opposition lies a hope of independence from the common social constrictions on many female youth in Western cultures. They will be encouraged to refuse the orthodox signs of femininity but to aspire to the symbolic position of a *bishōnen*. If gender is not decipherable, they feel less bound to a traditional role, which is predominantly determined by the sexual inequality in society.

The effect of gender hybridity is especially noticeable, because most of today’s teenagers – already in a difficult stage of adolescence – encounter complex interconnections and fragmentary discontinuities, not only in the variety and types of discourses, but also in the interconnectedness

shaped by new media forms. In Asian countries, this gender hybridity can also be noticed, and it seems not particularly restricted to female youth. For example, the hairstyle of some of today's Taiwanese male youth is also influenced by manga and anime imagery, and emphasizes the movement of hair. This style also crosses the visual signals of male and female characteristics, similarly to the style of singer Bill Kaulitz. Furthermore, we find a special kind of performance art named "Cosplay" in Taiwan, which is also influenced by manga, and carries on the style of characters from the new Taiwanese puppet theater "Budaixi" (布袋戲). The Japanese term "Cosplay" (コスプレ) means a costume role play, in which participants dress like a specific character or idea, often drawn from fantasy movies, manga and anime, and other popular fiction. In this performances it is not unusual to see genders switched, "with women playing male roles and vice versa".<sup>25</sup> When representing and acting as a character drawn from popular manga or Taiwanese puppet theater, the function of this role play is to show the imaginativeness of the players. Cosplay provides a new space for self-expression, sheltered by the mask of the character which hides the (or a) more ordinary sight of the youth, and seems to transform them while providing a new identity. Participating in the interpretation of popular characters, the performers also get an opportunity to connect collectively, in parallel to the event of a pop music concert.

Cosplay can also be found in Western countries like Germany, where a mega event named "Connichi" in the city of Kassel takes place every

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<sup>25</sup> See <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosplay>>, 16 Oct. 2009.

year (Melzer)<sup>26</sup>. According to Melzer, it now has 150.000 visitors of all ages, but two-thirds are younger than 21 years old. Interestingly, two-thirds of the Western manga and anime fans visiting the unconstrained “Connichi” happening are female (ibid.). This shows again, that this kind of openness appeals especially to female youth in many Western countries.

Cultural interplay and cultural translation seem to be interrelated not only with the discourse of politics and apparent power-related configurations, but also spatially and temporally connected through the media. With the impetus of the band Tokio Hotel, we analyzed one distinctive example of cultural translation of manga image that can partially be traced from Germany to Japan, from Japan to the US, and from the US back to Germany. Cultural translation shows “the interstitial” (Bhabha 326) in every culture considered to be a fixed entity. Therefore, we cannot see Asian cultures such as the Japanese culture or Western cultures like the US culture simply as a united whole or oneness, which seems to threaten cultures of other countries. Cultural translation takes place in asymmetrical terms, moving not only in one direction, i.e. from a more dominant country to a country in a more inferior position, but multi-directionally in a process of constant cultural crossover of various forms of local cultural traditions. We may have to broaden the term of hybridity from one that stands for postcolonial practices to one that is extended to translations from national to multinational practices. In that view, the popular music band Tokio Hotel shows a (trans)national hybrid form that subverts, parodies, and reconfigures gender (always supposed that there are such things as gender), moving beyond the dualism of Asian/Western. Cultural

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<sup>26</sup> It first took place in 2002. See Melzer, Chris: Die Nippon-Connection. *Der Tagesspiegel*. 09/21/2009 <<http://www.tagesspiegel.de/2904895>>, 12 Oct. 2009.

hybridity can therefore be seen as a force that interferes with and disturbs hegemonic concepts of gender.

## Popular music

Tokio Hotel's fragmented style shows a principle of openness to the other, and in this way may still be considered a kind of (un)conscious politics which in this case is not 'undermining' the nation-state, but multiplying the colorful and diverse fragments of its country. A familiar argument of Theodor W. Adorno,<sup>27</sup> one of the theorists of the Frankfurt School founded during the 1920s, is that mass culture would suppress individual autonomy and has almost total fetishising effects on art, such as music. According to Adorno, serious 'art' music could be differentiated from commercial popular music through the perception of music (c.f. 17 et seq., 22 et seq., 32 et seq.). According to the Frankfurt School, the mass cultural profile of modern society signaled the fate of individual autonomy, and was steadily replaced by a "scientific-technological rationality" (ibid.): this would mean a uniform response to popular music among listeners without any necessary listening skills. Adorno argues, that in case of 'art' music or classical music meaning becomes only apparent after a considerable degree of listening skill has been developed by the listeners. He therefore implies a hierarchical nature with his distinction, which we can not follow.

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<sup>27</sup> Adorno, Theodor W. "On Popular Music." Ed. Max Horkheimer. *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*. IX, New York City: Inst. of Social Research. 1941. Photomechan. repr., München: Deutscher Taschenbuch-Verlag, 1980. 17-48.

In our reading of *Tokio Hotel* as an example of German pop culture, the construction of musical meaning is not as restricted as has been thought, but is a more complex process of aural and visual nature. There is not only one concrete meaning to be read, and the proclaimed understanding depends on the singularity of the listeners: their age, experience, and the degree of participation as well as a sometimes gradually proceeding familiarization. We think that meaning as such, and notably musical meaning, seems pre-determined only to a certain degree, but for the most part has to be mediated by the audience in the process of reception. So-called ‘serious’ music as well as popular music can be experienced in different ways, and both require prior learned listening skills for their appreciation. At the same time, the alleged individual autonomy of the audience (which Adorno claims only for listeners of art music) is never fully existent, neither in case of popular music, nor in case of art music. Both are regulated and follow calculated rules, and at the same time both play with cultural elements like musical history in different ways.

Even if popular music sometimes seems to some extent less complicated and may not demand as much concentrated listening as some art music does, both can be used to distract and overwhelm the audience. No style of music refrains from mediating the feeling of social unity, or ignoring the substantial differences between people. In that way it influences and regulates, or using Adorno’s expression, it “manipulates” (cf. 21) the way we listen to it, but in the end this ‘totalitarian’ unison mechanism of music still remains a riddle to us. This also applies to different traditions and styles of music of non-

European origin, which are excluded by Adorno's notion of music.<sup>28</sup> He seems to generalize a small part of European classical music as a canon of musical works. Popular music cannot be judged as a kind of commercial deformation in general, as the future success of new music cannot be calculated. Furthermore, not only the commercialization of art is fundamental. As a central element of the market economy today there is also a counter movement of the culture system. In (post)modern times, this leads to a culturalization of the economy: sometimes, art is confused with commodity items, and commodity items are confused with art. Little by little, this merger of market and culture seems to become indistinguishable, as art is put under enormous pressure to provoke and to shock. When we look ahead, in postmodern arts the breach of the rules may lose its shock characteristics, and will be entirely integrated into the established art market (cf. Zizek 3).<sup>29</sup>

If someone would ask what European classical music is, we could say that examples of classical music are the music of Beethoven and Mozart. But approximately 200 years ago, the music they wrote was popular with most people. Then it became classical music.<sup>30</sup> Whether we call music classical or popular seems a question of time. Perhaps in another 200 years we may call Tokio Hotel a European classic?

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<sup>28</sup> The cultural impact of this kind of subordination of greater parts of world music (Beijing opera for example) can not be considered here. This issue has to be left to another discussion in the future.

<sup>29</sup> Zizek, Slavoj. "Wer naiv fragt, wird schockiert." *Die Zeit online* 50/1999. 1-4. <[http://www.zeit.de/1999/50/199950.t-zizek\\_.xml](http://www.zeit.de/1999/50/199950.t-zizek_.xml)>, 7 July 2009. In this connection, we could also consider pop art concerning Andy Warhol.

<sup>30</sup> According to Kent Nagano, conductor of Bayerische Staatsoper München, in an Interview, showed on *Deutsche Welle TV*, 16 Feb. 2009.



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