

Journal/Writing Assignment 3: Vocaloids and the Future of Music

First, watch the mini-lecture on Japanese vocaloids.

Writing Prompt:

After having watched the mini-lecture on Miku Hatsune and vocaloids in Japan, this writing assignment asks you to consider the position of vocaloid technology in the future of music performance. As mentioned in the lecture, this technology has been used for several years in Japan and has since been used to resurrect dead performers, such as Tupac Shakur, Michael Jackson, etc., as well as being used as fill-ins for absent duet partners (Carrie Underwood, Janelle Monáe, M.I.A., etc.). This writing assignment asks you to consider the following questions (you may answer as many or as few as you wish): What did you think of the Miku Hatsune performance either as music or as a concept? Do you view vocaloid technology positively or negatively and why? Would you pay to see a vocaloid performance “live?” Why or why not? Do you think as the technology becomes better and more affordable, will there be a flood of dead celebrity hologram collaborations (Think of Hologram David Bowie playing with John Lennon and Kurt Cobain, Prince jamming with Jimi Hendrix and Bob Marley, or Whitney Houston singing a chorus for a Tupac rap). An attached optional story tells of plans for an entirely new hologram tour by the deceased *tejano* music legend Selena (who was murdered 20 years ago). Is this type of project about earning profits off of the dead or giving new experiences to old fans or people who didn't have the opportunity to see these stars perform live?

More generally, are vocaloid holograms a technological extension of music making or a further distancing of the public from actual music performance (and if so, is this even a negative development)? Is Miku Hatsune a corporate scam (a company own the product and earns money while others make new content) or does this technology allow a democratization of music making for anyone who can afford the technology (dedicated fans can contribute to the art they enjoy)? Will holograms of living performers be the simulcast technology of the future, enabling artists to perform everywhere virtually without needing to travel (putting more musicians out of work)? Perhaps instead of attending a concert, the same amount of money could get Hologram Beyoncé to perform for your birthday party. How closely is vocaloid technology related to electronica, where some DJs perform not by playing musical instruments but by activating prerecorded sounds? Or is this closer to the so-called tribute bands, who perform convincing imitations of classic rock and pop acts? Does it matter whether or not vocaloids are real if you get real feelings from the music?

Journal Assignment:

Using the above ideas regarding the nature and potential of vocaloid technology, describe your opinions regarding the vocaloid phenomenon based upon the lecture, performance clip, and additional links. As with our previous assignments, students may choose to view vocaloid technology positively, negatively, or both. As before, the important thing to do to fulfill the assignment is to: 1) evaluate vocaloids (positive, negative, mixed) using any of the prompt questions and then 2) support your opinion. Again this is a reflection and opinion paper and not a research paper; there is no single correct answer. But as before, move

beyond saying that you do or do not like something and explain why. If you feel ambivalent about vocaloids, explain your ambivalence and demonstrate an awareness of positive or negative viewpoints of the subject. Use any of the questions raised in the writing prompts above as a point of departure.

The assignment is worth 30 points. As this is a journal, only course staff will read the entry and you will have no comments assigned. You will be graded on content (15 points) and writing (15 points).

Specific Guidelines:

Assignment length: ~250 words. Write your mini-essay in a word processing program, back it up, edit it, proofread it, then when ready submit/upload it to the Unit 3 Journal (in the same folder where this document is found).

- Do write in complete sentences, in clear, solid prose.
- You may write in the first or third person.
- Feel free to write personally, but not informally (i.e., avoid overly casual language, slang, profanity, etc.).
- Introduce and conclude your essay (introduction and conclusion sentence)
- If you refer to class readings or topics, do not summarize readings or lectures; I already know what the readings say, and so do you; the writing assignment is too brief to go into much of the readings. You may use the readings for examples, but the examples should only support your ideas/opinions.
- **All ideas and quotations that are not your own must be properly cited to follow standard academic procedure and avoid breaches of the Honor Code** (you may any citation style as long as you are consistent in its application). It is not a requirement of the assignment that you include outside sources, but any sources that you do use must be cited.
- Do not go over the word limit by more than 15%

Access and Deadlines:

Assignment activation date: April 25

Writing assignment deadline: May 5 (Friday), 11:59pm