

Virtual Pop:

Gender, Ethnicity, and Identity in

Virtual Bands and Vocaloid

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Abstract

Virtual bands have been present in popular culture for decades, and they have become the topic of increased scholarly interest over the past few years. Despite this new work, however, there remains a need for more in-depth critical studies into gender and ethnicity in virtual phenomena, as this approach promises to open up new areas of enquiry. Focussing on questions of gender and ethnicity, my thesis will investigate the mechanics through which identity is constructed in animated, puppet, and hologram virtual band characters. My thesis will draw on a range of empirical, theoretical, and ethnographic approaches in order to analyse how and to what extent virtual band characters are created and disseminated by those in the industry, on the one hand, and by fans, on the other. In particular, I consider this question through the concepts of agency (perceived and attributed), authorship, and authenticity, and in relation to the notion of suspension of disbelief, examining ways in which animation affords greater potential for forms of 'layered awareness.'

Following a historical overview of virtual bands, and a critical appraisal of relevant theoretical perspectives on this topic, the thesis moves to a close reading of two case studies that reinforce and subvert gender and ethnic stereotypes commonly found in popular culture: Gorillaz and Vocaloid. These examples present different aspects of identity construction in virtual media, the former apparently led by the band's creators, the other by its fans. Within Gorillaz, my discussion centres around the female guitarist Noodle,

who, I will argue, is a modern-day Orientalist construction. By contrast, the chapters on Vocaloid draw on fan studies techniques to show that Vocaloid's fan base contains a large, unexpected demographic, and that part of the fans' dedication stems from their confirmed expectations of gender and ethnic identity in the Vocaloid characters.

Dedication

Dedicated to my supportive, generous family, who has helped me to achieve this goal through all my years, not just the last five. For Mom, Dad, Nathan, Tiffany, Lila, Cole, Meri, and Lacie. I love you to the moon and back.

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Introduction

When investigating various types of popular music, I have always gravitated towards studying music that I enjoy. This habit led me to the subject of this thesis; as my interests in many aspects of popular music studies grew, I failed to find much discourse on one of my favourite bands: Gorillaz. It seemed strange to me then, in 2012, that this fascinating band, with its unorthodox characters, exuberant catalogue, and unique backstory, was rarely viewed through a theoretical lens (although this situation has since changed, as will be detailed in this Introduction and elsewhere in this thesis).¹

As I continued to hunt for information on Gorillaz, I noticed that virtual bands in general were underrepresented in scholarship, especially in the field of popular musicology, where I found only passing references to bands like Alvin and the Chipmunks, the Banana Splits, and a few others. Perhaps these bands were considered too childish or too insignificant to merit enquiry. But the more I considered such bands and their far-reaching (and sometimes long-lasting) impact on society, I felt that there was something important to be investigated. I wanted to understand the appeal of these bands – why fans identify with them, the mechanisms of this appeal, and the relationship

¹ As will be discussed later in this Introduction, an article by John Richardson was one of the only pieces of literature available about Gorillaz at the time this project began, and it greatly influenced my work. John Richardson, “The Digital Won’t Let Me Go”: Constructions of the Virtual and the Real in Gorillaz’ “Clint Eastwood”, *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, 17:1 (2005), pp. 1–29. See also John Richardson, ‘The Surrealism of Virtual Band Gorillaz: “Clint Eastwood” and “Feel Good Inc.”,’ in *An Eye for Music: Popular Music and the Audiovisual Surreal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 201–239.

between virtuality and ‘popular culture.’² Aspects of certain virtual bands have caused fans to embrace the characters as autonomous musicians, and in certain cases, have resulted in great commercial success.

Virtual bands have become a staple in many cultures. For reasons explained later in this chapter, however, my focus will be on virtual bands in the West, primarily the United States and Western Europe. Appendix A is a randomly compiled list of 100 examples of virtual bands from America and Europe, which includes several household names. While this only serves as anecdotal evidence for the importance and widespread nature of virtual bands in the West, they have been an active presence in Western popular culture for over sixty years. It should be noted, however, that virtuality in popular music often includes connections in some way with Japan and other parts of East Asia, either through the technology that it uses, or through (mis)appropriations of artistic practices conceived within that region. This thesis is alert to this complex relationship between East and West, as discussed especially in chapters 5 through 7.

² I use the term ‘popular culture’ above in a general sense, but it is a complex construction. Cultural theorist Stuart Hall explains that the idea is tied to consumerism and capitalism; therefore, popular culture is not a true reflection of the tastes of ‘the people.’ Taste is shaped through cultural power, which is most often wielded by those in political or financial power. However, ‘the people’ at any class level includes individuals who can certainly think for themselves. For this reason, elements of popular culture also reflect what is popular amongst the masses. The instruments of cultural power cannot wholly control ‘the people,’ just as ‘the people’ can never fully escape the influence of cultural tastemakers. Hall’s ideas inform my use of the term ‘popular culture,’ especially in relation to the formation of gender and ethnic expectations within Western popular culture. See Stuart Hall, ‘Notes on Deconstructing “the Popular”,’ in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*, ed. John Storey (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1998), pp. 442–453. For more on Hall, including extensive unpacking of his work, see *Communication, Culture and Critique*, 6:2 (June 2013), pp. 201–352. Virtual bands have reflected and represented elements of society by acting as mirrors upon cultural moments or trends. They have also, in certain instances, drawn attention to popular culture by heightening it, parodying it, distorting it, or making it surreal.

Existing Studies of Virtual Bands

Various chapters, articles, and a PhD discussing virtual bands and Vocaloid have appeared since 2016, signaling the topic as a new frontier in music studies. My own thesis complements these studies in ways that I will clarify in the next section, which details my research questions. Some context for my own study is required first, however. In particular, a summary of existing work on virtual bands is necessary, noting sections of my thesis where I explore these ideas further in relation to my own. Notably, none of these studies use identity, gender, or ethnicity as a departure point, although some do discuss these constructions to an extent.

The Oxford Handbook of Music and Virtuality includes three chapters that discuss Vocaloid.³ In Louise H. Jackson and Mike Dines's chapter, 'Vocaloids and Japanese Virtual Vocal Performance,' Vocaloid is compared to Bunraku puppetry, with Vocaloids interpreted as the next step in a long line of Japanese puppetry traditions.⁴ Because Vocaloids are controllable like puppets, both from users' home computers and as holograms on stage, they align with the spectacle of puppetry, specifically Bunraku. I discuss Jackson and Dines's argument in detail in chapter 6.

³ Vocaloid is the term for the software, virtual singers, and genre that have emerged from the creation of Yamaha's VOCALOID software. The software comprises a digital voice bank that users (VocaloidPs or Vocaloid Producers) can employ to compose any vocal line they wish. Each voice is closely linked to an animated character. Vocaloid is the case study found in chapters 6 and 7 of this thesis, where the definition will be expanded upon, and the nuances of the construction will be explored.

⁴ Louise H. Jackson and Mike Dines, 'Vocaloids and Japanese Virtual Vocal Performance: The Cultural Heritage and Technological Futures of Vocal Puppetry,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Virtuality*, eds. Sheila Whiteley and Shara Rambarran (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 101–110.

In his chapter ‘Hatsune Miku and Japanese Virtual Idols,’ Rafal Zaborowski elaborates on the *jimusho* culture of Japanese pop music, or ‘office’ culture.⁵ The term relates to the fact that Japanese pop musicians are closely controlled by the studios or labels to which they are contractually bound. Many aspects of their personal lives are monitored, so they often agree to dating and lifestyle clauses in their contracts, all in the name of preserving the illusion that they are perfect and pure.⁶ The Japanese audience will only accept as ‘idols’ those who maintain a very strict, innocent public persona.

Zaborowski undertook fieldwork in Japan in 2012, asking Japanese consumers how they view Vocaloid. The interviews were conducted with people working in the music industry and with fans. Those who were avid Vocaloid fans spoke of two contradictory elements of the genre to explain their love of it. Some spoke of their admiration for its nonhuman elements, ‘this speed, these fast-paced words,’ while others touted the capability of expression in the voices, for example, that they were moved by the ability of one of the Vocaloids (Hatsune Miku) to emote.⁷ These latter responses align with a great number of replies I received from fans (from around the world) in

⁵ Rafal Zaborowski, ‘Hatsune Miku and Japanese Virtual Idols,’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Virtuality*, eds. Sheila Whiteley and Shara Rambaran (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 111–128.

⁶ While stories of Japanese ‘idols’ shamefully breaking their contracts are relatively normal in Japan, they cause a major stir when they make headlines in Western news. For example, in 2013, Minami Minegishi, a member of supergroup AKB48 shaved her head and openly wept in an apology video to her fans. Her crime? Spending the night at a man’s house who was allegedly her boyfriend. AKB48 have a strict no dating clause as part of their contracts, and Minegishi had been caught breaking the clause. The outcry in the West over the girl’s level of shame and her desperate plea for forgiveness reflected that the ‘idol’ culture of Japan is still extremely misunderstood, and is uncomfortable for a Western audience. Zaborowski, ‘Hatsune Miku and Japanese Virtual Idols,’ p. 115.

⁷ Zaborowski, ‘Hatsune Miku and Japanese Virtual Idols,’ pp. 122–123.

my own research into virtual Vocaloid fan communities, discussed extensively in chapter 7.

Finally, Thomas Conner's chapter 'Hatsune Miku, 2.0Pac, and Beyond,' references many of the virtual bands discussed in this thesis, although he approaches them from a different perspective to my focus on gender, ethnicity, and identity.⁸ Conner's chapter serves as a kind of virtual band history, although it is less comprehensive than chapter 1 of this thesis, probably due to spatial restraints in the book. He argues that the degree of virtuality employed by individual bands differs, and has been tailored to suit the context and key demographic of each band.⁹ Conner concludes with several predictions for the future of virtual bands and virtual performance, including Vocaloids made from voicebanks of famous singers, current human performers being reproduced as holograms to perform in multiple venues at once, and the development of Artificial Intelligence resulting in nonhuman musicians who can possess and maintain creative control of their work.¹⁰ These predictions seem highly likely: VOCALOID's first American English character (Cyber Diva, released 2015) closely resembles Lady Gaga in her 'Poker Face' video (2008),¹¹ and bands like the Black Eyed Peas are already using holograms to perform in venues that they themselves are unable to

⁸ Thomas Conner, 'Hatsune Miku, 2.0Pac, and Beyond: Rewinding and Fast-Forwarding the Virtual Pop Star,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Virtuality*, by Sheila Whiteley and Shara Rambarran (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 129–147.

⁹ Ibid., pp. 137–139.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 140–143.

¹¹ 'Cyber Diva: Yamaha's first genuine Voice Bank which offers a female natural American English voice in VOCALOID4' <<https://net.vocaloid.com/en/products/show/548>> [accessed 17 August 2016].

attend (will.i.am and apl.de.ap performed with a hologram Fergie and Taboo at 2011's NRJ Awards in France).¹²

Beyond *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Virtuality*, and out of all the emerging work on Vocaloid, Sarah A. Bell's article 'The dB in the .db: Vocaloid Software as Posthuman Instrument' is arguably the most pertinent to this study, because Bell deals with auditory expectations linking the body and the voice.¹³ As will be discussed in chapter 6, Bell employs Nina Eisheim's theory that vocal timbre is a marker of identity, not biology. Timbre can be performed, but it is often mistaken by the listener as an essentialising marker of a particular gender or ethnicity. In this way, Eisheim's theories align with themes in gender studies about performativity of gender; however, her ideas become complicated when one considers that the voices of most Vocaloid characters align with cultural expectations of what they 'should' sound like, as suggested by the visual depictions of their gender and ethnicity.

Virtual bands are also coming under increasing scrutiny. For example, in 2016, Alex Jeffery submitted a PhD thesis about Gorillaz and the creation of narrascapes in their album *Plastic Beach* (2010).¹⁴ According to Jeffery, the term narrascape encompasses a 'holistic model, allowing spatial, textural and participatory features to be more prominent' than they are in the

¹² 'Black Eyed Peas: Members of the group perform as holograms at live show' <<http://musion.com/?portfolio=black-eyed-peas-holograms-at-nrj-awards-show>> [accessed 17 August 2016].

¹³ Sarah A. Bell, 'The dB in the .db: Vocaloid Software as Posthuman Instrument,' *Popular Music and Society*, 39:2 (2016), pp. 222–240 (p. 229).

¹⁴ Alex Jeffery, 'The Narrascape of Gorillaz' *Plastic Beach*: an Interdisciplinary Case Study in Musical Transmedia,' (PhD dissertation, City University, 2016).

field of narrativity; it also ‘aims for greater flexibility, allowing for and giving more centrality to a greater number and range of agents and activities in the construction of storyworlds.’¹⁵

In my thesis, Jeffery’s work will inform discussion of Gorillaz’ fandom in chapter 4. His research focuses specifically on fan activity and output surrounding *Plastic Beach*, while mine spans more albums. But Jeffery’s investigation of many types of fan output (audio, video, fanart, cosplay/toy play) includes examples of how fans appropriate parts of the official output (canon) that have the most personal meaning for them, in order to create new materials (‘fanon’). Fan appropriation is telling, as fans often manipulate representations of gender, ethnicity, and sexuality. The liberties they take reveal the malleable nature of the characters and their worlds, as well as the sense of ownership and entitlement that fans possess.

Research Questions

This thesis contends that a vital component of virtual bands and Vocaloid is identity construction, whereby virtual characters are generated by the interaction of sonic, visual, and narrative dimensions. Whilst this subject has not been overlooked by the studies summarised above, none have addressed it as their starting point or main focus. Consequently, my principal research question can be stated as follows: in what ways are identity, gender, and ethnicity constructed in virtual bands and by fans of virtual musicians, specifically within the medium of animated, puppet, or hologram

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 82.

virtual bands? This is no small task, since there is a wide array of such bands and virtual musicians, and each group can undertake identity construction in a variety of ways. But such an investigation is important because it sheds light on two groups of tastemakers within popular music: those making the decisions from studios and corporate offices, and those in the public who are receiving, interpreting, and accepting/rejecting what is offered to them. Identity is a complex factor for both of these groups. Industry professionals carefully curate identity, while fans might embrace or cast off a musical act based on elements of identity (even though the fans may not be able to state explicitly why the identity was problematic for them). Taking the discussion surrounding identity from the realms of popular musicology, cultural studies, gender studies, and other areas, and focussing it on bands that might otherwise seem simplistic, is a useful exercise that can reveal a great deal about identity construction as a phenomenon.

I will explore this by focussing on the following four research questions: 1. How are gender and ethnicity represented visually and aurally in virtual bands and Vocaloid, and do these representations align with, subvert, or advance gender and ethnic stereotypes commonly found in popular culture? 2. How are the concepts of authenticity, authorship, and agency negotiated in the context of virtual bands? 3. Who are the 'true' and perceived authors of virtual bands, and to what extent and in what contexts of reception and consumption does this matter? And finally, 4. how does suspension of disbelief function within virtual bands and Vocaloid?

Gender refers to the behaviour associated with, or attributed to,

biological sex. Gender and ethnicity are both coded expressions of being, with particular gestures that act as signifiers of a particular sex or ethnic group. The traditional or common conception of sex in Western society is binary: people are generally perceived to be either male or female. Gender fluidity, non-binarity, and representations of gender that question or complicate the traditional sexual distinction only began to be theorised in the 1980s and 1990s, for example, in the work of Judith Butler. In terms of popular music performance, however, such non-binary representations date back to the origins of modern popular music; examples include Little Richard's use of make-up and flamboyant costume, Elvis Presley's 'pelvic thrusting,' and the ambiguous embodied performances of Mick Jagger, David Bowie, Prince, Patti Smith, k.d. lang, Morrissey, Duran Duran, Culture Club, Antony Hegarty, and beyond. Similarly, societal expectations of ethnicity can be found in many popular culture artefacts, from casting decisions in film and television, to the prominent stars in a variety of popular music genres. What will be revealed, then, when one examines gender and ethnic representations of characters in virtual bands? A non-human virtual band character can look and behave in any conceivable way that its creator can imagine. But, I will ask, to what extent do virtual band creators rely on known gender and ethnic stereotypes exhibited in the (human) music industry? Are these elements replicated in virtual bands? And if so, does this amount to an attempt to fool fans into thinking the virtual band characters are actually human?¹⁶ Conversely, which virtual bands contain characters who defy

¹⁶ At the time of the writing of this thesis, the author is not aware of any non-human virtual

stereotypes of gender and ethnicity, and in what ways do they challenge such stereotypes?

Furthermore, how do the representations of gender and ethnicity performed by virtual band characters influence the characters' authenticity, agency, and (the illusion that many virtual band creators are aiming for) authorship? How is agency achieved for fictional, fabricated characters, and how does societal acceptance of technology aid this process? I argue in this thesis that gender and ethnic representations act as a frame of reference, crafted by the band's creators to gain the fans' acceptance. Virtual band creators are asking for fans to go on a journey with them, one that often requires the fans to accept things because the creators say it is so. In virtual bands with characters who align with common tropes of ethnicity and gender, the creators acknowledge that in the human popular music world, certain people have long been more likely to sing, play, or participate in some types of music than others. This lends the characters both authenticity and agency within the genre of popular music in which they engage, as well as within popular music as a whole. When the creators ask the audience to believe that these characters are playing, singing, writing, and producing the music,

bands which are intended to deceive fans into believing they are real. Current virtual band creators ask fans to suspend their disbelief and 'agree' that cartoons, puppets, or holograms are making the music, but the intention is not for fans truly to be fooled. This distinction will be clarified further in subsequent chapters. The closest example of an attempt to fool fans into believing a non-human musician is real is AKB48's introduction of Aimi Eguchi. Eguchi was a digital singer introduced to fans as the newest member of AKB48, a Japanese supergroup that has had between 25 and 130 members since its inception in 2005. Eguchi's face was created using features of other AKB48 members; the 'most popular' eyes in the group were paired with the 'most popular' nose, 'most popular' mouth, etc. The composite face was released on the AKB48 website with fake information about the new girl. However, it only took a few days for fans of the supergroup to raise enough questions that the hoax was revealed. Fans noticed Eguchi's features resembled those of other AKB48 members, and her creators admitted that she had been fabricated.

it is therefore easier for the audience to accept and participate in the false reality. Audiences know the creations are fictitious, yet they will happily engage with the material as if it were real.

But why does this matter? What can this tell us about the ideas of reception and consumption? What can it tell us about the way the music industry moulds reception and consumption? To answer that, we must understand the distinction between the ‘true’ authors of virtual bands and the perceived authors. In the case studies found in this thesis, it will be shown that there are multiple types of ‘true’ authors, and that fans are willing to accept the perceived authors (the characters). This willingness comes from their suspension of disbelief, a concept that will be referred to throughout the following pages.

This thesis contains several small, introductory case studies of virtual bands, but the two main case studies are Gorillaz and Vocaloid. Both Gorillaz and Vocaloid provide special insight into the investigation of my research questions. With regards to gender and ethnic stereotyping in virtual bands, Gorillaz’ characters and Vocaloids on the market allow enlightening analysis when read closely.

Addressing questions of authenticity, authorship, and agency negotiation in the context of Gorillaz and Vocaloid is a complex but rewarding endeavour. Gorillaz and Vocaloid allow us to investigate two extremes of authorship: Gorillaz creators Damon Albarn and Jamie Hewlett are widely known, but the output for Vocaloid is almost exclusively created by fans. Gorillaz has an enormous output of official music, videos, multimedia, and

merchandise, and yet, fans engage with the folklore of Gorillaz and create fanart and fan fiction that reflect their motivation to understand Gorillaz more deeply and their desire to interpret the output as they see fit. The manipulation of authorship within the Gorillaz fan community is an accepted practice amongst the fans (as will be discussed in chapter 4), and Albarn and Hewlett have attempted to mediate this manipulation by introducing fan contests to create new characters,¹⁷ or to collaborate personally with the band.¹⁸ Conversely, Vocaloid characters are introduced by an official press release from Yamaha or Crypton Future Media, and then fans receive *carte blanche* to create music and artwork for those characters. New rules of authorship are being created and existing rules are being challenged within the realm of Vocaloid.

Discussing the suspension of disbelief in virtual band fandoms is a natural extension of the analysis of authorship, authenticity, and agency. These concepts arguably each have influence over how, why, and to what extent fans will suspend their disbelief in their reception of virtual bands. As in current discussions of game theory, particularly the argument between ludology and narratology, a listener's, contributor's, or user's purposes and means of suspending disbelief may vary. Ludology theorises that video

¹⁷ Gorillaz launched a campaign in 2010 inviting fans to design a new character called The Evangelist. Tom Breihan, 'Gorillaz Add New Cartoon Member: Meet the Evangelist,' *Pitchfork*, 11 January 2011 <<http://pitchfork.com/news/41172-gorillaz-add-new-cartoon-member/>> [accessed 15 May 2017].

¹⁸ In 2004, a contest began to find a fan to collaborate with Gorillaz. Fans were invited to submit entries of 'artistic expression in all its forms,' from 'animations, line drawings, music, sickly off-cuts, brief sketches, film scenes, caught-on-cameras clips, out-takes, voice-overs, whether humorous, dark, edgy, juvenile, insightful or thought-provoking. It allowed the audience to set the parameters.' See Cass Browne and Gorillaz, *Rise of the Ogre* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2006), pp. 206–8.

game play comes down to a systematic set of rules essential to the game; narratives in the game and even character design mean nothing because only a player's actions (the mechanics of game play) matter. This mode of thinking eschews distinctions between the storyworld and the player's world. Conversely, narratology states that a video game can be read as a text. The story of the game is essential to game play, and to how the players interact with the game's universe.¹⁹

I introduce this debate in game studies to demonstrate that questions of cognizance are linked to suspension of disbelief. If the game player, or the virtual band listener, is aware of their engagement in 'play' by participating in these types of media, can they truly suspend their disbelief? Someone watching a fictitious band, particularly an animated one, must be experiencing a degree of layered awareness: animation cannot be mistaken for something real, and yet it seems that audiences compartmentalise or ignore their awareness of this truth, in order to participate in the construction. My detailed investigation of Gorillaz fans in chapter 4 and Vocaloid fans in chapters 6 and 7 will consider suspension of disbelief, and tie it together with the threads of authorship, authenticity, and agency discussed elsewhere in the thesis.

Methodology

¹⁹ Henry Jenkins, 'Game Design as Narrative Architecture,' in *First Person: New Media as Story, Performance, and Game*, eds. Noah Wardrip-Fruin and Pat Harrigan (London: The MIT Press, 2004), pp. 118–130. In this article, Jenkins (a narratologist) attempts to find a 'middle ground' between ludology and narratology. As such, the article provides a description of both frameworks. The article was highly controversial, and sparked heated debate online, with a response from prominent ludologist Markku Eskelinen.

This thesis is predominantly concerned with an analysis of virtual bands and Vocaloid in a Western context. The main reason for this focus is that I am a Western scholar. My frame of reference is a Western perspective, and while I spent the years of this project striving to understand Japanese and other East Asian cultures and to consider the extremely different contexts of creations like Gorillaz' Noodle and the singers of Vocaloid, ultimately, my perspective is bound to carry the weight of my Western experience and knowledge. I can push against that experience, but I will always be a white woman born and raised in the West, investigating elements of cultures that are different from my own. Other scholars from the West have of course studied and written about cultures from around the globe for centuries with various degrees of success (and various degrees of essentialism or colouring of ideas). These are significant undertakings that add a great deal of value to global discussions, but because the subject of virtual bands is only so lately growing in popularity, and because there is a lack of study on the impact of virtual bands on cultures everywhere, I chose to speak primarily for the cultures from which I have grown and through the filter of my own white Westernness.

Another consideration for choosing to focus on the Western perspective in my work is that I became aware in my second year of study that Zaborowski was already tackling the question of the Japanese perception and reception of Vocaloid. I met him at a conference and attended his paper on Japanese fan reception of Vocaloids compared to supergroups. His research was conducted in Japan, giving him more direct

exposure to Japanese fans than my Internet-based interactions. His research was compelling, explaining the devotion of fans in Japan to their genre of choice, and their reasons for adoring the human participants in supergroups or the virtual musicians of Vocaloid, respectively. In short, the Japanese elements of fandom were under investigation, and the gap in knowledge was closing.

Positioning the West as its main research locale, this thesis will argue that one of the most important ways in which fans identify with virtual bands is through constructions of gender, ethnicity, and identity. The field of popular music studies has demonstrated that these are some of the staple means through which audiences identify with popular music, but virtual bands have not been examined extensively from this perspective. This thesis asks, therefore: how are gender, ethnicity, and identity constructed in virtual bands? Given the multimedia nature of the subject, to answer this question it is necessary to draw on a range of tools from different fields, including: popular music studies and popular musicology; cultural, media, technology, and sound studies; audiovisual analysis, virtual ethnography, and fan studies. The specific aspects of these fields that I draw on will be touched on below, and further elaborated throughout the thesis. There will be analysis of virtual band music, including discussion of genre expectations, while instrumentation and vocal performance will be related to discourse from gender and ethnic studies, in order to examine the extent to which virtual bands conform to or question common ethnic and gender performance roles.

As with many PhD projects, the focus, scope, and content of this thesis have changed since its inception in 2012. The context for the research has also changed significantly, since the thesis deals with technologies that have been and are currently changing at rapid rates. The musical, digital, and virtual worlds in which this PhD began no longer exist, or have been drastically altered. The scholarly world of 2012 has also changed, as reflected in the previous section's discussion of the various publications about virtual bands and Vocaloid that emerged in the last months of this project.

Years before beginning this project, I read John Richardson's insightful article "The Digital Won't Let Me Go": Constructions of the Virtual and the Real in Gorillaz' "Clint Eastwood," (2005) which was the only authoritative dissection of the band to utilise methods from popular musicology.²⁰ The piece sparked a desire to further understand Gorillaz' unique place in popular music and culture. Richardson's article was expanded and revised for inclusion in his 2012 book, *An Eye for Music: Popular Music and the Audiovisual Surreal*, a book that influenced and informed this PhD in large measure in its earliest days.²¹ In the book, Richardson includes Gorillaz in a larger consideration of the surreal within audiovisual trends. As will be shown in detail in chapters 2 and 4, Richardson relates his contemporary examples of audiovisual art (including Gorillaz) to ways in which surrealism has evolved since it was extensively

²⁰ Richardson, "The Digital Won't Let Me Go".

²¹ Richardson, 'The Surrealism of Virtual Band Gorillaz.'

theorised in the first half of the twentieth century, and how more modern audiovisual projects fit within that evolution. The case that Richardson makes – that despite new manifestations, surrealism continues to thrive within artistic mediums, and that contemporary audiovisual multimedia can be interpreted through a surrealist lens – can be applied to other examples of virtual bands (especially when employing the multivalent definition of surrealism that Richardson develops), which is the approach I adopt in chapter 2.

Richardson's integrated use of popular musicology, sound studies, and cultural studies techniques (amongst others) was key to my decision to adopt a multidisciplinary approach. Truly, virtual bands demand such an approach because, as forms of multimedia, they bring different types of media into some kind of relationship. While image is an important part of this relationship, so, too, is sound. Here Nicholas Cook's reminder that we need to consider carefully the relationship between image and sound is instructive, as will be discussed further in chapter 2.²²

Due to the paucity of studies on virtual bands, I needed to familiarise myself with concepts and scholarship relevant to virtual media. What followed was months of reading about virtual reality studies, posthumanism, cyborg theory, music video studies, and the mechanics of animation, voice reproduction, holograms, and the practicalities of creating a virtual band.

²² For Cook, this relationship can be plotted somewhere on a similarity-dissimilarity continuum, on which he locates three basic models: 'conformance' (when sound and image are consistent with one another); 'complementation' (when they are contrary but not contradictory); and 'contested' (when the two contradict one another). Nicholas Cook, *Analysing Musical Multimedia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 98–106.

It was also during the earliest days of research that I began to investigate, compile, and attempt to categorise examples of virtual bands. The categorisation exercise was particularly interesting and ultimately troubling. Many bands fit into several categories as I conceive them. As is reflected in the ‘Categories of Virtual Bands’ section in chapter 1, I found it hard to place any band into steadfast groupings. I do not view this as a weakness, however, as categories and genres in popular music have long been problematic tools, useful in theory but troublesome in practice.

My attempts at categorisation, however, did allow me to identify bands in broad terms – diverse geographic locations of the band creators (which sometimes did not align with the locale of the fictional band members) emerged, and bands of similar musical influence and style could be grouped at least superficially together. The diverse range of bands as I perceived of them guided my attempts to undertake as many interviews with as many band creators as I could; I was able to pinpoint bands that were unique or seemed to be outliers in some way, and endeavour to contact their creator(s). Because of the anonymous nature of the Internet, identifying and contacting band creators was not always an easy task, and it largely returned interviews conducted over email or Twitter. Some band creators were never reached, despite my best efforts (Albarn and Hewlett, for example, remained elusive). Some responded that they would happily be interviewed, but when questions were sent to them or interview times arranged, the responses stopped coming (my interview with Your Favorite Martian quickly dissolved as read receipts indicated that my messages remained unread). But some

interviews yielded interesting perspective and insight (my interview with Mistula's creator and fictional bass player in chapter 1 and Appendix B, for example).

I also began attempts to identify, contact, interview, and understand the fan groups around virtual bands, focussing most (but not all) of my attention on Gorillaz fans and fans of Vocaloid, knowing that these would be my main case studies. I began with Gorillaz fans, and as will be revisited in chapter 4, the majority of my research was conducted by examining online fan communities. In this case, I chose online fandoms because the apexes of fan activity surrounding Gorillaz occurred during saturated times of official band output, from the announcement of new albums to their release and subsequent media materials. Research for this thesis covers the first four studio albums and the correlating B sides (*G Sides for Gorillaz* [2001], *D Sides for Demon Days* [2005], *Sea Sides* for *Plastic Beach* and *The Fall* [2010]); the latest album, *Humanz* (released in April 2017) was too late for inclusion. I used online forums and fansites that effectively acted as archives for fan discussions and interactions during the months surrounding each of the first four album releases.

Likewise, I have chosen to focus my attention on online Vocaloid fan communities only. There are certainly Vocaloid fan communities that meet and engage in fan activities in person, and these are tight knit groups that merit their own investigation. But my decision to look solely at online Vocaloid fanbases was determined by two factors. The first is that Vocaloid is a virtual art form with virtual characters, so it seems appropriate to

investigate virtual fan communities as they discuss and deal with a virtual medium. The second is that because online dissemination of Vocaloid material was the first and remains the primary vehicle for distribution, the Vocaloid convention and concert culture that has subsequently developed has arguably been bred directly from online communities; therefore, a logical progression of study in Vocaloid fan culture can be mapped from virtual communities to actual communities.

Over the course of this study, I engaged with several Vocaloid fan communities in a variety of ways, always through the medium of English. Initially, I simply visited Vocaloid fansites and perused other people's posts. I watched videos, listened to music, looked at fanart, and became familiar with terminology. I read long threads of posts in an attempt to assess the type of interaction the fans had with one another. While there seemed to be some of the hierarchical traits similar to those observed in other online fan communities (fans correcting other fans over tiny details, bragging about experiences seeing 'live' Vocaloid concerts, namedropping in posts about prominent VocaloidPs), the overwhelming number of posts encouraged further engagement from all fans, rather than shaming some fans for not knowing enough about the topic. Members who were new to these communities were encouraged to speak up and introduce themselves, and 100% of introductory posts that I observed featured long streams of welcome messages from a wide range of forum members, not just from moderators or the most popular, long-standing users.

After garnering this initial impression of the Vocaloid fan community, I decided to sign up for a forum (Site A) myself without disclosing my full identity. I used a new handle that I had never used on another website of any kind. I did not use a profile picture but left the blank face that was provided for me upon registering. I left my gender and location information blank. I then began to explore Site A, commenting on other user's posts instead of creating my own. I have chosen not to discuss this portion of my experience any further in this thesis. Because I did not disclose my identity to anyone on Site A, any discussion of specific interactions would be a breach of ethics. However, I will simply state that my observations and experiences were extremely similar to what I had witnessed when I was simply reading fansites and was not interacting on them. The sense of inclusivity, despite my extreme anonymity, was strong.

My next step was to join a Vocaloid forum and introduce myself as an academic researching the genre. I chose a forum (Site B) that I knew was highly trafficked and esteemed in the Vocaloid community (Site B had been mentioned and hyperlinked on numerous other fan websites). I registered with a handle that did not reveal my actual name, and I used a cartoon avatar that I created, an anime-style face that resembles me (short hair, glasses, similar skin tone and eye colour). I revealed my location as Cardiff, UK, and I decided to disclose my real name to anyone if they asked. In order to join Site B, one is required to register with an email address, and a confirmation email is then sent to verify the new user's identity. Already, Site B was proving to be professional and to take its security and membership

very seriously. Upon confirming my email address, I immediately received an automated message on the site from one of the moderators, inviting me to post an introduction to a discussion link that was permanently pinned to the top of the Forums page. I did so, and received a stream of messages welcoming me. Because my introduction included the fact that I was a researcher, several of the posts included excited and insightful comments about the possibilities for my project ('Vocaloid doctoral thesis? You are my hero!' '[...] it's always great having academic interest in fandoms. Validates our crazy obsessions.' 'I think people should know that there's more than [sic] just Hatsune Miku and J-pop. That Vocaloids aren't fake music or autotune [sic]. That technically, they are instruments. That they don't always have to be in anime style. And, that they all aren't Japanese.'²³)

The bulk of my interaction on Site B was conducted through private messages. Once I made my initial introductory post, users offered to help me or to answer questions, either by responding to the post or by sending messages directly to my inbox. I had a handful of in-depth conversations, and a large number of people sent me lists of their favourite Vocaloids, favourite VocaloidPs, and videos I 'just had to watch.' Site B is also where I first came across 'bioloid,' a user who will be discussed further in chapter 7. 'bioloid' immediately revealed his love for Vocaloid Megurine Luka to me, and a few messages later revealed that this was, indeed, romantic love.

²³ Various welcome messages from the 'Introductions' forum on Site B, 26–28 September 2013.

'bioloid' is active on several forums and is one of the moderators on a high profile Facebook Vocaloid fan page (FBGroupA). A few months after meeting on Site B, he added me to FBGroupA. This was a new level of intimacy with the fan network because I was added as myself. My Facebook profile has high security settings, but anyone can see my full name, and the real picture of me that serves as my profile picture. In addition to 'bioloid,' several other users from Site B are members of FBGroupA, so they could see me for the first time (and in some cases, I could see them for the first time, as many had Vocaloid-related avatars on Site B but real pictures of themselves on Facebook). My interaction on FBGroupA was more frequent and extensive than on any other site. I commented extensively on posts, 'liked' a variety of posts, and made posts of my own. The notifications from FBGroupA appeared in my Newsfeed, so I received updates from the page every time I logged into Facebook (which was much more often than it had been on Site A and Site B, as checking Facebook is part of my daily routine, and checking Site A and Site B required specific attention). FBGroupA is also where I decided to conduct my survey: specific statistics outlined in chapter 7 are gleaned solely from that page. The main reason for selecting FBGroupA for this purpose was because I could see the full number of members included in FBGroupA, and could therefore know the percentage of people viewing my posts and responding to the survey; on Site B, this would have been extremely challenging if not impossible, as the membership is not visible to all users, and the numbers fluctuate drastically, according to one of Site B's moderators.

The survey was posted to FBGroupA on 9 October 2014. The post emphasised that the survey should not be shared outside FBGroupA, as it was meant to garner information about FBGroupA members only. The post also disclosed that the survey was for research purposes, and that the information it provided would be used in this thesis. On the date the survey was posted, FBGroupA had 230 members; between 9 October and 20 October, the post was seen by 134 members. A follow-up post was made to draw attention to the survey for a second time on 18 October. On that date, the group had 231 members; the second post was seen by 85 members, but there is no way to know how many of those were among the 134 members who had seen the first post. Of the 231 total members of FBGroupA, 47 took the survey (20.3%), with the largest number of responses (23) returned on the first day. The survey was closed on 20 October, 12.00 Pacific Standard Time. The results of this survey will be analysed extensively in chapter 7.

Thesis Structure

The thesis comprises seven chapters that trace a logical progression from the earliest virtual bands through to current incarnations. Technology and its larger societal effects are common themes discussed throughout, and fan reception becomes increasingly important in investigating the most recent manifestations of virtual musicians. The thesis begins with a general overview of virtual bands, and later focusses on the two main case studies: virtual band Gorillaz, and the fabricated singers of Vocaloid.

Chapter 1 begins with an investigation of virtual band history, including the development of animation and its important role in producing techniques that allowed sizeable, fast output from animation studios. This prolific output resulted in more virtual bands being featured in animation playing ever-expanding catalogues of music. The popularity of virtual bands in the 1950s–1970s will be discussed at length, since this was the period that bred the largest number of virtual bands and created a virtual band fan base – kids in the United States and United Kingdom glued to Saturday morning television who would grow up to become fans of virtual bands targeted for adults (like Gorillaz). Lastly, this chapter will also explain various technologies used to create virtual bands and to convince the fans of their musical authenticity and autonomy. Technologies that help to recreate the voice (voice modulation, AutoTune) and that help to reproduce the body (holograms) are key to crafting the full illusion of a virtual band. It is these technologies that audiences engage with via media and in ‘live’ performance.

Chapter 2 engages with a wide scope of theories to determine which are most useful to this investigation of virtual bands, including theories developed by musicologists and scholars in other fields. To dissect virtual bands, for instance, one must have a working knowledge of virtual reality theory, and it is also useful to understand surrealism. I also consider the extent to which discourse on monsterization and cyborgs, and on televisual and music video studies are relevant to the analysis of gender and ethnic stereotypes in virtual bands.

In chapter 3, the analysis is honed in directly on representations of gender and ethnicity within virtual band characters. This chapter reintroduces existing debates about gender and ethnicity in popular music, and then examines the extent to which gender and ethnic expectations are reproduced in virtual band contexts, or whether in fact, as the utopian aims of some of their creators suggest, they succeed in charting new identities and social constructions. The chapter utilises three small case studies: Dethklok, an all-male, all-white heavy metal band from the animated television series *Metalocalypse*; the all-female, mixed-ethnicity Josie and the Pussycats, a cartoon band from the 1970s television show of the same name; and Studio Killers, a band comprised of a cartoon human female, a fox, and a mink. These bands serve as examples of ways in which gender and ethnic performance expectations are built directly into virtual band characters, and ways that certain characters subvert such expectations.

Chapters 4 and 5 are dedicated to Gorillaz, arguably the most successful virtual band of all time. Gorillaz provides an illuminating illustration of the time-consuming care and dedication that goes into creating a virtual band. Each detail of the band's backstory, image, and music reflects a great deal of thought and creative energy from originators Albarn and Hewlett. However, there are many parallels to be drawn between the details of Gorillaz' construction and the constructed public images of rock and hip-hop musicians. Do these parallels come through because of Albarn and Hewlett's understanding of the music industry's stereotypes? Are certain tropes employed for a commercial purpose, or is it merely

coincidence that there are so many similarities between the cartoon members of Gorillaz and human popular music performers? And if Albarn and Hewlett are harnessing fan expectation – especially fan expectation of gender and ethnic constructions – do they deliver a band that is cutting edge, or more of the same?

Chapter 4 introduces and examines the three male characters of Gorillaz: Murdoc Niccals, Stuart ‘2D’ Pot, and Russel Hobbs. How do these characters embody the racial and gender stereotypes linked to maleness in rock and roll and hip-hop? This chapter discusses elements of the band’s music catalogue and of the characters’ appearances, character traits, and backstories that align with fan expectation. Specific attention is devoted to Russel, a character painted with the brushstrokes of ethnic expectation, since he exists as the sole black character and the band’s percussionist. The investigation of these three characters serves as the introduction to a discussion of Gorillaz’ fanbase, illuminating ways that the fans buy into and engage with Gorillaz folklore. How does fan expectation influence the creation of a commercially viable construction of autonomous cartoons making music?

In chapter 5, the exploration of Gorillaz is further narrowed to a discussion of Noodle, the band’s only female character. This chapter explores the extent to which Noodle is a modern-day construction of Orientalism. Not only is she the sole female in a band that thrives in the male-dominated genres of rock, hip-hop, and reggae/dub, she is also the only non-Western character, hailing from Japan. Noodle’s mysterious

background, beauty, and need to be rescued by her Western bandmates align with some of Orientalism's most well known portrayals of women. While Noodle does subvert certain stereotypes of females in popular music (for example, she is a virtuosic guitar player), I ask to what extent she aligns with Orientalist portrayals of women, and what her creation reflects about current cultural expectations in modern Western society? Furthermore, I consider how the music of Gorillaz reflects Noodle's background and artistic voice, especially since she is described as the group's main songwriter.

Chapters 6 and 7 leave Gorillaz behind to explore the other main case study of this thesis: the emerging genre of Vocaloid. Vocaloid has garnered a great deal of attention in recent months, and its implications for popular music at large are significant. The genre of Vocaloid emerged from the launch of Crypton Future Media and Yamaha's VOCALOID software, which allows anyone with a computer to compose music and to manipulate a digital singing voice to sing anything one wishes. The expansion of the term Vocaloid to include other similar types of software, the animated characters associated with each singing voice, and the genre as a whole illustrates its rapid growth and widening appeal.

The history of Vocaloid and its technical aspects are explored in chapter 6. This includes a detailed explanation of anime and manga's influence on Vocaloid characters, and an investigation into the elements of Japanese culture that allowed Vocaloid to achieve a meteoric rise there (amongst these elements are the *kawaii* aesthetic, the technological developments of Japan after World War II, and an increasingly prominent

societal focus on the digital and virtual over the real). Part of the characters' appeal relates specifically to their 'cute' design, which reflects ideals of beauty established for decades in Japanese anime and manga. These ideals align with tropes of gender and ethnicity that appear in a multitude of cultures worldwide. Owing to its high degree of cultural transferability, the popularity of Vocaloid is no longer restricted to Japan, and chapter 6 explains certain factors that have allowed Vocaloid to gain global exposure and acceptance. With its malleable, digital performers and visually-impressive hologram performances, Vocaloid could potentially herald a popular music future where 'live' performance is entirely redefined; the chapter ends with a consideration of its profound implications for human performers and popular music as a whole.

Chapter 7 draws on both fan studies and psychoanalytical perspectives on fan culture in order to analyse fan loyalty to the various Vocaloid characters. Indeed, as will be discussed, the allegiance of fans is very much centred around the characters themselves, rather than on the genre as a whole. Data is presented in chapter 7 that shows that a large proportion of the active Western Vocaloid fanbase is comprised of an unexpected demographic. The chapter revisits some of the research methodology used for this particular portion of the thesis, and the resultant information garnered from surveys and interviews with fans. This information is then examined more closely, using past work conducted in other fandoms as a guide. Finally, I utilise a psychoanalytic framework to suggest further possible reasons for the devoted fan followings present in Vocaloid.

Chapter 1

‘You’ve Come a Long Way, Baby:’ The History and Technologies of Virtual Bands

A discussion of virtual bands and Vocaloid must examine the history and the technologies that have allowed them to develop thus far. Without an understanding of the precursors to current virtual bands, it is impossible to integrate these bands into discussions of identity in popular music, or to understand the mentality that allows fans to suspend their disbelief and accept those fictitious musicians’ autonomy and authenticity. It is also vital to investigate the advancements in technology that have allowed virtual bands to become worldwide phenomena. Voice modification technologies, the Internet, hologram advancements, and other developments have all played into the success and variety of virtual band representation, allowing their creators opportunities to represent the characters through a variety of mediums. These new technologies allow gender and ethnic stereotypes found in some virtual band character constructions to be played out, aiding the tropes in reaching mass markets. But the diversity of technologies also creates many avenues for fans to engage with virtual bands in constantly shifting ways.

This chapter will examine the existence of virtual bands over the past sixty years, parsing them loosely into groups. I will first discuss the many possible categories of virtual bands, the helpful aspects of grouping them, and the problems that arise from attempting such an exercise. I will then give an introductory investigation of the development of animation

techniques, moving into a discussion of Alvin and the Chipmunks, one of the earliest virtual bands that used a variety of mediums and appealed to both children and adults through their novelty. From there, the chapter will investigate a group of virtual bands marketed for children – the bands of Saturday morning television. These bands were part of a shift in America in the 1960s (and later in the United Kingdom) to focus Saturday morning television programming on children and pre-teens, with related merchandising priced for pocket money. Next, I will outline elements of nostalgia that have aided in the growth of virtual bands targeted at audiences of all ages, and finally will hone in on bands intended purely for older teens and adults. These bands have mostly emerged from the 1990s onward, a phenomenon that is related to the aging of audiences who were exposed to virtual bands as children. I will then focus on virtual bands that have thrived in arenas of newer technology (moving away from television and phonographs to new mediums such as websites and online fandoms). Finally, I will dissect the technologies that surround these bands; this dissection will include information about voice- (vocoder, AutoTune) and body-recreation (hologram) technologies, and will begin to shape an understanding that these technologies are integral to the suspension of disbelief that virtual band fans must undertake.

Categories of Virtual Bands

Attempting to arrange virtual bands into categories is a complicated endeavour. There are a variety of possible ways to classify virtual bands,

and each has their benefits and drawbacks. Some categories I will suggest here are straightforward, while others are highly debatable.

Perhaps the type of categorization that is most contentious amongst popular music consumers is classification by genre. To group music or musicians by genre is, of course, a storied and informative process, but it is simultaneously fraught with imprecision. In order to place any band (virtual or real) into a genre, one must consider not only a broad category, but also a myriad of smaller classifications that fall under larger genre headings. For example, Dethklok (discussed extensively later in this chapter and in chapter 3) can easily be classified as a heavy metal band. But heavy metal has hundreds of sub-genres, including Nu Metal, Death Metal, Black Metal, Avant-Garde Metal, and many more. Classifying Dethklok into one (or many) sub-genre(s) of metal requires an extensive knowledge of Dethklok's music and of the sub-genres themselves.

To further complicate matters, new sub-genres are often created and defined within fan discourse. Entire sub-genres may exist that are only discussed on certain websites or amongst certain communities. And historically, some genres have been closely linked to gender and ethnic expectations in popular culture (this will be discussed further in chapter 3). Rap music is (primarily) for black males, folk is for white male and female singer-songwriters, and glam rock exists somewhere in between traditional, binary gender expectations. To classify virtual bands into genres can therefore place gender and ethnic expectations on them. And as will be

shown throughout this thesis, gender and ethnic stereotypes are already present in many virtual bands; genre classifications only further them.

A less-controversial categorisation could therefore be proposed for virtual bands: groupings based on cartoon, puppet, or hologram characters. I use the term ‘cartoon’ rather than ‘animated’ because some virtual bands have drawn characters that are always static when depicted (such as Grand Theft Auto’s Love Fist). These categories are simple and straightforward, until we consider that some bands appear in multiple forms (Alvin and the Chipmunks were puppets before their more well-known incarnations in animation), or that hologram characters must be drawn, built, and programmed by computers, and the state of a character’s rendering at any given time complicates its position between cartoon and a category all its own.

The fact that virtual band characters exist as cartoons, puppets, or holograms can lead into discussions of other related methods of categorisation. Virtual bands could be grouped by backstory (whether or not a folklore for the band exists, and what type of folklore it is), or whether the characters of the band depict humans, anthropomorphised animals, or fictional creatures. The age of the fictitious band members could also be taken into consideration. To classify bands by instrumentation (do the bands play real instruments or ones invented by the creators for the band) or line-up (number of singers, guitarists, percussionists, and so forth) would be helpful, and would inform discussions of genre. A virtual band could even be classified tenuously by the gender of its characters, or by its country of origin

(which could be further discussed in terms of the creators' country and its relation to the band. What elements of the creators' knowledge or expectation about their or another country are reflected in the virtual band?)

Considering the creators of virtual bands illuminates other possible categories based around human involvement in virtual bands. Bands could be grouped by public knowledge about the creators; do those who form the bands remain anonymous, or are they open publicly about the endeavour? Bands could also be classified by their label status, record sales, or chart placement, all of which are dependent on human factors.

These human factors are vital to the perpetuation of bands, because they are related to marketing decisions. Investigating the means of marketing would create valuable categories for virtual bands because the means will vary greatly based on the intended audience. And both the intended audience and the actual audience of virtual bands would serve as revealing categories as well. As will be seen in this chapter and in chapters 6 and 7 on Vocaloid, the audience that virtual band marketing is aimed at does not necessarily reflect who is truly engaging with the music.

The engagement of fans occurs in a variety of mediums, from online to conventions, from television to film. The medium that a virtual band employs is a valuable delineation for bands. Some bands were created for television (*Josie and the Pussycats*), while others exist only on YouTube (*Your Favorite Martian*). But many virtual bands spill into several mediums, especially as they grow in popularity. The singles and albums released by Gorillaz were quickly followed by music videos on television (eventually

made available online), and then by books, merchandise, and live performances featuring holograms. A category of medium would need to include a qualification – that bands are grouped by the main medium in which they are portrayed.

All of these proposed groupings have not included theoretical considerations. Virtual bands could be grouped by classification as satire, parody, surrealist constructions, doppelgängers, or as a variety of other theoretical constructions. These particular classifications could be debated endlessly, and with new virtual bands emerging, the discussion of these potential categories could be carried on for many years to come.

It is important to note that most virtual bands fit into several of these groupings and categories. In this chapter, I have organised my overview of virtual bands chronologically, and within that chronology, by intended audience and by medium. While I have structured my work this way in order to discuss specific elements of their construction, I am by no means suggesting that these bands only belong to the categories into which they are grouped here, or that my classifications are incontestable. The categories are imperfect and sometimes shift over time. For example, the groundbreaking, lucrative nature of Alvin and the Chipmunks' material led other executives to conceive of a virtual band market for children, and as those child audiences grew older and technologies evolved, virtual bands morphed as well. The groupings suggested here will therefore serve as aides in the following discussions that focus specifically on gender and ethnic stereotypes.

An Animated Anthology – The Rise in Popularity of Animation

Bands have long been featured in various fictitious forms, but the virtual band's roots may be traced back to early animation. Cartoon musicians have 'created' music in animated shorts and films since the development of commercial animation in the early 1900s. Studio animation was a rocky business from its inception. While cartoon strips in newspapers and other publications were immensely popular, the transfer from static frames to moving characters was precarious. The earliest cartoons were shown in cinemas around 1913 as part of the newsreel before the main feature; they were popular as novelty pieces. But by the 1920s, cinema audiences were already becoming bored with cartoons.¹ They found the animation jerky or poor in quality. For some studios, this meant abandoning the animation enterprise altogether (for example, Paramount shut down its animation studios in 1921).²

For others, this meant radically changing the animation process and adapting its technology in the hope of speeding up and bettering the process. The use of celluloid for layering characters and backgrounds was first used in the midteens, but the process was revolutionised when William C. Nolan had the idea to draw wider background scenery and move the background slightly in each frame to suggest movement. Nolan's contemporaries quickly discovered that putting objects (like bushes) in the foreground and moving

¹ Michael Barrier, *Hollywood Cartoons: American Animation in Its Golden Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 9.

² Ibid., p. 21.

them more rapidly than the background created the illusion of depth.³ Likewise, cycles became popular for creating repetitive movements like running; in a cycle, the animators would simply use the same nine or ten drawings repeatedly for the portion of the scene that required the same movement.⁴ Cycles were an important precursor to limited animation, a technique that became pervasive in the 1950s–1970s for rapidly creating large sections of animation, simply by recycling old footage or animating only a character's mouth and eyes.

As these and other techniques developed and studios turned out better quality animation more efficiently, cartoons rose again in popularity and stayed there for decades. The faster animation processes also meant that cartoons became a viable medium of entertainment for television. It was possible to produce cartoons quickly enough to have them featured on a weekly basis in short episodes, such as Hanna-Barbera's *The Flintstones* (1960–1966), the first cartoon series to appear in primetime; it aired on ABC, achieving huge popularity and spawning spin-offs.

The expedition of the animation process also allowed for the rise of Saturday morning TV culture, which meant that many children in American (and later British and European) homes spent their Saturday mornings watching animated series, and cartoons became ever more prevalent in popular culture. The marketing of cartoons and cartoon-related products (including albums from various cartoon bands) became a vast industry. The

³ Ibid., pp. 15–16.

⁴ Ibid., p. 16.

advancements in animation technologies that allowed for quick production were vital to the creation of virtual bands because they allowed animation studios to explore a wide array of characters and settings; in shows that featured cartoon bands, efficient animation techniques allowed creators to focus on musical aspects, resulting in at least one new song in most episodes of these shows. The musical output from such series was enormous.

Alvin and the Chipmunks...

One of the earliest virtual bands is also one of the most enduring: Alvin and the Chipmunks (The Chipmunks) first appeared on a novelty record in 1958. Their creator, Ross Bagdasarian, Sr., had found previous success with other novelty records; Bagdasarian wrote the hugely popular ‘Witch Doctor’ in 1958. According to his son’s recollection of the story,

In 1958, my family was down to our last \$200. Being a gambler at heart, my dad did what any other prudent person would do. He took \$190 of it and bought the latest state of the art tape recorder, one that allowed him to change tape speeds. As he tried to decide what to write about, he spotted a book on his desk, ‘Duel with the Witch Doctor.’ In a burst of creative energy, fueled mostly by sheer panic, he wrote Witch Doctor [sic].⁵

To create the voice of the witch doctor in the song, Bagdasarian slowed down the tape speed on his new tape recorder to create a deep, booming voice. The up-tempo, entertaining pop tune was a hit. When Bagdasarian’s record company, Liberty Records, asked for another novelty song only a few months later, he manipulated tape speed once again. This time, he sped up

⁵ Ross Bagdasarian, Jr. <www.chipmunks.com> [accessed 2 October 2013].

the tape, creating the iconic chipmunk voices of Alvin, Simon, and Theodore.⁶

'The Chipmunk Song' was a smash hit that Christmas, selling everywhere from record shops to lingerie stores. It reached number one on the Billboard Hot 100 Pop Singles Chart.⁷ The song is a slow waltz with a simple melody, with the three chipmunks' voices singing in close harmonies. The lyrics are humorous, focussing on the Christmas gifts that The Chipmunks hope to receive. The song instantly introduced audiences to the tumultuous relationship between lead singer Alvin and human owner and manager Dave Seville. Bagdasarian provided the voices of all three chipmunks (by speeding up his vocals using the tape recorder), as well as voicing Dave (at normal speed). The dialogue included between verses of 'The Chipmunk Song' hinted at a larger Chipmunks' backstory.

At first, The Chipmunks were just voices on one novelty track. But because of their immense popularity, the puppet versions of Alvin, Simon, and Theodore were soon featured on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, with Bagdasarian alongside them lip-synching the part of Dave. The Chipmunks had become manifest in their first physical embodiment. They sold 4.5 million records in seven weeks between December 1958 and January 1959, breaking previous sales records.⁸ More Chipmunks records and a wide

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Billboard, The Hot 100 <<http://www.billboard.com/charts/hot-100>> [accessed 9 August 2016].

⁸ Bagdasarian, Jr. <www.chipmunks.com> The assertion that the record was extremely popular is supported by an article of the time, in which the success of The Chipmunks' single is credited with creating a boom in Christmas singles that year. The author, Bob Rolontz signals on 22 December that the album was predicted to exceed the three million album

array of merchandising, including Chipmunks comic books, were released, but it wasn't until October 1961 that they appeared in their first animated incarnation when *The Alvin Show* premiered on CBS primetime.

In 1964, the album *The Chipmunks Sing the Beatles* was released; the novelty record had been 'personally sanctioned' by the Fab Four after Bagdasarian met them in London.⁹ The album artwork features the Chipmunks with dark moptops, but that is the only physical change to the cartoon characters; the Chipmunks are not meant to be doppelgängers for John, Paul, George, or Ringo. So while later virtual bands would produce exact animated recreations of human bands (including an animated incarnation of the Beatles discussed in the next section), this was the first example of a virtual band paying tribute to a major musical act, and doing so as autonomous characters. The album plays as a loving tribute, with the instrumentation of each track true to the Beatles' original, and the vocals pitched as a delightful novelty for Beatles or Chipmunks fans. With the enormous popularity of the Chipmunks at this time, and the unprecedented mania in America for anything related to the Beatles, it seems that both parties recognised an opportunity to boost their profile and create a new type of merchandising. It is also interesting to consider the artistic shift the Beatles began to explore in 1965, only one year after *The Chipmunks Sing*

sales mark, 'making it the biggest seller since "Hound Dog" a few years ago.' Bob Rolontz, 'Heavy Action Keys Renaissance of Christmas Singles: Half a Dozen Yule Waxings Hit Trail Blazed by "Chipmunk",' *The Billboard*, 22 December 1958 [Google ebook].

⁹ Bagdasarian, Jr. <[www\(chipmunks.com](http://www(chipmunks.com)>.

the Beatles was made; the album might not exist if it was not suggested at just the right moment in the Beatles' careers.

Bagdasarian died suddenly in 1972, but The Chipmunks were far from over. They have been the stars of several animated series (each with different character designs), made-for-TV movies, and have been computer animated and paired with live actors and settings in four major cinema releases (the fourth, *Alvin and the Chipmunks: The Road Chip*, was released as recently as December 2015). In 2005, they were also featured in a full-length DVD film as both puppets and computer animated characters.

The Chipmunks have a diverse catalogue of music, ranging from original songs written by Bagdasarian and others, to covers of hit songs from across several decades. As time has progressed, the production of cover versions has far exceeded new Chipmunks songs. The Chipmunks' albums often reflect pop trends from the decade in which they were released, with covers from the most popular artists of the time (The Beatles in the 1960s, Michael Jackson and Madonna in the 1980s, and an array of one-hit-wonders in the 1990s and 2000s).¹⁰ The Chipmunks have also explored other genres. For example in 1992, they featured on the country album

¹⁰ The Chipmunks released several other albums in the 1960s besides *The Chipmunks Sing the Beatles*, some of which were comprised of original songs, and some of which included covers (like 1969's *The Chipmunks Go to the Movies*). While there were no releases in the 1970s, 1980 saw the release of *Chipmunk Punk*; the album did not contain any punk covers, but the title reflects the popularity of punk at the time. The album included covers of Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers ('Refugee') and Queen ('Crazy Little Thing Called Love'). An entertaining source for experiencing a wide variety of Chipmunks covers is the 1992 VHS special *Alvin and the Chipmunks: Rocking with the Chipmunks*. The 25-minute special includes clips of Alvin singing songs by Elton John, The Rolling Stones, Little Richard, The Beach Boys, and others. It also includes animations of Alvin dancing in the videos for Michael Jackson's 'Smooth Criminal' and 'Beat It' alongside the King of Pop.

Chipmunks in Low Places, on which Alvin protested that he is inherently misunderstood on the track, ‘I Ain’t No Dang Cartoon.’¹¹ Alvin, Simon, and Theodore also have chipmunk girlfriends, Brittany, Jeanette, and Elinor who have their own band: The Chipettes (first featured on the *Alvin and the Chipmunks* television series in 1983). The three Chipettes are seemingly pre- or early-adolescent, based on their behaviour and clothing, just like The Chipmunks themselves. Brittany is a redhead, Jeanette is a bespectacled brunette, and Elinor is a chubby blonde; their appearances and personalities act as female parallels to Alvin, Simon, and Theodore respectively. While they never reached the staggering success of The Chipmunks, The Chipettes are part of The Chipmunks canon and add to the folklore of three singing chipmunks that live with a human who decided to turn them into pop sensations.

The look of The Chipmunks has continued to evolve due to advances in animation practices, especially computer animation. But the singing has remained the same. While The Chipmunks are still marketed most directly for children, they have retained the appeal for all ages that was established from the beginning (after all, The Chipmunks made their television debut in primetime when the family could watch television together). The tone of the most recent Chipmunks’ films and music has focussed on appealing to children, while simultaneously giving a nod to parents who grew up with The

¹¹ On this upbeat solo number of Alvin’s, he explains that he has been misunderstood for years; he came along to make people laugh, but he does not get the respect he deserves: ‘I hope my little song / Ain’t just howlin’ at the moon. / I may be made of ink and paint, / But I ain’t no dang cartoon!’ Ross Bagdasarian, Jr., Janice Karman, and Andrew Gold, ‘I Ain’t No Dang Cartoon,’ *Chipmunks in Low Places*, CD, Chipmunk Records and Sony Wonder (1992).

Chipmunks (and who now sit through children's films with their own kids). For example, the recent use of The Pussycat Dolls' 'Don't Cha' (2005) in *Alvin and the Chipmunks* (2007) and Sir Mix-a-Lot's 'Baby Got Back' (1992) in *The Road Chip* reflect a tongue-in-cheek aspect of The Chipmunks' marketing. These songs contain adult themes veiled in lyrics that are not overt enough for many young children to understand. Adults will recognise the music (especially 'Baby Got Back') or will catch the meaning, while kids will find the music amusing but not sexual. In this way, the charm of The Chipmunks remains broadly appealing.

...And Their Successors

The success of The Chipmunks paved the way for other animated bands to follow, especially in the medium of television, and in marketing towards children. This section will focus on bands that fit into these two categories. For example, in the year following the success of the The Chipmunks' cover album, the Beatles released an animated series (*The Beatles*), which ran on Saturday mornings on ABC from 1965–1969. The show was an important precursor to other bands who would attempt the same model: turning human acts into animated ones. The trend continued with *The Jackson 5* (1971–1972), *The Brady Kids* (1972–1973), and *The Partridge Family 2200 A.D.*

(1974–1975), but could also arguably extend to creations like 2D in Damon Albarn's Gorillaz.¹²

The Beatles' music featured heavily in the series, with each episode titled after a Beatles track; each song was always included in the episode of the same name. The Beatles' real songs were integrated into most episodes as musical interludes, rather than being used to advance the plot; this differs from musical episodes of many television shows, in which music is used as a plot device to further the story. According to stories from the show's producers transcribed in the book *Beatletoons: The Real Story Behind the Cartoon Beatles* (1999), The Beatles themselves had very little involvement in the production of the show. The musical numbers incorporated into each episode were taken directly from Beatles records, and marked the only part of production that involved John, Paul, George, or Ringo in any way. The Beatles did not even provide the voices for their animated equivalents; the cartoon Beatles' spoken lines were recorded by voice actors Paul Frees (American) and Lance Percival (English).¹³

The timing of the premiere of the show and the Beatles' decision to permanently cease touring in 1966 is probably a coincidence, albeit a convenient one. More notable circumstances contributed to the Beatles' decision to stop playing live shows, such as their work on *Rubber Soul* (1965) and *Revolver* (1966), which contained music that was extremely

¹² While 2D is not a direct copy or representation of Albarn, he bears many of the same physical and character traits as Albarn, and of course, has the same voice. The parallels between Albarn and 2D will be discussed more thoroughly in chapter 4.

¹³ Mitch Axelrod, *Beatletoons: The Real Story Behind the Cartoon Beatles* (South Carolina: Wynn, 1999).

difficult to reproduce in live settings. Nevertheless, *The Beatles* was a huge success as a marketing ploy aimed at Saturday morning TV audiences mostly comprised of children. It debuted with 52% viewing ratings, numbers that had never been previously achieved.¹⁴

The Beatles was an attempt at recreating a human band using animation, with the aim of marketing them to a new, younger audience. The novel format and the associated merchandising were intended to draw in children. Indeed, one of the largest goals of creating the series was merchandising, with kids' items such as lunchboxes and posters comprising the majority of the output. The television series operated exactly as similar shows featuring cartoon bands with no human equivalent. The cartoon Beatles found themselves in the same types of predicaments, resolving often-comical problems in single episodes. Yet it is important to remember that the cartoon Beatles were based on a human act, and that the unprecedented celebrity culture around the Beatles was a large factor in the genesis of the animated show. Fans were demanding more access to the Beatles, and the cartoon show was a way to deliver it, while keeping the Beatles themselves at a safe distance. The existence of human equivalents to the animated Beatles did not, however, alter the business approach of the show's creators. They used the same formats and tricks as other cartoonists of the time, and understandably so, as other cartoonists were experiencing incredible commercial success.

¹⁴ Jeff Lenburg, *The Encyclopedia of Animated Cartoons: Third Edition* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2008).

For example, in 1969, The Archies (a band comprised of characters from an animated television series based on the popular *Archie* comic books and produced by Filmation) reached number 1 on the Billboard Hot 100 chart with their song ‘Sugar, Sugar.’¹⁵ They were also number one in the UK, Canada, and South Africa. This was the first significant success of a virtual band in any popular music charts since The Chipmunks. While none of their animated contemporaries reached the same level of success as The Archies, the output of the Hanna-Barbera animation studio in the 1960s and 1970s included a wide array of cartoon bands, from *Josie and the Pussycats* (1970–1972) to The Neptunes, featured on the show *Jabberjaw* (1976–1978).

Hanna-Barbera has suffered a great deal of scorn from cartoon fans and critics who believe the studio’s output was rushed and shoddy; in the late 1960s–1970s, Hanna-Barbera was the most prolific animation studio producing for American TV, with series on all three major US channels (CBS, ABC, NBC). The studio’s repeated use of limited animation and recycled story lines have long been criticised as the worst of TV animation.¹⁶ But Hanna-Barbera used fictitious bands in several of their shows, and the bands

¹⁵ Billboard, ‘The Archies Chart History’ <<http://www.billboard.com/artist/381051/archies/chart>> [accessed 17 October 2013]. In Don Kirshner’s (music supervisor for both The Monkees and The Archies) version of the story, The Monkees were originally meant to record ‘Sugar, Sugar.’ However, the band refused to do so. Kirshner decided instead to create a band out of the Archie characters, and the song was a huge hit. Various members of the Monkees and their production team dispute this story. Rich Podolsky, *Don Kirshner: The Man with the Golden Ear* (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard, 2012) [Google ebook].

¹⁶ To read accounts of fans’ distaste for Hanna-Barbera, see Timothy Burke and Kevin Burke, *Saturday Morning Fever: Growing Up with Cartoon Culture* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1999).

have endured – at least in the realms of nostalgia. *The Banana Splits Adventure Hour* (1968–1970) featured a rock band of larger-than life puppets (actors in animal suits) seen strumming instruments in weekly music videos; *Banana Splits* albums and merchandising soon followed. *The Cattanooga Cats* (1969–1971) did not achieve much popularity, and was eclipsed by the appearance of *Josie and the Pussycats* in 1970. But even Josie needed a gimmick to survive, as illustrated when she and the rest of her bandmates were shot into space for *Josie and the Pussycats in Outer Space*, beginning in 1972. *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kids* (1973–1974), *Jabberjaw*, and the futuristic *The Partridge Family 2200 A.D.*¹⁷ were just a few more of the shows that centred on animated bands.

Even before the incorporation of animated bands into a vast number of Hanna-Barbera cartoons, the studio already had a hand in music production. Based in Hollywood, Hanna-Barbera Records (HBR) was launched in 1965; the label signed several big stars of the time, and HBR's catalogue of records eventually featured theme song covers, animated band output, and songs by human artists unaffiliated with cartoons.¹⁸ Les Baxter, Jean King, and the Guilloteens were all part of the HBR label, alongside The

¹⁷ *The Partridge Family 2200 A.D.* featured animated versions of the members of The Partridge Family. Their human counterparts formed a band constructed by television executives for ABC's hit series of the same name, featuring a widow and her family band, which ran from 1970–1974. Here, like *The Beatles*, is another example of executives using specific human bands as inspiration, and employing cartoon marketing techniques to make money.

¹⁸ Guy Lawrence, 'Yogi Bear's Nuggets: A Hanna-Barbera 45s Guide' <<http://www.spectropop.com/HBR/index.htm>> [accessed 9 October 2013].

Flintstones' Pebbles and Bamm-Bamm.¹⁹ HBR is an indicator that the Hanna-Barbera corporation recognised the power and earning potential of pop music, a key to understanding the prevalence of cartoon bands in Hanna-Barbera shows.

Virtual Bands for All Ages, Available on Your TV

Even though many virtual bands are comprised of cartoon or puppet members, it does not mean that the bands are exclusively aimed at children. Virtual bands are a construction that can appeal to a wide array of people, and production and record companies pour a great deal of time and money into creating virtual bands with appealing music and imagery for multiple demographics. In many cases, virtual bands are marketed for adults. The mediums used in virtual band creation (like cartoons or puppets) might seem childlike, but fanbase populations and band revenue suggest that adults appreciate and enjoy virtual bands and are willing – on some level – to accept the folklore surrounding them.

It is easily arguable that nostalgia is a key factor in the popularity of virtual bands marketed for adults. The prevalence of cartoon bands in the 1960s–1970s means that a great portion of a generation was exposed to them. While many consider nostalgia to be a straightforward or benign

¹⁹ Pebbles Flintstone and Bamm-Bamm Rubble are the respective children of Fred Flintstone and Barney Rubble from the cartoon series *The Flintstones*. In the original series, Pebbles and Bamm-Bamm are featured as toddlers, but they were later the stars of their own spin-off series, *The Pebbles and Bamm-Bamm Show*, which ran in various formats on CBS from 1971–1973. The show centred on Pebbles and Bamm-Bamm as teenage sweethearts, and several episodes featured original music from their band, The Bedrock Rockers.

concept, it is actually rather complex, and has a complicated and controversial history.

The notion of nostalgia is several centuries old, but formally emerged in the 17th century as a medical diagnosis for Swiss soldiers who were suffering symptoms of depression due to homesickness; the prescribed cure was to send them home.²⁰ Understanding of the term evolved to the definition of nostalgia as a psychological phenomenon. Only recently has nostalgia been used to describe the notion of a common, sometimes gentle longing to return ‘home.’ These feelings of home are often tied to childhood simplicity and ideals, and explain why many people remember their homes as perfect and have downplayed or eliminated the negative aspects of their childhoods. But, as Matthew Riley points out, ‘the loosening and expanding of the term’s meaning is a sign of the persistence and diversity of retrospective longing.’²¹

Riley explains at length the complicated intertwining of nostalgia and modern Western culture. In the immediate post-Enlightenment world, the concept of nostalgia was espoused by many who found the ideals of the Enlightenment too harsh, and believed that rationalism had destroyed the longing for simple pleasures and a straightforward life. Philosophers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau claimed that the Enlightenment had tainted human

²⁰ Matthew Riley, *Edward Elgar and the Nostalgic Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 5.

²¹ Ibid., p. 6.

behaviour, rather than improving it. Romantic poetry, literature, art, and song soon appeared, often recalling simpler days spent in quiet villages.²²

The problem with such recollections is that they cannot be entirely true; the perfect existence that is conjured up by nostalgists is a false memory. While earlier eras might have had their charms, it is impossible that they would have been devoid of any woes or hardships. And yet, nostalgia has the power to make someone envision a past that is idyllic, and to therefore yearn for that time.

Nostalgia has been used in recent history by politicians and social movements to promote specific agendas, from both right wing and left wing perspectives. In Britain, for example, the right has used nostalgia in several eras to elicit patriotism, to tie up land in preservation projects, and to push a conservative agenda of ‘old-fashioned’ morals.²³ The problem, as many critics have pointed out, is that these ideals can stymie social progress. They can also translate into lucrative business opportunities for the rich (for example, turning estate houses into tourist attractions, while ignoring the need for affordable housing for its own citizens).²⁴

²² Ibid., pp. 6–7.

²³ Especially in the years between 1873 and 1914, Britain faced economic and military uncertainty due to economic depressions and prevalent unemployment, a severe dip in Britain’s trade figures, the rise of other military forces in Europe, and Germany and America’s manufacturing prowess. Britain was also facing internal issues of public health and poor living conditions, and a shift in the arts that was seen to celebrate decadence. The uncertainty of the time resulted in a surge of nostalgic projects, including societies dedicated to preserving buildings and land, celebrations of rural life, and ‘the invention of tradition’ (‘bestowing a dubious sense of antiquity on royal ceremonial and other public events.’) See Riley, *Edward Elgar and the Nostalgic Imagination*, pp. 8–9.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 8–13.

On the other hand, the left has used nostalgia to unite communities, since a great deal of conservation work is done by everyday volunteers and enthusiasts. In Britain, the modern left is also quick to remember that Thatcher's government downplayed nostalgia because conservation efforts stood in the way of private property rights. And indeed, as Frederic Jameson argues, a type of national nostalgia that is self-aware can do away with the trappings of fascism, to which nostalgia is most often linked.²⁵ Nostalgia can also be used as a tool of unification (because all people, immigrants and indigenous, rich and poor, experience nostalgia) rather than fostering ideals of harmful exclusivity and nationalism.²⁶

This involved examination of nostalgia has been presented to reveal nostalgia's layered but persistent presence in human culture. When we apply it to the nostalgic feelings that inspire fandom for virtual bands, this complexity is still present. Virtual bands were a staple of Saturday morning cartoon shows, and they emerged during a period when televisions were becoming cheaper and appearing in more homes. Importantly, Saturday morning cartoon shows were marketed through the use of many everyday products (LPs, lunchboxes, posters) to capitalise on the passions and financial means of their target audience: children. This means that virtual bands were prevalent in many parts of life, not just confined to the television once a week. As such, for the generation of children (now adults) from the 1960s–1970s, virtual bands very likely figured in their lives to some degree.

²⁵ Frederic Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 82.

²⁶ Riley, *Edward Elgar and the Nostalgic Imagination*, pp. 14–15.

The animated bands of Hanna-Barbera and other animation studios, though mostly short-lived, became part of American culture. While today's adults might have been introduced to the bands when they were children, they are the ones who recognise the bands in a multitude of pop culture settings, from The California Raisins appearance in RadioShack's 2014 Super Bowl commercial, to the live-action *Josie and the Pussycats* film produced by Universal in 2001. Glimpses of the bands that adults remember from childhood bring fond memories and may encourage them to seek out recordings or to pass the music on to their children.

Therefore, today, a new virtual band that has never been seen also has the potential to spark those feelings of remembrance and nostalgia for adult audiences. By employing certain techniques (for example, adopting recognisable animation or puppeteering styles, crafting detailed universes for the band's characters to inhabit, or creating music with stylistic similarities to virtual bands of the past), new virtual bands can ingratiate themselves to adults. It is true that many people remember their childhoods with false degrees of perfection; and yet the longing for youth and simplicity, despite its illusory nature, is well documented.²⁷ By tapping into this yearning, today's virtual band creators take an audience that is primed to remember and feed their memories (perhaps in a subconscious way) with new material.

An investigation of a few virtual bands specifically targeted towards teens and adults can reveal how nostalgia comes into play. Jim Henson's *Muppet Show* premiered in 1976 and featured Dr Teeth and the Electric

²⁷ Recall Riley's historical recount of nostalgia outlined above. *Ibid.*, pp. 5–9.

Mayhem (Dr Teeth), an all-puppet band whose members are still frequently seen in new Muppets material. MTV's animated series for teens, *Daria* (1997–2002), included Mystik Spiral, the band of Daria's best friend's brother; the members of Mystik Spiral often bragged about their plans to 'make it' in the music business, but a recurring joke of the series was based around their laziness and the fact that they never took the steps to get anywhere.

Dr Teeth and Mystik Spiral were both fictitious bands meant to appeal to an older audience. Even though Dr Teeth first appeared on a show meant for all ages, their songs are covers or parodies of popular songs for adults; their music often features lyrical or musical jokes that only adults would understand. Dr Teeth covered Bobby Day's 1958 hit 'Rockin' Robin' in episode 510 of television's *Muppet Show* (1980). Adult viewers would remember the original, while children would delight in learning the infectious tune. Likewise, bassist Floyd Pepper's solo rendition of 'While My Guitar Gently Weeps' (episode 419, 1980) probably resonated with more adults than children. Dr Teeth's funk version of Chopin's 'Polonaise in A flat' (episode 202, 1977) is catchy and hilariously adapted, but adults are more likely to recognise the musical joke.

In a nod to their popular contemporaries Nirvana and Pearl Jam, Mystik Spiral has a heavy metal/grunge fusion sound that mirrored a great deal of rock in the early to mid-1990s. Frontman Trent Lane features in several episodes of *Daria*, as a politically-minded revolutionary whose ambition only stretches as far as talking about success. Even though title-

character Daria is extremely intelligent, she falls for Lane's languid hipness, clearly mimicking the way that some real teenage girls swoon over real bands. Mystik Spiral's songs parody themes in 90s grunge rock – dissatisfaction, anger, depression. Their song 'From the Futon' is a double nod to their laziness and angst: 'From the futon / Everything always so low. / From the futon / I'm in limbo – how low can I go?'²⁸ These examples show the pervasiveness of virtual bands in many areas of popular culture, and point to the acceptance of virtual band characters by teens and adults.

Animation and puppetry are not mediums that exclude adults, as one may assume. Adults seem just as willing to embrace virtual band characters, especially when those characters have been crafted with thought, creativity, and attention to detail. The careful construction of such characters in relation to common tropes of popular music also helps to strengthen the characters' appeal. The characters play, sing, and bear resemblance to characters in human bands; they deal in angst, display virtuosity in their performance practice, and dress in attire that suits the genre into which they attempt to situate themselves. While their traits are exaggerations of familiar popular music traits, they are nonetheless recognisable to audiences in these new, fictitious contexts.

Strong financial backing for marketing purposes by production companies is also key to a virtual band's success. This is true of both main case studies discussed in chapters 4 to 5 and 6 to 7 of this thesis. Gorillaz' marketing has produced a carefully curated stream of videos, DVDs, and

²⁸ Anne D. Bernstein, *The Daria Diaries* (New York: Pocket Books, 1999).

merchandise, built to keep the fans engaged even for long periods between the band's album releases.²⁹ Gorillaz' albums and marketing materials are meant to appeal to teens and adults, and the band's hard-edged, spirit-possessed, Satan-worshipping characters are not exactly kid-friendly. And while VOCALOID is marketed as appropriate software for all ages, and a great deal of energy and money is dedicated to the development of software advancements and marketing around character culture, the emerging fanbase in Western countries is predominantly older than 15 years of age. Certainly the majority of noteworthy VocaloidPs are adults.³⁰

Virtual Bands in Other Types of Media

Television is not the only media outlet that has capitalised on virtual bands. They have emerged as Internet sensations, in video games, and even at neighbourhood pizza joints. The Internet is an important forum for real and for virtual bands, allowing for the meteoric rise of many groups (including several fictitious ones, such as Your Favorite Martian and Mistula, discussed below.) Various types of sites have emerged that give musicians instant outlets for their music, and both human bands and the creators of virtual bands have capitalised on them. Websites like MySpace emerged in the late 1990s, giving bands the opportunity to build fan communities and to link themselves to other similar bands. SoundCloud (like other hosting sites) allows anyone to upload music, and listeners can click directly on the sound

²⁹ In its official marketing, Gorillaz' output has been divided into 'Phases' that are related to the release of each album. This will be discussed in detail in chapter 4.

³⁰ For elaboration on the demographics of Vocaloid fans, see chapter 7.

wave of the track to comment on specific moments in the music. YouTube is the most successful video hosting site, allowing musicians of any calibre to disseminate music videos worldwide. And wiki-sites allow specific information about musicians and genres to be written and edited by musicians and fans; while the information may not always be reliable, the popularity and pervasiveness of wikis reflects the deep, personal engagement levels of popular music fans (and other fandoms for which wikis exist).

Importantly, the Internet allows virtual band creators to control their level of anonymity; they can decide if, when, and how they will reveal themselves to the fans. This is only too fitting for a genre that extensively employs imagination and in which creators hope to give the characters credence. The Internet also gives fans unprecedented access to the lives of all stars, including virtual ones. With fan forums, AMAs ('Ask Me Anything'³¹), and detailed websites, fans invite their favourite musicians into their everyday lives. Now it is possible for fans to communicate directly with their musical idols, including virtual ones, by using Twitter.³²

YouTube was the primary forum for Your Favorite Martian, an animated virtual band created by alternative blogger and YouTube star Ray William Johnson. Johnson curates the enormously popular YouTube channel 'Equals 3' (with over ten million subscribers), that features videos of

³¹ 'Ask Me Anything' is the term for online events hosted on a variety of sites, but originally created by www.reddit.com. A celebrity is present on the site for a predetermined amount of time on a publicised date in order to answer any questions the fans pose to them.

³² Many virtual band characters have their own Twitter feeds, including Murdoc Niccals of Gorillaz (@MurdocGorillaz) and Uno of Mistula (@Mistula).

him commenting on viral videos. So when Johnson hinted in 2010 that he might be starting a new project, there was vast speculation about what it might entail. In January 2011, he published a teaser video for his 'Yourfavoritemartian' channel, and in just a few days, over 73,000 new subscribers were waiting for the official launch.³³

Your Favorite Martian released original comedic songs often with crude or politically incorrect lyrics ('Zombie Love Song,' 'Tig Ol' Bitties,' and 'The Stereotypes Song' were all hits with at least 30 million views each). The band's characters included lead singer PuffPuff Humbert (voiced by Johnson), DeeJay (a black character) on turntables, Axel Chains on drums, and Benatar on guitar, bass, and piano.³⁴ Your Favorite Martian has since stopped creating songs, but their music videos remain on YouTube where viewing numbers continue to rise. The humour of Your Favorite Martian's songs and its YouTube-star creator contributed to its popularity. While the medium for presenting the band's material was progressive, and the fact that a celebrity famous only as a personality on a video-sharing website attracted such interest in a virtual band was unprecedented, the content of Your Favorite Martian's music was not innovative and the subject matter was often obscene and misogynistic. The band's output uses simplistic songs with

³³ 'Ray William Johnson's new project "Yourfavoritemartian" Finally Rolls Out January 26, 2011,' 24 January 2011
<<http://www.zimbio.com/Youtubers/articles/JxnUHcgm0h0/Ray+William+Johnson+New+Project+Yourfavoritemartian>> [accessed 17 October 2013].

³⁴ The use of the name Benatar seems slightly strange in this case, as it is most likely a nod to female rock star Pat Benatar. She achieved great commercial success, and in many ways broke expectations for female recording artists, with her raw vocals and success as a songwriter. But she was not known for her guitar, bass, or piano skills, so the choice of naming a cartoon instrumentalist after her is interesting.

predictable structures, chord progressions, and hooks; this seems to suit a fanbase who are interested in amusement from crude lyrics and animations, but who are probably not seeking to be musically challenged.

Some virtual bands have used YouTube in addition to other types of media to spread their music, in much the same way that human bands do. Mistula is a virtual band comprised of two-foot tall, anime-inspired dolls that play heavy metal. The dolls' owner Joey David started collecting ball-jointed dolls in 2004, and her husband Rey Tiempo helped her start a doll band soon after. In an email interview conducted in December 2013, David explained, 'When I'm seized by an idea, I usually do not rest until it's completed. The creation of Mistula took roughly two months, and that includes music production, photo shoots and web design. It was both tiring and exhilarating.³⁵

David is a native of the Philippines, where she created Mistula, which is important to note when considering the pervasiveness of virtual bands throughout the world. Virtual bands are not purely a Western phenomenon. The Internet has allowed Mistula's music to circulate to many countries, but David states that the majority of Philippino fans 'discovered Mistula on Philippine TV,' a reflection of the blend of media used in marketing the band. Mistula has a distinctly gothic aura based on the Spanish Catholic heritage and imagery of the Philippines.

Like many virtual bands, Mistula's fictitious band members have detailed back-stories and a specific folklore for how the band came together.

³⁵ Email interview with Joey David, 3 December 2013.

When I interviewed David via email, I also interviewed Mistula's bass player (and two-foot doll) Uno. Uno's responses were crafted by David, but the answers given in the doll's 'voice' exhibited a level of confidence and knowledge similar to any member of a real rock band. Uno explained in detail how he learned to play bass, commenting,

I learned to play guitar first. I played along to my favorite songs, just like any other guitar student who wanted to emulate their rock idols. Never really had any formal training. I was studying the songs by ear, then I gradually noticed that I was actually following the bass lines more. So I gravitated towards the bass. I just learned to love the sound of it, how it forms the backbone to most of my favorite songs.³⁶

Uno also remarked on poetry as key in the writing of Mistula's songs, and on the 'rock and roll lifestyle.'³⁷

Like the creators of many virtual bands, David works hard to keep the images of her characters intact and to create the illusion that fans can interact directly with the puppets themselves. The answers given could easily have come from a human musician, especially a musician with a need to purvey a specific image. Uno's interview aligned with a great deal of interviews conducted with human artists in music journalism, because his responses were designed to convince me of his musical prowess and expertise, as well as his intellectual and sensitive soul that spawned his lyrics.

The Internet is not only useful for building a fanbase. It can also aid in renewing an existing one. Some virtual bands owe a rebirth in popularity to

³⁶ Interview with Uno, 3 December 2013.

³⁷ For full text of the Uno interview, see Appendix B.

the Internet. In the case of The Rock-afire Explosion (Rock-afire), the Internet created a forum for fans to express their love for the band, and to update it into a new context. In the 1980s, Rock-afire, a collection of robotic animal figures, headlined one of America's most popular restaurant chains: Showbiz Pizza Place. The restaurants began opening across the southern United States in 1980, with more than 250 restaurants opening in the first three years. The robots that comprised Rock-afire were mass produced, and the animatronic characters were placed in the dining area of every Showbiz restaurant, playing a mixture of familiar pop covers and original songs while customers ate. The animatronic figures were extremely innovative for the time, with detailed movement of fingers, eyes, mouths, and other body parts; the movement was more refined than previous animatronic characters had been. Each body part could be individually programmed for each song. Every few months, a new set of songs would be introduced, so the show was constantly reprogrammed using advanced (for the time) software. The shows were extremely popular, but were removed or replaced when Showbiz was merged with and rebranded as the Chuck-E-Cheese franchise in 1990. A new animatronic band (the same machinery altered with new rubber animal covers and clothing) Munch's Make Believe Band replaced Rock-afire in almost all of the restaurants.

But Rock-afire had a larger following than anticipated, and nostalgic fans began to emerge in the early 2000s. Twenty-somethings who had been children at Showbiz Pizza Place were now running websites dedicated to the memory of Rock-afire. It was on one such website that fan Chris Thrash was

able to contact creator Aaron Fechter (the owner of Creative Engineering and original designer and musician for Rock-afire) to negotiate the price for buying a set of Rock-afire robots. In 2006, Thrash purchased his own Rock-afire ‘show,’ a complete collection of all animatronic figures, stage set-up, mechanisms, and programming software. In 2008, he began posting YouTube videos of his show performing current popular songs; Bubba Sparxxx’s ‘Ms. New Booty’ and Usher’s ‘Love in this Club’ were the first videos that led to more than a million views for Thrash. The resurgence in Rock-afire’s popularity even led to a 2008 documentary telling the story of the superfans who refused to let Rock-afire slip into obscurity.³⁸ The Internet was integral to major portions of Rock-afire’s ‘comeback,’ from Thrash’s first communication with Fechter to the videos which were shared across multiple forums and websites. Rock-afire’s story is a reflection of how nostalgia and technology can integrate seamlessly and influence contemporary society.

Other technologies have also spread the popularity of virtual bands. In the world of video game virtual bands, the 2013 release of *Grand Theft Auto V* by Rockstar Games features Love Fist, a virtual 1980s hair metal band first seen in 2002’s *Grand Theft Auto: Vice City*. The band’s Scottish characters (Jezz, Willy, Dick, and Percy) are big stars with tumultuous lifestyles, and they enlist the help of characters in the Grand Theft Auto universe to obtain drugs, alcohol, and prostitutes. The excesses of the band’s hard rock lifestyle point to the same themes of male dominance that

³⁸ Information on The Rock-afire Explosion is available in the documentary: *The Rock-afire Explosion*, dir. by Brett Whitcomb (Connell Creations, Inc. and Window Pictures, LLC, 2008) [on digital download].

are seen in human rock bands, and are employed largely for comedic effect.³⁹ Love Fist has a classic 1980s metal sound, and on 9 January 2013, their first EP was released. In the band's constructed folklore, however, this was a re-release of a 1986 EP. Unfortunately for the fans, Love Fist's two 'legendary albums *The Number of the Breast* and *Clear the Custard* are still out of print.'⁴⁰ Again, the collision of technologies in creating and marketing virtual bands is a key element to Love Fist's success.

These, of course, are only a few examples of virtual bands that have had varied success online, in video games, and in popular culture. Many more bands have been groundbreaking in other ways.⁴¹ The bands discussed here have helped to create opportunities and fanbases for their contemporaries and followers. They demonstrate how virtual bands have permeated many areas of popular culture, and how lasting a virtual band can be. Perhaps a culture that never experienced The Chipmunks or never developed the Internet would not be so willing to believe in the autonomy of Gorillaz or to champion anime Vocaloids.

Anime and manga have also had a direct influence on the acceptance of Vocaloids, especially in Japan, where anime and manga are prevalent in everyday life. Chapter 6 will discuss anime and manga in detail, mapping their emergence as art forms to their integration into many aspects of Japanese society. The chapter will also consider how the popularity of

³⁹ More about themes of male dominance in rock can be found in chapter 3.

⁴⁰ 'Love Fist's Original 1986 EP Is Now Available on iTunes,' 11 January 2013 <<http://www.rockstargames.com/newswire/article/48251/love-fists-original-1986-ep-is-now-available-on-itunes.html>> [accessed 15 October 2013].

⁴¹ For an extensive list of 100 virtual bands selected at random, see Appendix A.

anime and manga has grown in the West, and the fact that its reception has acquainted Western fans with a plethora of cute, young characters whose appearance and demeanor paved the way for Vocaloids.

Creating the Voice

The technologies used in the creation of virtual bands are as diverse as the bands' mediums and styles, but the voices used for each character are extremely important. A simple turn of the speed knob on Bagdasarian's tape recorder created three of the most iconic singing voices in Western culture. Yet this is just one example of a variety of voice-modification techniques that have become more user-friendly, realistic, and adaptable in recent decades.

Before delving into an examination of this technology, it is important to first discuss the fact that singing can be viewed as an artificial form, even when there are no technologies applied to it. This is because singing requires the manipulation of the body – for instance, a change in breathing technique, controlling the amount of vibrato used, or using the various cavities of the face for resonance. The techniques used by opera singers to fill an opera house with sound require no amplification, because the singers have been trained to operate their biological mechanism in order to achieve the necessary volume. Likewise, the unmodified voice is capable of accessing different registers, such as Minnie Riperton's virtuosic control of whistle tone. All of these skills require careful work, training, and control, and can therefore be viewed as a (stylised) combination of the natural and the artificial.

The history of technological voice modification and recreation is more than a century old, and includes an assortment of devices. The advent of such technologies reflects scientific trends of the Victorian era, when discoveries in biology were emerging rapidly. The study of sound was also popular, as evidenced by new findings and techniques in hearing health. And the invention of devices like the phonograph and other similar technologies were revolutionary and caused scientific and social waves.⁴² There was a fascination amongst scientists and artists with creating models or machines that imitated functions of the body. Indeed, in many stories (dating back much further than the Victorian era) from a variety of cultures, the desire of the designer was not simply to create a statue or facsimile, but to create an artwork that functioned as a human (for example, the ancient Greek myth of Pygmalion striving to build his perfect woman Galatea out of ivory). Centuries later, the obsession with mechanically recreating human biological function hit a peak due to the scientific revolutions of the 1800s. As Remko Scha points out, ‘The idea that living organisms function according to the laws of physics, and could in principle be simulated by means of mechanical constructions, [became] no longer a vague, alarming suspicion, but a scientific hypothesis.’⁴³ The technological advancements that resulted from such experimental machines saw progress in many fields, from medicine to art, philosophy to biology, which in part explains the popularity of these devices.

⁴² John M. Picker, *Victorian Soundscapes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

⁴³ Remko Scha, ‘Virtual Voices,’ *Mediamatic*, 7:1 (1992) <<http://www.mediamatic.net/8635/en/virtual-voices-1>> [accessed 27 May 2013].

For example, Joseph Faber's 'Euphonia' amazed audiences in the mid-nineteenth century. The Euphonia, first designed in 1840, was a complex machine. Its inventor was a poor German immigrant, but he drew attention for his device. Joseph Henry saw the machine in 1845 before its first exhibition in Philadelphia, and was thrilled by the many possibilities it could offer. He envisioned that the Euphonia could be linked to telegraph machines, and speak the words of the coded messages sent over the wires; he also believed it could be used to broadcast Christian sermons to multiple churches at once using the same technique.⁴⁴ While the Euphonia was never used for these purposes, it did dazzle audiences at various public events.

The machine was comprised of an air chamber built in the shape of the human lungs and throat, reflecting the contemporary fascination with biology (and man's attempts to replicate and control it). Air was passed through the chamber via bellows, and with the use of a connected keyboard, an operator could manipulate the sound to form speech. Of note was the design of the Euphonia, which was attached to a human figure or face, presumably to make the production of sound from thin air less fearsome to the audience, although the choice of subject – either a girl or a 'Turk' – suggests that the artificial sound was associated with the voice of an

⁴⁴ Frank Rives Millikan, 'Joseph Henry and the Telephone,' *Smithsonian Institution Archives* <http://siarchives.si.edu/sites/default/files/pdfs/jhpp/JHP_Joseph_Henry_and_the_Telephone.pdf> [accessed 17 August 2016].

‘Other.’⁴⁵ Jacob Smith notes that the practice of making new technologies look purposefully human was common in the nineteenth century. He quotes James Lastra who claims it helped the audience ‘come to grips with the newness of technologically mediated sensory experience,’⁴⁶ even if the earliest voice modification developments might have been classified as monsters or cyborgs.⁴⁷

Alexander Graham Bell was also a pioneer of voice modification technology, and not only because the telephone was a technology based around the transformation of the voice into electrical pulses. As a boy, he saw a replica of a speech machine designed by Wolfgang von Kempelen at an exhibition, and it sparked an interest for Bell in vocal reproduction. He soon started an experiment with his dog. He trained the dog to sit up on its haunches and make a continuous growling noise; he would then manipulate the dog’s vocal tract by hand, and could coax vowel sounds, diphthongs, and even some consonants from the dog’s throat. In the end, he was able to get his dog to ‘say,’ ‘How are you, Grandmamma?’⁴⁸

A few decades later, several new technologies would focus on manipulating sound and the voice itself, some of them in the same manner as Bell’s experiment with his dog. The voder was developed by Bell Labs in the 1920s–1930s, first impressing audiences at the 1939 World’s Fair in New

⁴⁵ The fact that the face or body of the Euphonia was represented by a girl or by a Turk is significant to this thesis because of gender and ethnicity issues, and will be discussed further in chapter 2.

⁴⁶ Jacob Smith, ‘Tearing Speech to Pieces: Voice technologies of the 1940s,’ *Music, Sound and Moving Image*, 2:2 (2008), pp. 183–206 (p. 186).

⁴⁷ More on cyborg theory and monsterization can be found in chapter 2.

⁴⁸ Scha, ‘Virtual Voices,’ <<http://www.mediamatic.net/8635/en/virtual-voices-1>>.

York and San Francisco.⁴⁹ The machine (named ‘Pedro’ after Brazilian emperor Dom Pedro, a man notoriously shocked upon receiving his first telephone call in 1876)⁵⁰ was designed to simulate speech through the use of an elaborate stenotype keyboard. It took a year of training on the voder to be able to create coherent speech; the job was competitive and most often given to female telephone operators. The voder was controlled by ten white keys which when pressed turn on vowel sounds. One other white key controls volume. Alongside the right hand are three black keys which make the consonants, ‘k’, ‘p’, and ‘t’. Under the left wrist is a key that changes the sound from consonants to vowels. The right foot presses a treadle for vocal inflections. [...] the operator modifies the sounds by pressing more than one key at a time, like the player of an organ.⁵¹

The voder was one of the Fair’s most popular exhibits.

Meanwhile, Bell Labs was hard at work developing the voder’s sister project, the vocoder. Both gennematic devices,⁵² the development of vocoder technology was meant for much more important business than the novelty function of the voder. The vocoder was a voice scrambler, to be used by the military for secret communication. It was a huge machine that took up most of a room, and included a telephone receiver and two record turntables (to create instant vinyl transcripts of the conversations that were immediately melted down once the conversation ended). When someone spoke into the vocoder, his or her voice was broken into pieces, scrambled and transmitted, then reassembled by the vocoder on the other end of the

⁴⁹ Dave Tompkins, *How to Wreck a Nice Beach: The Vocoder from World War II to Hip-Hop* (Illinois: Stop Smiling Media, 2011), pp. 34–37.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 34.

⁵¹ Smith, ‘Tearing Speech to Pieces: Voice technologies of the 1940s,’ p.193.

⁵² For a thorough explanation of the classifications ‘gennematic’ and ‘genetic,’ see chapter 2.

line; the reassembled voice sounded monotone and robotic, but was (usually) discernible.⁵³ The vocoder was used for many important calls during World War II, even between Winston Churchill and Franklin Roosevelt, and was undecipherable if intercepted.⁵⁴

Another voice modifier was simultaneously gaining commercial popularity in the war effort at home: the Sonovox. This device, which vibrated the throat of the user in order to change the sound, was used in radio broadcasts on the homefront and to deployed soldiers. It was, for example, ‘used during the opening of the 1942 baseball season at the Polo Grounds in New York where, as part of a war bond campaign, the crowd heard the sound of a dive bomber growl “Remember Pearl Harbor!” and later, “Slap a Jap.”⁵⁵ It was also the voice added to the three-toned NBC chime: ‘Buy war bonds!’⁵⁶ And after the war, it became the voice of household appliances, animated Disney trains, and the famous Lifebuoy soap foghorn.⁵⁷ The Sonovox falls into the genetic category of voice modification technology because it uses the human body for vocal creation.

The Sonovox and the vocoder would both go on to have long careers in music. The Sonovox remained popular for decades because it has a wide range of possible frequencies, allowing for higher and lower sounds, as opposed to the monotone of the vocoder. The vocoder is still used today for

⁵³ Tompkins, *How to Wreck a Nice Beach*, pp. 42–43.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 60.

⁵⁵ Smith, ‘Tearing Speech to Pieces: Voice technologies of the 1940s,’ p. 190.

⁵⁶ Tompkins, *How to Wreck a Nice Beach*, p. 57.

⁵⁷ Smith, ‘Tearing Speech to Pieces: Voice technologies of the 1940s,’ pp. 192–195.

voice manipulation in funk and hip-hop.⁵⁸ The vocoder has been modified into a much smaller machine, but the technology of breaking the voice into pieces and scrambling it is the same. It is used quite commonly to achieve an electronic vocal sound, perhaps because it is not as physically taxing as some other voice manipulators, such as the Talk Box.

The Talk Box (invented in 1973) includes a tube that goes straight into the mouth.⁵⁹ The tube vibrates violently as the user talks into it, and the sound travels down the tube into a speaker unit where it is amplified as a robotic distortion.⁶⁰ Peter Frampton used the Talk Box on ‘Do You Feel Like We Do’ on *Frampton Comes Alive* (1976),⁶¹ Stevie Wonder used it on *Sesame Street*,⁶² and Roger Troutman was one of its most talented players until his murder in 1999.⁶³ But the vibrations shake the skull so strongly that some players have lost teeth from excessive playing. The tubes themselves become full of germs and bacteria that can cause viruses, chronic stomach pain, and other ailments.⁶⁴

In his article ‘Virtual Voices,’ published in 1992, Scha observes that although voice reproduction technologies are ever-improving and rely less and less on human input, the synthetic voice still sounds inhuman, ‘if only

⁵⁸ Examples of more contemporary uses of vocoder include Above the Law’s ‘Black Superman’ (1994) and Daft Punk’s ‘Robot Rock’ (2005), and can be found in other genres, like Neil Young’s simplistic ode to his son ‘Transformer Man’ (1982), or Imogen Heap’s a capella folk ballad ‘Hide and Seek’ (2005).

⁵⁹ An immediate precursor to the Talk Box, ‘The Bag,’ was produced by Kustom Amplification in 1969. Using similar principles to the Talk Box, ‘The Bag’ could be slung over the shoulder and carried by the performer. See <<https://www.kustom.com/about-us>> [accessed 9 August 2016].

⁶⁰ Tompkins, *How to Wreck a Nice Beach*, pp. 131–134.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 132.

⁶² Ibid., pp. 135–136.

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 136–143.

⁶⁴ Ibid., pp. 139–141.

because of its uniformity.⁶⁵ To him, there was an abstraction to the simulated voice that meant no one could mistake it for human speech. Roland Barthes's theories in 'The Grain of the Voice' (1972) predate Scha, but are similar in qualifying the real human voice as unique. In his essay, Barthes attempts to dissect the 'grain' of the human voice, 'the very precise space (genre) of *the encounter between a language and a voice*'.⁶⁶ He describes the singing voice of a Russian church bass as follows:

something is there, manifest and stubborn, [...] beyond (or before) the meaning of the words, their form (the litany), the melisma, and even the style of execution: something which is directly the cantor's body, brought to your ears in one and the same movement from deep down in the cavities, the muscles, the membranes, the cartilages, and from deep down in the Slavonic language, as though a single skin lined the inner flesh of the performer and the music he sings.⁶⁷

Much has changed since both Barthes and Scha wrote the essays mentioned here; fabricated voices are more prevalent in today's society, with creations like Apple's Siri and Amazon's Alexa assisting users with everyday tasks. But there is still some truth to Barthes's and Scha's ideas. Current methods of speech simulation are interactive and innovative, and yet the sounds emitted are recognisable as only simulated rather than human. The Uncanny Valley is still real within the realm of voice recreation technology.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Scha, 'Virtual Voices' <<http://www.mediamatic.net/8635/en/virtual-voices-1>>.

⁶⁶ Roland Barthes, 'The Grain of the Voice,' in *Image Music Text* (London: Fontana Press, 1977), pp. 179–189 (p. 181). Original emphasis.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 181–182.

⁶⁸ Masahiro Mori, 'The Uncanny Valley,' *Energy*, 7:4 (1970), pp. 33–35. Mori coined this term to explain the psychological unease that humans feel when they are presented with an artificial intelligence that too closely resembles a real person. There must be some element of difference that allows us to distinguish humans from fabrications. See also Conner, 'Hatsune Miku, 2.0Pac, and Beyond,' p. 130.

But with rapid advancements and new markets for speech synthesis emerging (music, mobile technology, speech devices for the impaired, and video games), it may not be long before we can no longer recognise when we are hearing a human voice or a manufactured one.

All of the advancements mentioned above have been precursors to the most notorious form of voice modification: AutoTune. Much as it is criticised by some or hailed as a saviour by others, AutoTune is an important invention that has greatly influenced pop, R&B, hip-hop, and dance music genres. Dr. Harold ‘Andy’ Hildebrand, the man who invented AutoTune, has been responsible for several groundbreaking musical inventions. After leaving a job researching geophysical science in 1989, Hildebrand attended Rice University in Texas to obtain a degree in music. During his studies there, he perfected DSP (digital signal processing) technology to allow for seamless looping in musical tracks with multiple instruments. He also created a microphone modifier that could make any good quality microphone reproduce the effects of many other microphone types. But it was the invention of AutoTune in 1997 that would have the biggest impact on popular music.

First built as a plug-in, the technology allowed for single lines of singing or solo instrumentation to be corrected digitally. Within two years, Hildebrand’s company Antares developed a rack-mount, the ATR-1, which was a hardware version of AutoTune that allowed for manual control of the

sound through a series of knobs.⁶⁹ The music industry began to use the technology, secretly at first, to correct sharpness or flatness in vocalists' studio performances. AutoTune was brought into the public eye, however, with Cher's 1998 single 'Believe,' which used the effect to accent certain words.⁷⁰ The song was a massive hit, spending four weeks at No. 1 on Billboard's Hot 100,⁷¹ and the unmistakable sound of AutoTune became known as the 'Cher Effect.'⁷² Soon other artists adopted the robotic sound, and one even made it his staple: T-Pain is now synonymous with AutoTune; his work is heavily laden with it. In 2008, Kanye West released an album, *808s and Heartbreak*, which features AutoTune on every track.

But not every famous name in R&B and hip-hop has embraced AutoTune. Jay-Z has taken a public stance against it. In 2009, he released 'D.O.A. (Death of Auto-Tune [*sic*]),'⁷³ a track which mocks poor singing and calls on his fellow artists to give up the software and return to a more pure sound: 'Y'all n***** singing too much / Get back to rap, you T-Pain-in' too much.'⁷⁴ The ethics of AutoTune have also been called into question as competitive singing television shows like Britain's *The X-Factor* have openly

⁶⁹ 'A Brief History of Antares' <<http://www.antarestech.com/about/history.shtml>> [accessed 17 October 2013].

⁷⁰ 'The History of Auto-Tune,' 2010 <<http://www.independentmusicawards.com/ima/2010/autotune/>> [accessed 17 October 2013].

⁷¹ Keith Caulfield, 'Cher's 20 Biggest Billboard Hits,' 20 May 2014 <<http://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/chart-beat/1563030/chers-biggest-billboard-hits>> [accessed 31 May 2014].

⁷² 'The History of Auto-Tune' <<http://www.independentmusicawards.com/ima/2010/autotune/>>.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Jay Z, 'D.O.A. (Death of Auto-Tune),' *The Blueprint 3*, Digital download, Roc Nation and Atlantic Records, 4690355001348 (2009).

admitted using the technology to alter contestants' voices.⁷⁵ *The X-Factor* scandal led other singing reality shows, like *American Idol*, to defend themselves in public forums.⁷⁶

Reproducing the Body

When creating a virtual band, one cannot stop at just the voice. The voices might sustain the band initially, but demands to reproduce the bodies of the virtual characters will soon follow from record companies or fans who wish to engage with the characters in new ways. In recent years, advancements have been made that allow designers to recreate their characters in increasingly realistic ways. In 2002, San Diego's County Fair produced the first performance of 'Elvis Presley in Concert,'⁷⁷ a groundbreaking performance featuring living members of Elvis's former band and a video-generated King.⁷⁸ The show featured huge video screens playing footage of Elvis performing; the images selected were carefully edited with live footage of the band playing on stage, which created a similar effect to the use of jumbotrons at many large concerts – the important difference being that in

⁷⁵ 'X-Factor admits tweaking vocals,' BBC, 23 August 2010 <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-11056050>> [accessed 17 October 2013].

⁷⁶ Gil Kaufman, "'American Idol': We Have Never Used Auto-Tune," 27 August 2010 <<http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1646637/americana-idol-we-have-never-used-auto-tune.jhtml>> [accessed 17 October 2013].

⁷⁷ 'Elvis Presley On Stage' <http://www.elvis.com/events/concert_tours/tour_schedule.aspx> [accessed 29 October 2013].

⁷⁸ George Varga, 'Dead rappers' hologram resurrections grow,' *San Diego Union-Tribune* (online), 15 May 2013 <<http://www.utsandiego.com/news/2013/May/15/dead-rappers-hologram-resurrections/>> [accessed 29 October 2013].

this case, the star was not present.⁷⁹ The show at the Fair was incredibly popular, and demand soon led to a tour that lasted several years.

'Elvis Presley in Concert' was one of the first instances of utilising technology to produce a 'live' performance of a performer who is not there, whether deceased or fictitious. The idea has been developed to include another technology, one that gives an even greater feeling of manifestation to a star who is not present: holograms. The music industry has begun to use holograms in fascinating ways, sometimes simultaneously raising ethical dilemmas. For if the ability to reproduce anything (or anyone) and make it appear in 3D before an audience exists, does that mean that this ability should be exercised?

One of the first groundbreaking uses of hologram for a musical performance was Gorillaz' performance of their hit single 'Feel Good Inc.' at the 2005 European Music Awards (EMAs) in Lisbon. The band appeared on stage as holograms. The effect was created using a technology developed by Passion Pictures (a production company that had previously worked on Gorillaz music videos and promotional materials).⁸⁰ The holograms were based on an old parlour trick called 'Pepper's Ghost,'⁸¹ an illusion invented by John Henry Pepper in the late 1800s, used to make human performers look ghostlike on stage. The effect plays on the fact that any sheet of glass

⁷⁹ Jumbotrons are large screens that show simultaneous video of the performance during concerts. Often, this will include close-ups of the performers, as well as full-stage shots. Jumbotrons are used to give attendees at the back of the venue a more intimate experience, but they create an interesting dilemma, as many concert-goers will watch the jumbotrons more than watching the performers themselves.

⁸⁰ <www.passion-pictures.com> [accessed 29 October 2013].

⁸¹ Browne and Gorillaz, *Rise of the Ogre*, p. 260.

can act as a mirror or a window, depending on how the light hits it. If an object or person is a certain distance from a pane of glass set at 45 degrees from the observer, and a light is shone on the glass, the reflection will appear as a ghostly apparition.⁸²

Passion Pictures used this basic visual trick to create Gorillaz' holograms by shining light from the top front of the stage onto a mirror at the bottom of the performance space; the reflection from the mirror was then reflected again onto huge, thin screens - so thin they were barely discernable to the live audience. The result was the four Gorillaz characters appearing to move in 3D space. Gorillaz' performance with human collaborators De La Soul at the EMAs was broadcast live around the world; it was a never-before attempted fusion of music and technology, a big-budget, high-concept, quasi-holographic extravaganza of light and sound that would bring the Gorillaz show to their audience in glorious Technicolor, with the band rendered onstage in three eye-popping dimensions.⁸³

The band won Best Group that night.⁸⁴

Gorillaz would use the same effect in a modified performance at the 2006 Grammy Awards just a few months later. This time, they performed with Madonna, whose single 'Hung Up' was looped into the ending of 'Feel Good Inc.' The creative team from Passion decided they would need to create a hologram Madonna so that she could interact seamlessly with the

⁸² 'The Pepper's ghost illusion,' BBC <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningzone/clips/the-peppers-ghost-illusion/250.html>> [accessed 24 October 2013].

⁸³ Browne and Gorillaz, *Rise of the Ogre*, p. 260.

⁸⁴ In Jamie Hewlett's acceptance speech, he pointed out, 'Best Group - and we don't even exist.' Browne and Gorillaz, *Rise of the Ogre*, p. 260.

hologram Gorillaz characters. Cara Speller, Gorillaz' visual effects producer, worked with Arri, a camera manufacturing company, to create a camera 'that could shoot in high-definition at 60 frames per second, and give us enough information to be able to grade her to look like the band and to keep the movement as realistic as possible.⁸⁵ The effect was stunningly real; Speller recalls,

for me, the best moment was when we were in rehearsals at the Staples Centre [...] the day before the show. It was the middle of the day and they started playing the footage, so Madonna came up on our stage and started walking across, and someone paused the playback and Madonna just froze halfway. Everyone around us, their jaws just hit the floor. They actually thought that she was on stage.⁸⁶

During the Grammys performance, the audience responded to the hologram Madonna as if she were real, cheering for her 3D image 'rising' out of the stage floor as if they were seeing the actual Madonna for the first time that night. The performance was a huge success. According to Gorillaz' biography, 'The rules of live performance were torn up, set on fire, stamped on and ground to dust under the heel of Murdoc's well-worn boot.'⁸⁷

The performance was indeed revolutionary, and the technology was soon seen elsewhere. In 2012, a hologram of Tupac Shakur appeared on stage with Snoop Dogg at the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival (Coachella). Shakur was shot and killed in 1996, ending an important rap career and feeding the East Coast/West Coast rap rivalry. His controversial

⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 268.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 268.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 270.

life and music have become immortalised by fans who continue to talk about him, filmmakers who produce documentaries about him, and record labels who re-release his work; he appeared on the Forbes Top-Earning Dead Celebrities list until 2007.⁸⁸ The same production company who had engineered Gorillaz' performance at the Grammys created a hologram Tupac for Coachella. A representative of the company was not allowed to comment on whether all of the vocals used for the performance were Tupac's, but he did say 'that [the] company has the ability to recreate long-dead figures and visually recreate them in the studio.'⁸⁹

The trend of hologram rappers has continued, with holograms of N.W.A.'s Eazy-E performing with Bone Thugs-N-Harmony,⁹⁰ and Ol' Dirty Bastard (O.D.B) performing with the Wu-Tang Clan on 2013's Rock the Bells festival tour.⁹¹ Eazy-E died of AIDS in 1995; O.D.B. died of a drug overdose in 2004. Both artists were engineered as holograms to give performances of their hit songs with still-living hip-hop groups.

Other deceased stars have been resurrected as holograms, or their holograms are currently in development. A Michael Jackson hologram appears in *ONE*, a Las Vegas collaboration between Cirque du Soleil and

⁸⁸ Lea Goldman and David M. Ewalt, eds., 'Top Earning Dead Celebrities,' *Forbes* (online), 29 October 2007 <http://www.forbes.com/2007/10/29/dead-celebrity-earning-biz-media-deadcelebs07_cz_lg_1029celeb_land.html> [accessed 24 October 2013].

⁸⁹ Gil Kaufman, 'Exclusive: Tupac Coachella Hologram Source Explains How Rapper Resurrected,' 26 April 2012 <<http://www.mtv.com/news/articles/1683173/tupac-hologram-coachella.jhtml>> [accessed 24 October 2013].

⁹⁰ Latifah Muhammed, 'Rock The Bells 2013: Eazy-E's Hologram Takes Over Day 1,' 8 September 2013 <<http://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/the-juice/5687228/rock-the-bells-2013-eazy-es-hologram-takes-over-day-1>> [accessed 29 October 2013].

⁹¹ Evan Minsker and Corban Goble, 'Watch: Ol' Dirty Bastard Hologram Performs with Wu-Tang Clan at Rock the Bells,' *Pitchfork* (online), 9 September 2013 <<http://pitchfork.com/news/52189-watch-ol-dirty-bastard-hologram-performs-with-wu-tang-clan-at-rock-the-bells/>> [accessed 29 October 2013].

Jackson's estate, which opened in May 2013. The hologram in the show performs 'Man in the Mirror' with a troupe of back-up dancers.⁹² A hologram version of Michael Jackson received even more exposure during a televised performance of 'Slave to the Rhythm' at the May 2014 Billboard Music Awards (BBMAs). The song is a track from Jackson's second posthumous album *Xscape*, which was released just five days before the BBMAs and debuted at No. 1 in the UK charts. At the BBMAs, the hologram danced with, around, and in between a troupe of both hologram and live dancers. The hologram was based on a young Michael Jackson, looking much like the singer did around the time of the release of *Bad* (1987). The performance received a standing ovation from the audience, and was deemed 'Cool' by an online poll on Billboard's website.⁹³

As mentioned before, in the case of resurrecting deceased performers, ethical questions arise. For example, who makes the decision to recreate the image and performances of musicians who have passed away? In 2014, Alki David, the CEO of a company called Hologram USA, found himself in verbal conflict with Mitch Winehouse (Amy Winehouse's father and curator of her estate) when David began publicly hinting at plans for a world

⁹² Zack O'Malley Greenburg, 'Michael Jackson Returns To The Stage In Vegas -- As A Hologram,' *Forbes* (online), 24 May 2013 <<http://www.forbes.com/sites/zackomalleygreenburg/2013/05/24/michael-jacksons-hologram-rocks-las-vegas-area/>> [accessed 29 October 2013].

⁹³ Billboard's website hosted a poll after the performance to gauge wider reactions to the hologram. The question posed was 'BBMAs' Michael Jackson Hologram: What Do You Think?' Three multiple-choice responses were available: 'Cool' (52.81% or 2,116 votes); 'Creepy' (15.62% or 626 votes); 'Cool and Creepy' (31.57% or 1,265 votes) shortly after midday on 21 May 2014. Source: Jessica Letkemann, 'Michael Jackson Hologram at Billboard Music Awards: What Do You Think? (Poll),' 19 May 2014 <<http://www.billboard.com/articles/events/bbma-2014/6092135/michael-jackson-hologram-billboard-music-awards-2014-opinion-poll-vote>> [accessed 21 May 2014].

tour of a Winehouse hologram. Mitch Winehouse denied the rumour, and he and David had a short but public fight on Twitter and in the news media.⁹⁴ David quickly moved on to plans for holograms of other deceased celebrities, including Whitney Houston; a hologram tour featuring Houston was announced in 2015, with full support from Whitney's sister and president of her estate, Pat Houston.⁹⁵

In these and other instances, the owners of the artist's estate or the record label that owns the artist's catalogue have been heavily involved in the creation of the hologram performances. But does owning an artist's work also include the right to recreate the artist's persona on stage? In strictest legal terms, it does, but should it? There is a great deal of agency present in the work and the images of deceased artists, as will be discussed in chapter 2, and the earning potential and cultural capital of that agency can be harnessed or exploited. How do we know the difference?

When discussing virtual bands, these particular ethical questions do not come in to play, but other ethical questions do arise. Holograms serve the helpful purpose of making fictitious characters seem even more real. Holograms place virtual performers in three-dimensional space, making them appear tangible. The holograms can interact with one another and with live performers in unprecedented ways, bringing new perspectives to old questions about authenticity in popular music. Pair these facts with the

⁹⁴ Gundersen, Edna, 'Amy Winehouse Touring as a Hologram? No No No,' *USA Today* (online), 1 April 2014 <<http://www.usatoday.com/story/life/music/2014/04/01/amy-winehouse-hologram-tour-scrapped/7174517/>> [accessed 25 January 2016].

⁹⁵ Brittany Spanos, 'Whitney Houston Hologram to Tour World in 2016,' *Rolling Stone* (online), 11 September 2015 <<http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/whitney-houston-hologram-to-tour-world-in-2016-20150911>> [accessed 25 January 2016].

careful reiteration of popular music's common ethnic and gender tropes in the construction of certain virtual band characters, and they become powerful commercial and cultural tools. No wonder fans can easily reconcile the animated characters to the music – as will be discussed in chapters 4 and 7; they have seen Gorillaz' Murdoc dance with Madonna, and Vocaloid Hatsune Miku front a band of human musicians on her arena tour in Japan.

Conclusion

The history of virtual bands is more layered than perhaps at first anticipated. The complicated nature of the medium is illustrated by attempts to categorise such bands. Any proposed categories necessarily become fluid, much like genres of popular music are often expanded, redefined, or manipulated in order to suit the characteristics of some music. The sheer number of virtual bands in the past sixty years also reflects their complexity, and the staying power of many virtual bands discussed in this chapter cannot be denied. Not only did the widespread 'Saturday morning cartoon' culture of the 1960s–1990s help to breed the acceptance and prevalence of character culture, but nostalgia, too, has played an important role in maintaining momentum for virtual bands in popular culture. When one considers, then, that virtual band creators have embraced voice- and body-recreation technologies to make their characters even more appealing and to expand their reach further, it should come as no surprise that virtual bands have a firm foothold in the Western popular imagination.

The presence of varied developments in technology and popular culture cannot go unexamined if we are to gain a greater understanding of the virtual band phenomenon. A theoretical framework must be constructed in order to shed light on the problematic aspects of virtual band creation and fandom. The next chapter will attempt to create such a framework, examining work by theorists in several fields, endeavouring to restructure their theories to aid discussion of virtual bands. This framework will then be honed and focussed in chapter 3 on specific issues related to ethnic and gender tropes.

Chapter 2

'Almost Unreal:' Towards a Theoretical Framework for Virtual Bands

This chapter is concerned with mapping and analysing the theoretical areas that are relevant to a study of virtual bands and Vocaloid. It charts both established and more recent theoretical perspectives on virtuality, and assesses the value and viability of these theories in order to determine which theoretical approaches will be most effective when exploring the case studies in the second part of this thesis. This chapter aims to develop a methodological framework for approaching virtual bands, introducing ideas that are developed further in later chapters in relation to questions of identity, gender, and ethnicity.

Scholarship has tended to dance around the periphery of the virtual band, although, as discussed in the Introduction, more attention has been given to theorising and analysing these bands in recent years. In this work and in other discourse on art and performance, dissections of technology and its implications are prevalent; in some cases, theorists take issue with the ethics and consequences of technology. Topics like the intermundane, monsterization, cyborg theory, liveness, authenticity, simulation, surrealism, and virtual reality are just a few of the areas that coincide with an understanding of virtual bands, raising important questions about the development and acceptance of such groups. Likewise, a multitude of concepts from media, film, television, and music video studies offer potentially useful tools to assist a close analysis of virtual bands.

The overview that follows is important for a few reasons. First, it establishes a theoretical context for approaching a topic that might otherwise be dismissed as unimportant or irrelevant. Virtual bands are complex constructions, and, I will argue, understanding how they function is relevant to cultural and critical theory more broadly. Second, this chapter will serve to position virtual bands in the context of technological discourse in the last thirty to forty years. It will also begin to explore ways in which choice theories are applicable to virtual bands and Vocaloid.

Defining Reality and Virtual Reality

In his book *Cyberculture* (2001), Pierre Levy suggests that the word ‘virtual’ has multiple meanings. The term is often used in everyday vernacular to signify unreality, because ‘reality’ must denote something tangible. If this were true, however, ‘virtual reality’ would be a contradictory, nonsensical term. Therefore, from a philosophical standpoint, Levy argues, ‘the virtual *is that which exists potentially rather than actually*. [...] The virtual stands in opposition not to the real but to the actual, virtuality and actuality being nothing more than two different modes of reality.¹

Furthermore, Levy states that, ‘Any entity is virtual if it is “deterritorialized,” capable of engendering several concrete manifestations at different times and places, without being attached to any particular place or

¹ Pierre Levy, *Cyberculture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), p. 29. Original emphasis. Importantly, this definition suggests that Levy does not require ‘virtual reality’ to be linked to any mode of technology.

time.² This assertion helps to explain the prevalence and popularity of the technologies discussed in chapter 1. The recreation of the human voice (using machines, plug-ins, or software), or the technology used to create a hologram are deterritorialized, appearing in multiple contexts and for multiple purposes since their invention. These technologies maintain flexibility in this way, creating alternate manifestations of ‘reality,’ and are useful tools for human creativity, expression, and exploration.

Levy also theorises that there are two over-arching categories of virtual realities: those that are self-contained, universes unto themselves, where the participant cannot affect the world; and those that are open to manipulation by the participant, and which are in theory, infinitely changeable.³ Elements of both of these categories are present in virtual bands and in the technologies that surround them, as will be discussed thoroughly in the following section.

One quality of reality, in whatever form, is a conscious experience of events in ‘real’ time, which some have described as the condition of ‘liveness.’ From the perspective of consciousness studies, one could argue there are two kinds of liveness: one involving the perceiver’s experience of any media in any context, the other involving the act of performance. As with virtual reality, liveness is a term that must constantly be reexamined as technology advances and our perception of what is ‘live’ changes. In his book *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (1999), Philip

² Ibid., p. 29.

³ Gabriella Giannachi, *Virtual Theatres: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 4.

Auslander focusses his attention on the act of performance, arguing that in our modern cultural climate, live performance cannot be divorced from media or the televisual.

Auslander asserts that television was initially influenced by theatrical performance, with live broadcasts set in a single location, and the actors treating the cameras like the theatrical fourth wall. However, the style of television and the means of creating programming quickly changed in the mid-1950s as technology advanced to allow for reruns and more cinematic filming practices in television. Studios opted to film certain shows without studio audiences and with a single-camera format; broadcasting drama or comedies live became ever more uncommon. The popularity of other types of live performance (such as theatre, live music, and so on) also dipped. For many audience members, the convenience of a night in front of the television seemed to outweigh the appeal of a night out at the theatre.⁴ In response, live performance increasingly incorporated mediatized elements into live events. These elements were meant to appeal to an increasingly televisual audience, who were transcending the familiarity previously achieved by records and radio and demanding a new kind of intimacy.

For advocates of theatre and other similar types of performance, one of the main arguments for live performance is the intimacy it provides: a group of strangers gathers together to experience an event that will never be experienced in exactly the same way again. However, Auslander contends

⁴ Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 13–22.

that the standards of intimacy that the audience seeks have changed significantly in the televisual era. Intimacy is now equated to immediacy and proximity, engaging the visual and the audial senses; the audience demands to be brought as close to the subject matter as possible, just like at home in front of their television sets. Auslander suggests this is the reason for the introduction of giant video screens to sporting events and popular music concerts, and the reason why the majority of the audience will watch the screens rather than the players on the field or the performers on stage.⁵

Auslander has updated his own work (as recently as 2008), and many other scholars have used his theories as a departure point to discuss liveness. For example, Paul Sanden's *Liveness in Modern Music* (2013) provides commentary on the continued presence of the term 'liveness' in popular culture, many years after the emergence of the concept and despite its ontological problems (and often, its ontological vagueness or inappropriateness).⁶ Sanden argues that the term faces the same problems as it did when Auslander first wrote about it in 1999 because there is still no clear line to draw between that which is live and that which is not-live.⁷ In fact, the proliferation of new technologies continues to blur the term. Today's common use of sampling in many genres of popular music, as well as the ease of watching 'live' performances on YouTube long after they happened

⁵ Ibid., pp. 24–25.

⁶ Paul Sanden, *Liveness in Modern Music: Musicians, Technology, and the Perception of Performance* (London: Routledge, 2013).

⁷ Ibid., p. 6.

are only two examples of the ways that ‘liveness’ falls into uncertain descriptive territory.

Similarly, the rise in ownership and usage of mobile phones in recent years has complicated the concept of ‘liveness.’ Many people record a performance onto their phones and therefore watch most of the performance through the phone screen, with the ability to zoom in and out when they like. The recording then gives them the opportunity to relive the performance for themselves or to gain cultural capital by playing it for friends.⁸ This trend has caused controversy amongst popular music artists, with some high-profile stars banning the use of camera phones at their shows. Some artists claim the use of a mobile phone to record is distracting to other fans at the performance, while other artists might be more concerned with unflattering images or financial losses due to bootlegged material.⁹

Importantly, Auslander points out that the idea of live performance is a relatively new concept, having developed only in the years since recording technologies (which enable us to replay or reproduce a performance) required us to specify our entertainment as ‘live’ or otherwise. This idea should colour our historical and ontological methods for investigating ‘live’

⁸ For more on cultural capital, see chapter 7.

⁹ Les Shu, ‘7 Musicians Who Want You To Put Away The Camera (Or They’ll Do It For You),’ *Digital Trends*, 29 August 2013 <<http://www.digitaltrends.com/photography/7-musicians-who-would-like-you-to-put-away-the-camera-or-else-theyll-do-it-for-you/>> [accessed 23 February 2014].

Michael Nelson, ‘She & Him Are The Latest Act To Ban Camera Phones Via Patronizing Signage,’ *Stereogum*, 8 July 2013 <<http://www.stereogum.com/1400701/she-him-are-the-latest-act-to-ban-camera-phones-via-patronizing-signage/news/>> [accessed 23 February 2014].

Dave Lee, ‘Should music fans stop filming gigs on their smartphones?,’ *BBC*, 12 April 2013 <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-22113326>> [accessed 23 February 2014].

performances of virtual bands. What do we mean by ‘live’ in this context?¹⁰ Is ‘live’ ever truly applicable to a virtual band? Certainly it is applicable when the performance includes a mixture of media elements and living performers, such as the Elvis concerts or Tupac’s appearance at Coachella (both described in chapter 1). It seems that a great deal of virtual performances currently have a component of the living included – from accompanying band members to guest artists – but the trend could easily shift to solely virtual performers.

Auslander also raises interesting points about the relation of liveness to authenticity. Of course, authenticity varies by musical genre. In progressive rock, improvised solos and jamming are key to establishing authenticity. The audience at a live performance demands new material, indicative of the level of musicianship of the band. To recreate perfectly the instrumental solos from a studio album on the stage would never do. However, in pop music, performance trends indicate that audiences want the familiarity of the music video to be transferred into the experience of the live event. Pop concerts often feature recreations (achieved through costuming, choreography, and sets) of music videos, the televisual expression of authenticity transferred to the stage.¹¹ In pop music performance, the live performance is often authenticated by the videos. As publicity materials are released for new albums, music videos most often precede the live tour, and

¹⁰ Auslander, *Liveness*, pp. 51–52.

¹¹ Auslander, *Liveness*, p. 35.

large sections of the show produced for the tour will directly reference the videos.

The point is that authenticity is not black and white, and the artists and fanbases for each genre determine their own standards of authenticity. In Auslander's example, the Milli Vanilli scandal of the early 1990s was not a scandal to their fans (though the music industry and journalists were shocked and subsequently raised questions about the ideology of authenticity).¹² Milli Vanilli was a pop group, not a rock group, and were therefore held to different standards by their fans, who were much more interested in the group's image and dancing.¹³

'Live' performances are therefore one of the most important means that a virtual band can use to establish authenticity. But do these performances align with genre expectations – for example, when investigating a virtual rock band, are there differences in the live performance from the album? And how is the 'live' illusion created? It is important to note that holograms created for 'live' virtual band and Vocaloid performances have varying degrees of realism and surrealism; the holograms meet

¹² In February 1990, Milli Vanilli won the Grammy for Best New Artist after the success of their first album *All Or Nothing* (1988). Their single 'Girl You Know It's True' spent 26 weeks on the Billboard Hot 100 list, peaking at number 2. However, their Grammy was officially rescinded in November 1990 because it was discovered that the two frontmen of the group, Robert Pilatus and Fabrice Morvan, did not do any of the singing on the album. The two had been touring for months, lipsynching at each performance. The live lipsynching was not problematic to the music industry, but the lack of original singing on the recording was considered scandalous. The Recording Academy, *32nd Annual GRAMMY Awards* <www.grammy.com/awards/32nd-annual-grammy-awards> [accessed 20 February 2014]. Billboard, *Milli Vanilli Chart History* <www.billboard.com/artist/311298/milli-vanilli/chart> [accessed 20 February 2014].

Chuck Philips, 'Milli Vanilli's Grammy Rescinded by Academy,' *Los Angeles Times* (online), 20 November 1990 <articles.latimes.com/1990-11-20/news/mn-4948_1_milli-vanilli> [accessed 20 February 2014].

¹³ Auslander, *Liveness*, pp. 85–86.

audience expectations (they move realistically in 3D space), while simultaneously surprising or shocking fans (the characters are clearly animated, and in the case of Gorillaz or Vocaloid, are not meant to be mistaken for humans on stage).

Arguably, virtual bands, whether experienced ‘live’ on stage or through other media, represent a form of heightened realism, or surrealism. In *An Eye for Music*, John Richardson discusses theories of surrealism and relates them to various types of music.¹⁴ His opening two chapters present six possible definitions of surrealism: semiotic and linguistic; psychoanalytic and affective; stylistic; aesthetic; ontological and perceptive; and institutional.¹⁵ His definition of ‘neosurrealism’ appears in chapter 3, at first positioned as an historical movement (anything coming after surrealism), then later described as surrealism that is self-aware, self-critical, and interested in more than just shock value.¹⁶ Richardson admits that to define such terms as surrealism and neosurrealism is inherently problematic, and potentially disingenuous to the movements themselves, as both are populated with artists who do not hold fast to rules, guidelines, or structures.

¹⁴ John Richardson, *An Eye for Music: Popular Music and the Audiovisual Surreal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹⁵ Semiotic/linguistic: the earliest meaning of surrealism as assigned by its founders, especially with regard to representation of the real. Psychoanalytic/affective: relates to the Freudian unconscious or the psychological concept of the uncanny. Stylistic: defined by its means of production. Aesthetic: achieved by taking an object from its common setting and placing it in a new context. Ontological/perceptive: ‘juxtapositions’ of surrealism are all around us, but ‘cultural conditioning has made [them] invisible to us.’ Institutional: recognising that the approval or acceptance of established surrealist groups stands as an authoritative definition of what is or is not surreal. Richardson, *An Eye for Music*, pp. 36–46.

¹⁶ Ibid., pp. 54–58.

Richardson's aesthetic definition of surrealism (the removal of an object from its normal setting and its placement in a new setting) is exemplified by the removal of a rock band from the stage and their placement into a fictionalised cartoon or other virtual context, such as *The Beatles* cartoon series discussed in chapter 1. It is also demonstrated by a human performer appearing on stage with fictitious collaborators, as in Madonna and Gorillaz' hologram performance at the 2006 Grammy Awards, and Rock-afire's appearance with Cee Lo Green in his 2013 Las Vegas show.¹⁷ Likewise, the heightening of reality is a commonly recognised trait of surrealism and virtual bands. When character designs feature exaggerations of human traits, those characters exist in a flexible realm. We can therefore accept them undertaking human tasks, like attending band rehearsal, which makes them accessible to us. We can also accept that they are non-human and possess abilities we do not, like Russel's ability to channel dead rappers for performances on early Gorillaz tracks.¹⁸

Some of the precepts of surrealism can be related back to analysis of virtual reality. From the theatre to video games to the art museum, alternate realities are formed by artists with specific visions, and these artists employ

¹⁷ The band's animatronic figures appeared in the finale ('F*** You') of Green's seven-week engagement at Las Vegas's Planet Hollywood. According to Aaron Fletcher, original creator of the band's figures and key player in revitalising them to sing modern songs on YouTube, 'Cee Lo grew up having his childhood birthday parties at Showbiz Pizza Place in Atlanta [...] and now, he's bringing his childhood first live band, musical influence with him!' Bohus Blahut, 'Cee Lo Green + Rock-afire Explosion Live in Las Vegas,' *Retro Thing*, 22 February 2013 <<http://www.retrothing.com/2013/02/cee-lo-green-rock-afire-explosion-live-in-vegas.html>> [accessed 5 June 2013].

¹⁸ Russel's gift of channeling the dead is even more interesting with examined through the lens of the intermundane. The skill lends Russel agency as a character, while he simultaneously crafts agency for the dead rappers with whom he communicates. See chapter 4.

technology in ever-changing ways to help immerse the viewer in a world that (like the surrealist vision) is often meant to be a heightening or exaggeration of the real, rather than a completely new reality. These virtual realities can be postmodern in the extreme, utilising elements of pastiche, and encouraging unique means and methods of fan participation. For many virtual-reality artists and creators, the goal is for participants to become immersed in – and lose themselves completely to – the new environment. Many also hope that participants will think back and engage with their memory of the virtual world long after they have returned to reality.¹⁹

Applying Theories of ‘Realness’ to Virtual Bands

Using the example of Levy’s theory that virtual universes can either be self-contained or open to manipulation by the participant, the dichotomous nature of virtual bands becomes obvious. Many virtual bands exist in universes that are specifically constructed for them, or in alternate realities that are tailored to them, as evidenced by the elaborate back stories that the bands possess (examples of bands with detailed folklore discussed elsewhere in this thesis include Dethklok, Josie and the Pussycats, and Gorillaz). Within the context of these universes, fans have little control or means of change, though they are often welcomed to interact within the parameters of that universe.

In one example, the official Gorillaz website long featured the interactive worlds of Kong Studios and the Plastic Beach, where the band lived and recorded at various points in their history; the virtual studios were

¹⁹ Several case studies that support this idea can be found in Giannachi, *Virtual Theatres*.

ever expanding with new rooms and new features.²⁰ In both of these virtual landscapes, fans could explore and play games, experiencing the everyday lives of the Gorillaz characters. The environs were simply for investigating and fans could not change them. Some rooms could be minimally altered by fans, who could solve puzzles to open doors, pick up important objects, or interact with characters. Fans could also create avatars in the style of Gorillaz, though these avatars were not visible when navigating through Kong or the Plastic Beach.²¹

But there are exceptions that align more closely with the other category of virtual worlds conceptualised by Levy, where participants can exert a striking degree of control within the virtual environment. For example, digital models of Vocaloid characters can be downloaded by fans and used to create elaborate music videos, giving fans the opportunity to manipulate the universe. Using these models, fans maintain complete control over the movement and environment of the Vocaloid (see chapter 6 for more on this.) The possibilities for creating output in this manner are endless, since any number of fans can create as many music videos as they please. The technology used for such models is also constantly updated and improved, making it, as Levy suggests, infinitely changeable.

Whether in a universe that they can control or one that they cannot, avid fans immerse themselves in researching the folklore and backstories of

²⁰ More about these incarnations of the Gorillaz website will be covered in chapter 4.

²¹ A great deal of virtual reality games and environments allow the participant to see parts of their avatar, usually their hands in the foreground of the screen, during exploration and game play. The virtual worlds of Gorillaz have never included such features.

bands whose members are not real; their interactions (especially online interactions) document a style of engagement with the virtual bands that mirrors fan engagement with human performers. In many cases, virtual bands garner strong, dedicated fanbases through this engagement, and evidence – discussed in chapters 4 and 7 – suggests that the fans approach the band's fabricated characters as real musicians and songwriters.

Likewise, the human artists who have created virtual band characters have carefully constructed the 'live' representations and performances of the fictitious entities. The creators dedicate time and money to making the interaction between virtual band characters and fans as realistic as possible. This level of sought-after realism is specific to current fan requirements.

Contemporary fans have certain expectations for live performance; these expectations have been moulded through cultural trends of the past several decades. Advancements in technology allow for current virtual band performances to reach levels of 'hyperrealism,' a term that Richardson explains '[is] used in reference to the intensified experiences afforded by cinema and computer-generated virtual reality.'²² In other words, the technological aspects of a virtual band performance allow realism to be heightened and extended into a new type of realism.

Indeed, the technological advancements available for use in performance events have made a large contribution to the realism of virtual bands. The rise of such bands has largely occurred within the span of the last sixty years, the same era as the rise of television and Auslander's

²² Richardson, *An Eye for Music*, p. 47.

mediatized culture. As such, the fanbases for virtual groups are perfectly cultivated through their exposure to technology, and are malleable enough to accept the fabricated and recreated over the real and the live. That type of cultivation helps Gorillaz fans, for example, to accept that Albarn is not the voice of Gorillaz' lead singer 2D, but that 2D received months of vocal training from Albarn and ergo sounds remarkably like him.²³

Of note, Gorillaz has attempted a variety of concerts produced with different manifestations and combinations of real performers and cartoons; however, based on fan response, it seems essential to Gorillaz' success for 2D's image to 'perform' at their gigs, even though Albarn is an international star and well known as the co-creator of Gorillaz. Gorillaz' most effective shows have featured both Albarn and 2D performing. Fans seem to insist on both, not one or the other.²⁴ This is further complicated by the surreal nature of placing human musicians on stage with cartoon characters, as it takes both types of performers out of their normal settings (for the humans, a stage devoid of animated bandmates; for the cartoons, an entirely animated

²³ Browne and Gorillaz, *Rise of the Ogre*, p. 43.

²⁴ Gorillaz' first gig at London's Kings Cross Scala on 22 March 2001 was poorly received, with critics saying the performance had a 'cold and emotionally stunted quality.' The gig featured the silhouettes of the Gorillaz 'characters' behind white screens while full-colour animations of related images played above. The silhouettes were actually those of the human musicians but were meant to be interpreted as 2D, Murdoc, Russel, and Noodle by the viewer. See Browne and Gorillaz, *Rise of the Ogre*, pp. 69–72. Subsequent gigs used the same technique, and garnered equally lackluster reviews. Ibid., pp. 97–98. The show evolved for years, and by the time of the band's third album *Plastic Beach*, the format contained what Albarn referred to as 'more human interaction.' When Gorillaz performance at Glastonbury in 2010 received harsh criticism, Albarn blamed it on the fact that Gorillaz was asked to replace U2 at the last minute, and 'We were yet to change the dynamic entirely from the cartoon band acting purely as a film orchestra into something that had more of a human element to it.' See Greg Cochrane and Duncan Crawford, 'Damon Albarn defends Glastonbury Gorillaz gig,' BBC, 26 July 2010 <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsbeat/10764168>> [accessed 23 February 2014].

universe) and places them in a new setting. Even though the new setting is recognisable and relatable, it is still a complex adjustment that the performers and audience must acknowledge.

The characters of virtual bands and Vocaloid are considered ‘real’ in a way they could never have been outside a mediatized culture, and their live performances help to solidify this position:

If the mediatized image can be recreated in a live setting, it must have been ‘real’ to begin with. This schema resolves (or rather, fails to resolve) into an impossible oscillation between the two poles of what once seemed a clear opposition: whereas mediatized performance derives its authority from its reference to the live or the real, the live now derives its authority from its reference to the mediatized, which derives its authority from its reference to the live, etc.²⁵

The effect that mediatization has had on popular culture means that audiences are capable of and willing to assign as much authority and authenticity to the mediatized image as to a ‘real’ image. The completely fabricated images of an animated band projected onto screens or of a hologram dancing on a stage at a live performance event carry just as much authority as a living, human performer would, because audiences have been conditioned across decades to accept the ‘impossible oscillation’ that Auslander lays out in his argument.

Understanding Multimedia

As we have seen, virtual bands and the technologies they employ expose the complex nature of terms like ‘real,’ ‘surreal,’ and ‘virtual reality.’ A virtual

²⁵ Auslander, *Liveness*, pp. 38–39.

band's functionality is further complicated when considering specific realisations of its construction. The way the characters interact and are represented in their own universe and in the real world is telling about how the band hopes to fit into popular culture, and gender and ethnic expectations are just one factor in how the characters (and the characters' creators) navigate this effectively. As with human popular music artists, virtual band creators employ differing forms of multimedia to deliver these representations to the audience, and so, an understanding of multimedia is key to analysing virtual bands.

In *Analysing Musical Multimedia*, Nicholas Cook provides a helpful framework for understanding varied methods in multimedia.²⁶ First, he argues, a 'similarity test' should be applied to the elements in a piece of multimedia to determine if the sound and image are consistent or coherent. When they are consistent, they will directly relate to one another; consistent is a narrow term and few elements can be classified as such. When elements are coherent, they will contain expressions that are related but not directly; they are related 'only at a remove'.²⁷

For example, Cook gives a literary example that helps to explain coherence and consistency. If we think of metaphors that relate to the idea of love as a journey, then phrases like 'This relationship is a dead-end street' and 'Our marriage is on the rocks' both describe love using travel metaphors. However, the first phrase describes love using a road metaphor, while the

²⁶ Nicholas Cook, *Analysing Musical Multimedia*, pp. 98–106.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 99–102.

second is a sea metaphor. They are describing love as a journey, but use different means of travelling, so these two phrases are coherent, not consistent. If one compares the sayings ‘Our marriage is on the rocks’ to ‘This relationship is foundering,’ these phrases provide an example of consistency, because both metaphors relate specifically to water travel. They are therefore directly related. Cook borrowed these examples from George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s 1980 book *Metaphors We Live By*. In cases of virtual bands, one example of sound and imagery consistency can be experienced when a well-known character is featured in a music video, realised in some way that depicts them as playing or singing the music (whether through animation, puppetry, a hologram, and so on).

Once elements have been identified as consistent or coherent, a ‘difference test’ should be applied to coherent elements to determine if they are contrary or contradictory. It is important to note that two elements can be related (sometimes even closely) while still being contrary or contradictory. To say that two elements that are coherent must therefore align perfectly or cannot be in opposition is incorrect. Contrary elements ‘might be glossed as undifferentiated difference,’ or elements that do not relate but do not detract from each other. But contradictory elements have collision or confrontation in them, and (like consistency) fall into a smaller category. As Cook describes it, ‘One might develop the analogy by saying that each medium strives to deconstruct the other, and so create space for itself.’²⁸ If the

²⁸ Ibid., p. 103.

elements are contradictory, they oppose one another, and can confuse or distort the meaning of the multimedia.²⁹

When the elements have been established as consistent/coherent, and the coherent elements have been established as contrary/contradictory, they can then be categorised under broader headings of conformance, complementation, and contest. Conformance applies to elements of multimedia that are found to be consistent in the similarity test. Complementation labels elements that do not fit together so neatly, but where each element has its own role and those roles do not stand in opposition to one another. Contest is when the elements bring different messages, each trying to ‘impose its own characteristics on the other;’ it is the opposite of conformance.³⁰

In her 2007 article ‘Look! It’s Rock’n’roll!’,³¹ Anja Mølle Lindelof develops Cook’s ideas by introducing another set of terms to categorise visual musical performance (in this case, to be applied to music video or broadcast performances). According to Lindelof’s definitions, documenting visualisations in music videos attempt to recreate the source of the music, a goal most often realised by using images of the musicians performing. By contrast, associative visualisations cover a wider range of imagery, which might tell a story, try to elicit certain emotions, or create associations in the

²⁹ Ibid., p. 102. Here, Cook calls heavily upon A.J. Greimas’s semiotic square to establish contrariety and contradiction.

³⁰ Ibid., pp. 98–106.

³¹ Anja Mølle Lindelof, ‘Look! It’s Rock’n’roll!: How television participated in shaping the visual genre conventions of popular music,’ *Music, Sound and Moving Image*, I.ii (Autumn 2007), pp. 141–159.

mind of the viewer.³² These are yet another set of terms that emphasise the importance of source. It is possible to take Cook's models of conformance, complementation, and contest, and combine them with the parameters of documenting and associative visualisation for even more thorough multimedia analysis. For example, combining these models, one could label the performance of a hologram with a live band as a conforming, documenting visualisation.

In addition to holograms used in live performance, one of the main multimedia tools used by virtual bands is music video; music video is a staple of the popular music industry, and it is relatively easy to create a representation of virtual band characters participating in music making within the context of a music video. By examining music video theory here and discussing examples in the following section, the power of music video to create authenticity for virtual band characters will be elucidated.

In her book *Visualising Music* (2010), Holly Rogers discusses the creation and effectivity of music videos in opposition to film music.³³ Rogers's opening chapter gives a thorough overview of the history of film-music theory, explaining in detail the long-held idea that the music in film is not necessarily to be considered as its own entity; it exists to enhance cinematic moments for viewers and as a mnemonic tool for recalling important imagery or plot points. This argument is supported by the fact that

³² Ibid., p. 143.

³³ Holly Rogers, *Visualising Music: Audio-Visual Relationships in Avant-Garde Film and Video Art* (Verlag: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2010).

film music is often composed during post-production, meaning it is an element of the film, not its own object.

While this is still an accepted concept for many film music theorists, it has been challenged in recent years, especially in research that compares classic Hollywood cinema with more modern films. There is evidence to suggest that some current film composers treat music differently than early film composers did. A great deal of discourse from cinema's earliest days reveals that composers of that era wished to make their music 'inaudible,' or rather, so subtle and married so eloquently to the imagery that the audience never noticed its presence.³⁴ However, modern films employ music differently, with sounds that are pertinent to the narrative or to the characters built into the score; Carol Vernallis uses the 2007 film *Transformers* as an example, noting that the score includes the sound of metal and mechanics, and that the imagery is sometimes linked to the sounds, so that the robots in the film seem to be creating the sounds in synch with the score.³⁵ Additionally, marketing of film music has changed, as described by K.J. Donnelly in 'The Classical Film Score Forever?' Here, Donnelly notes that Danny Elfman's orchestral score for *Batman* (1989) and Prince's music used in the film were released simultaneously as two separate albums linked to

³⁴ Kurt London, *Film Music* (London: Faber and Faber, 1937), p. 37.

³⁵ Carol Vernallis, *Unruly Media: YouTube, Music Video, and the New Digital Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 50–51.

the film. This reflects a specific Hollywood strategy: intertwining popular music and film music together as a marketing tool.³⁶

In contrast to the view that film music is subservient to film imagery, music videos function in a very different way. The music for a music video already exists before filming, and the video's narrative (if there is one) and imagery are meant to complement the music.³⁷ Here, the image accompanies the music. Rogers goes on to emphasise that the music video is about providing a source for the music. When a record is made and distributed, it serves as an imprint of the band's performance without a visual component. Listeners take for granted that it is the band's musicians playing on the recording, but we do not have visual proof. The music video provides us with a source. Sometimes the source is genuine, as in videos that feature footage of the band members 'playing' the song; sometimes the source is fabricated, as in videos where we see non-band members (or fictional characters) singing along or playing an instrument. As Rogers says,

Adding video to song provides the disembodied music with the illusion of a source, even if the source offered is a 'strange world' every bit as disembodied as the recorded music it accompanies. [...] Rarely does a music video present a straightforward, unedited performance. Instead, music, liberated from its source, is able to

³⁶ K.J. Donnelly, 'The Classical Film Score Forever?,' in *Contemporary Hollywood Cinema*, eds. Steve Neale and Murray Smith (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 142–155 (pp. 144–145). See also Rogers, *Visualising Music*, pp. 9, 14–65.

³⁷ Sometimes the imagery complements the music by being completely unrelated to the song; the power of the image paired with the music makes it memorable. Consider the video for The Dead Weather's 'Treat Me Like Your Mother' (2009), in which Jack White and Alison Mossheart fire hundreds of rounds into each other in a machine gun duel. The imagery is only related to the lyrics by relating the story of two people very upset with each other and because White and Mossheart are singing as they fire, but the imagery is extremely memorable.

construct an alternative world on its own terms: it is able to renounce its origin and so fabricate for itself an alternative source.³⁸

This last point has particular relevance for virtual bands, as discussed in the next section.

Music videos have existed in a variety of incarnations, each of which have had their own innovations and problems. For example, Soundies were short musical films produced for mobile jukeboxes (called Panorams) placed in restaurants, truck stops, and other nontheatrical venues in America from 1940–1947. In her book *Dreams of Difference, Songs of the Same*, Amy Herzog analyses Soundies and Panorams, and makes convincing arguments for their lack of commercial success and relatively short existence.³⁹ She posits that Soundies suffered from small production budgets in contrast to the lavish feature film musicals of the time, as well as from quick production turnaround (a new reel of eight musical shorts was made available every week during the seven years that the Soundies Distributing Corporation of America lasted).⁴⁰ But Herzog also explains that Soundies were problematic in their representations of music performance and in the way audiences were meant to respond to them. Soundies often featured settings like barrooms, a choice that could make the viewer feel like they are part of the setting, given the fact that the Panorams were located in places like bars and restaurants. However, during filming, the singers in Soundies were lipsynching with recordings of themselves, and this often resulted in mismatched lip

³⁸ Rogers, *Visualising Music*, p. 42.

³⁹ Amy Herzog, *Dreams of Difference, Songs of the Same: The Musical Moment in Film* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2010).

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 44–47.

movements to the sound of the music; the disjointed nature of the film in contrast to the music broke the illusion that the performance was real, thereby removing the viewer from a sense of inclusion in the musical proceedings.⁴¹

Regardless of these problems, understanding Soundies is an important step in analysing the relationship of sound and image in multimedia across the last century. Soundies are an early example of a medium in which the sound came first: the songs used in the short films were already popular songs, or were short, catchy, or humourous songs that aligned with the popular music of the time. The music of the Soundies took precedence over the image, and the images were created to match the music. Soundies are therefore a precursor to modern music video, which for many years was the only form of multimedia in which music was meant to be at the forefront, rather than occupy an accompanying or shared role.

Cook has also written extensively on music-video analysis. He emphasises that music-video study has not given enough attention to the music itself, and that the music video should be analysed as music (Andrew Goodwin's idea of 'the musicology of the image').⁴² Rogers's theory aligns with Cook's in that, unlike film, Cook believes the music-video image is meant to support and even sell the music.

Applying Theories of Multimedia to Virtual Bands

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 46–47.

⁴² Cook, *Analysing Musical Multimedia*, p. 150.

An overview of virtual band music videos and a close reading of Gorillaz' video for '19-2000' (2001) highlight ways in which virtual band creators have employed these multimedia elements to their advantage. Television shows like *Alvin and the Chipmunks*, *Josie and the Pussycats*, *The Banana Splits Adventure Hour*, and *The Beatles* were pioneers in music videos; in almost every episode, the action paused for musical performances to be depicted on screen, or songs would play while the band participated in chases or zany antics that furthered the plot. Most of these shows aired in the same years that the Beatles' used promotional videos (then called 'filmed inserts') of their songs to be broadcast on television without the Beatles needing to be present. The Fab Four began this practice in 1965, and continued it into the era when they stopped touring altogether. Indeed, the cartoon shows listed above predate Queen's music video for 'Bohemian Rhapsody' (1975) and the launch of MTV (1981), making them some of the first bands to employ music video at all.

The music videos of early cartoon bands usually featured spliced images of the characters (including close-ups) playing their instruments and singing, which were indicative of standard editing practices in many popular-music television programmes and variety shows at the time. Some of the cartoon videos also contained shots of mischief or chases related to the plot of the episode (giving the videos – to use Lindelof's terminology – both documenting and associative visualisations). These videos fit into Rogers's theory and Cook's conformance and complementation models of multimedia,

as the visual elements were used to affirm that the characters were indeed creating the music.

But as virtual bands escaped the confines of Saturday morning television, their music videos became more sophisticated. For example, Gorillaz' video for '19-2000' uses a combination of traditional and computer animation. The Gorillaz foursome are seen racing along a deserted highway in a Jeep; on their journey, they escape a UFO, avoid the motorway exit leading to a church, and take on a giant moose (the band aims targeted missiles at the moose, whose sneeze turns the weapons back on Gorillaz with disastrous effect). While the lyrics to the song are nonsensical themselves ('Get the cool / Get the cool shoeshine'), the musical and visual elements of the video largely contest (to use Cook's model) one another. The band does not play any musical instruments, and only occasionally are 2D or Noodle seen singing the lyrics. At the opening of the video, Murdoc turns the key to start the Jeep, and the opening bars of the song seem to play from the car radio, slightly distorted with static, suggesting that the music is diegetic. However, this quickly changes to non-diegetic as the radio static disappears; the music remains non-diegetic, playing through to the end of the action, after the Jeep and its radio have exploded and the characters are no longer singing along.

The entertaining and bizarre visualisations in the video are certainly characteristic of Gorillaz' unique style, but may leave the audience unsure of any clear objective or message. Regardless of this particular video, the characters maintain (and perhaps prove) their agency and legitimacy through

a wide array of multimedia output, having emerged during an era when their audience is primed to accept the characters as the band's primary musicians. Their music videos can be abstract and artistic without damaging their credibility.

In addition to traditional music videos, virtual bands use other types of multimedia that are closely linked to (or could be classified as) music video. When a hologram of a Vocaloid singing and dancing is played for a 'live' performance, the image is preprogrammed, and plays exactly the same way each time; it could easily be removed from the stage and placed in the context of a music video.⁴³ Gorillaz' music videos often include scenes before or after the featured song that give the viewer tidbits of information about the characters or show band interactions. Sometimes these scenes advance the Gorillaz folklore in important ways. For example, in the 2012 video for the single 'DoYaThing,' the band is shown at their house in 212 Wobble Street, which is the first update the fans received about Gorillaz' location and living arrangements since *Plastic Beach*. The video illustrates the dynamics between the characters, including 2D's rising melancholy, and ends with 2D stepping out the front door to be met with an eviction notice. He smiles as the camera pans up to show an enormous Russel asleep on the roof and Noodle's rebuilt floating island tethered into a brick wall with an

⁴³ See chapter 6 for information about Hatsune Miku's music video appearance with Japanese band Bump of Chicken, which featured technological advancements in programming Miku to allow for more instantaneous interaction with the band members.

anchor.⁴⁴ The music of the band is also often featured in short video clips, like Murdoc's 2005 appearance on MTV's *Cribs*.

The Voice in Virtual Bands

An element of virtual bands that is particularly important to creating authenticity, agency, and the suspension of disbelief is the voice. The creation and manipulation of the virtual voice is achieved through several types of multimedia, and is furthered by the 'live' appearances of the characters. The voice is linked (sometimes ambiguously) to gender and to gender expectation, making it a vital element to dissect in this study, which aims to explain how gender and ethnicity function in virtual bands.

To theoretically examine manipulations of the voice, it is helpful to have a means of describing different types of manipulations. Remko Scha offers one such approach aimed at differentiating various kinds of 'virtual voices.'⁴⁵ He breaks voice recreation and manipulation technologies into two categories: genetic (wherein the mechanism used to 'create' the voice is based around human anatomy, often with manufactured elements that substitute for the lungs, larynx, or mouth) and gennematic (wherein the technology fakes the voice entirely with no reference to the human anatomy, calculating the sound with computers and other technologies, rather than attempting to simulate the human apparatus of voice production).⁴⁶

⁴⁴ See chapters 4 and 5 for further explanation of this imagery.

⁴⁵ Remko Scha, 'Virtual Voices' <<http://www.mediamatic.net/8635/en/virtual-voices-1>>.

⁴⁶ Scha's genetic category parallels biological manipulations of the human singing voice (breathing, resonance, differing registers, vibrato) mentioned in chapter 1.

Most characters in virtual bands are genetic creations because the means of voice production comes from a living vocal artist who has been recorded or who sings from behind the scenes. It would be logical to argue that Vocaloids are the exception and are gennematic in nature because their vocal production is manifested through a computer programme, and (past the initial stages where the human voice is recorded) the manipulation of the voice is entirely digital.⁴⁷ Nonetheless, in almost all cases, the voices of characters in virtual bands are depicted as coming from some kind of body, whether it be human or animal. While some may claim this as proof that virtual bands are genetic, it is important to remember that Scha's definition stems purely from the way the sound is produced, not the way the production of sound is represented. The virtual body that is depicted as producing the sound (a drawing, puppet, or hologram) is not actually producing the sound, but often a human has provided the voice. Most virtual band characters therefore fall under Scha's genetic category.

And yet, it is revealing to think how important depictions of the body are in the reception of media. Does the depiction of a virtual characters' body and the sound of their voice align with what audiences expect to experience? What if the voice of a virtual character is created by a human whose sex is different from the one suggested by the character (a topic addressed in chapter 3 in relation to Studio Killers)? As Michel Chion writes regarding cinema, the 'question of unity of sound and image would have no importance if it didn't turn out [...] to be the very signifier of the question of

⁴⁷ This process will be discussed further in chapter 6.

[...] unity itself.⁴⁸ Like Chion, other theorists (Mladen Dolar and Pierre Schaeffer, for example) argue that the unity of sound and image is key to the way humans receive and process media. The acousmatic voice (a voice produced without an identifiable origin) used to be a puzzling or troubling entity, for example in the days of the earliest telephones, when people were not accustomed to interacting with a disembodied voice. Today, acousmatic voices are more common, and as Dolar argues, we find them intriguing or disturbing only if knowledge of the body is withheld or our expectation of the body of the voice (our mental picture of who is speaking) is not met.⁴⁹

Associating the voices of the virtual band characters with consistent visual representations is therefore key to establishing and maintaining the illusion that they are ordinary entities, and that the audience should accept them as autonomous musicians. The success of this endeavour is often tenuous, as audiences may have different expectations or may have different interpretations of the fluidity of gender or the representation of an ethnicity. If the visual component of a virtual band is meticulous and consistent, however, listeners will form a picture of the band that will spring to mind when they hear acousmatic performances from the band (for example, when they hear a song on the radio). Even if the virtual band character at first seems to be alien, non-human, or distorted, over time it can become familiar and recognisable. Fans respond to the visuals of virtual bands strongly,

⁴⁸ Michel Chion, *Audio Vision: Sound on Screen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 97.

⁴⁹ Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*, pp. 60–67. Dolar carries the argument further, saying, ‘When the voice gets attached to the body, it loses its omnipotent charismatic character. [...] The aura crumbles, the voice, once located, loses its fascination and power.’

especially with bands like Gorillaz where the visuals are highly stylized and figure prominently in live performance. This phenomenon in fan taste is not so far removed from the ‘Turks’ or girls mentioned in chapter 1: figures attached to the Euphonia, designed to move as the machine spoke and therefore provide a visual bodily source or anchor to the disembodied, mechanical voice.

Reportedly, the human element of the Euphonia was meant to make it less frightening to audiences of the 1840s. However, it is possible that the face or body did not have that effect, especially in the case of the Turk. In the era of Orientalism when the Euphonia was invented, using the Turk as the source of the voice may have proven more terrifying than placating, since the Turk would be considered Other, mysterious, and potentially dangerous. However, as Dolar points out, the connection between what one sees and what one hears is vital, and would have been particularly important to those audiences; the acousmatic (disembodied) voice fills the listener with trepidation, unless a source can be identified, at which point the voice loses its power. There are two possible hypotheses then: the presence of the form of both the girl and the Turk were indeed pacifying to audiences, or that the form of the Turk was intended to further intrigue and scare the audiences. The choice of these two particular human forms is fascinating because of the reactions they must have elicited at the time. Today’s audiences need the body as well, not because of fear of technology, but because it inherently gives them a locale for the production of sound.

Chion claims, ‘We are often given to believe, implicitly or explicitly, that the body and voice cohere in some self-evident, natural way.’⁵⁰ In *Vocal Apparitions: The Attraction of Cinema to Opera* (1999), Michal Grover-Friedlander states that, ‘In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the voice is seen as the first manifestation of subjectivity, even preceding self-recognition in the mirror.’⁵¹ In other words, the voice is an inherent indicator of identity, of humanity (see the discussion on monsterization later in this chapter), or at the very least of authenticity, to the listener.

However, Chion also points out that listeners do not need constant visualisation of the mechanism of speech. If a person turns away from us while speaking, our brains can seamlessly comprehend that the voice still belongs to the person who was speaking; ‘We’re not going to panic because we can’t verify the synchronism.’⁵² Listeners will automatically recognise and accept that a given voice belongs to a character, ‘Provided that the rules of a sort of contract of belief are respected.’⁵³ If enough visualisations of a body are synchronized with audio that feasibly matches that body, audiences will agree to suspend their disbelief and grant that the voice they hear comes from that body.

Other theories for examining reconstructions or creations of the voice and the body are also useful when discussing virtual bands. For example, one might apply Cook’s model here to discuss the significance of

⁵⁰ Michel Chion, *The Voice in Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 126.

⁵¹ Michal Grover-Friedlander, *Vocal Apparitions: The Attraction of Cinema to Opera* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 22.

⁵² Chion, *The Voice in Cinema*, p. 129.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 129.

conformance, complementation, and contest in the alignment of the voice and appearance of virtual band characters. Is conformance, complementation, or contest most often used in virtual bands (and arguably in the music industry as a whole) and why?

I suggest that conformance is the most common model in designing virtual band characters that match expectations of the voice. The appearance of the characters most often conforms to their voices and their roles in the band, as well as their gender and ethnicity (or the overarching societal expectations linked to their gender and ethnicity). This rule is not absolute; there are exceptions, such as the non-conforming singing voice and visual appearance of Cherry from Studio Killers discussed in chapter 3. However, conformance does occur often enough in virtual bands to merit scrutiny. Sometimes it is exhibited as simply as the Beatles animated characters looking and sounding like the real Beatles (even though the Beatles themselves did not voice the cartoon show). Or consider Melody, the drummer from Josie and the Pussycats. Melody is known for being rather dim-witted, and she was designed with blonde hair, a stereotype that would not have been lost on her 1970s audience.⁵⁴ Melody also speaks with a squeaky, feminine, inquisitive voice (she is never depicted as singing with her bandmates; many songs of Josie and the Pussycats include female vocal harmonies, but the source of these harmonies is rarely depicted, much like

⁵⁴ A thorough examination of tropes and stereotypes in Josie and the Pussycats' characters can be found in chapter 3.

the sounds of keyboards, bass guitar, or other instruments that are heard in their songs but are never shown or explained).

Cook's models are also suitable for discussing the voices of Vocaloids. When listening to Hatsune Miku sing, one hears the voice of a young woman. The design of Miku perfectly conforms to what is heard. We have certain expectations of what Miku should sound like because we are used to deciphering 'the tension of vocal chords, larynx, and pharynx [...] and] resonance cavities. In other words, what you hear is not simply a pitch, you also hear a body.'⁵⁵ While the voices of Vocaloids are always slightly digitized before release, they are not manipulated enough to break the expectation of what an audience hears and what they therefore expect to see. The alignment of the body with the voice allows the audience to suspend their disbelief and accept that the fabricated character Miku physically houses the voice.

Agency: Transformation Through Technology

No matter the means used to create or manipulate their voices, or the methods used to bring them to life using multimedia, the fictitious members of virtual bands and Vocaloids have agency, because they are the ones that inspire loyalty in their fans. A great deal of this agency comes from the consistent, conformant depictions of characters with their voices and music. The audience's expectations are met in the conforming elements of the

⁵⁵ Joke Dame, 'Unveiled Voices: Sexual Difference and the Castrato,' in *Queering the Pitch: The New Gay and Lesbian Musicology*, eds. Philip Brett, Elizabeth Wood, and Gary C. Thomas (Oxford: Taylor and Francis, 2006), pp. 139–153 (p. 143).

appearance and performance of the characters. The characters become important cultural commodities, and actually end up carrying weight in the music industry. For example, if a music journalist wants to interview someone from Gorillaz, they may set up an interview with a character, and an actor or writer will respond to the journalist's questions from the first-person perspective of that character; the interviews given by the characters discuss the albums and gigs in a jocular tone, mixed with fabricated stories about how certain sounds emerged on certain tracks or about the band's antics after a concert.⁵⁶ Interviews with Albarn or Hewlett often have a different tone: less playful, and more about the inception of the project, technical aspects, and in-depth dissection of the music.⁵⁷ The band characters, Albarn, and Hewlett all have agency, but their agency manifests itself in differing ways. The elaborate characters are the gimmick upon which the band is based, but only humans could create the band. Even Vocaloids have agency, since Vocaloid fans are more likely to be intensely loyal to their Vocaloid character of choice, not to the entire genre of Vocaloid. It is the character and the voice that breed devotion, not necessarily the style of music, or even the concept of virtual, ageless, perfect performers. The consistency between the character and the voice are therefore key to generating agency.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Paul Stokes, ed., 'Unfinished Monkey Business,' *NME*, 23 January 2010 <http://soulculture.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/2010-01-23-NME_02.jpg> [accessed 4 March 2014].

⁵⁷ Jon Pareles, 'The Man in the Gorillaz Mask,' *New York Times* (online), 15 May 2005 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/15/arts/music/15pare.html?pagewanted=all>> [accessed 4 March 2014].

⁵⁸ Fan loyalty in the Vocaloid genre will be discussed in chapter 7.

This idea of agency is approached from a different but relatable perspective in Jason Stanyek and Benjamin Piekut's 2010 article, 'Deadness: Technologies of the Intermundane'.⁵⁹ Here, Stanyek and Piekut use the trend of duets between living and deceased artists to introduce us to the intermundane, an elaboration on Karen Barad's theory of the intramundane. The term mundane here refers to something that is of this world, not of a heavenly or spiritual nature. Barad's theory is that anything that is or used to be mundane (whether living or an inanimate object) has agency. When a person dies, they leave enough of themselves in the world to maintain that agency. Agency is not a singular phenomenon, a power to be released at a specific moment; rather, it is relational, and can therefore be afforded to anyone, even someone who is dead.

Stanyek and Piekut relate this to recordings of singers who have died. The singers still have agency, and recordings are a primary example of that agency (as demonstrated by staggering posthumous record sales of Elvis, Tupac, and others). Stanyek and Piekut use 'inter' as their prefix of choice instead of Barad's 'intra.' Barad uses 'intra' to emphasise that agency is relational, and its existence is dependent on the 'mutual entanglement' of more than one element.⁶⁰ It cannot exist as individual elements. While Stanyek and Piekut agree with her on this point, they employ

the 'inter' prefix to draw attention to the performed naturalization of the separation of living and dead mundanities, the continual production of an agential cut that assigns prime mover status in

⁵⁹ Jason Stanyek and Benjamin Piekut, 'Deadness: Technologies of the Intermundane,' *The Drama Review*, 54:1 (Spring 2010), pp. 14–38.

⁶⁰ Stanyek and Piekut, 'Deadness: Technologies of the Intermundane,' p. 18.

living humans while objectivizing the ‘dead’ as inert, without future, and non-effective.⁶¹

The concept of the intermundane is useful when discussing virtual bands because it refers to agency as effectivity. If agency is something intangible and ‘not merely an individual’s capacity to respond to changing conditions,’⁶² as the article argues, then agency can be a characteristic of an entity that is dead or was never alive.⁶³

Effectivity is ‘the enactment of agencies that make a difference.’⁶⁴ Everything in the studio, both animate and inanimate, has some effectivity, and ergo some agency. Both the living and the non-living elements in a studio affect the outcome of the record; this includes everything, from the musicians to the microphones to the treatment of a dead singer’s vocal track. As Stanyek and Piekut argue, ‘effects are generated and absorbed by all kinds of entities.’⁶⁵ This is obviously transferrable to the members of a virtual band. Though they are not physically present, the constructed demeanors and backstories, the musicianship and the attitude of the characters in a virtual band greatly affect what is produced in the studio. The non-existent

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 18.

⁶² Ibid., p. 18.

⁶³ Stanyek and Piekut’s ideas here relate to prominent theories in other disciplines, such as Bruno Latour, Michel Callon, and John Law’s Actor-Network Theory (ANT). This theory, developed in the early 1980s, is an approach to social research that recognises that inanimate objects can be ‘actors,’ influencing social history. Although it remains a controversial idea, ANT is widely discussed by many sociologists, even if they do not agree with the theory. See Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁶⁴ Stanyek and Piekut, ‘Deadness: Technologies of the Intermundane,’ p. 18.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 18.

band members have a great deal of agency, then, and that agency locates them among the intermundane.

Furthermore, if effectivity is constantly being ‘generated and absorbed,’ then a certain amount of effect is also reliant on perception by the audience. Those who are living can construct new identities for the dead, or for characters that were never living. The way the fictitious members of a virtual band are perceived is important to their effectivity and agency. Both increase when the history, appearance, and sound of the characters are consistent and conformant (according to Cook’s model) with the music itself.

Already, it is becoming clear that gender and ethnic constructions in these characters can add to or detract from their effectivity and agency. The characters will generate more effectivity if their audience can make connections between elements like appearance, voice, and musical output.

Agency has been an evolving concept in popular music as radical changes in musical dissemination have occurred in the past few decades. The rise of technologies such as the record, music video, the mp3 player, and online music sharing has affected the way we view agency. In their multimedia manifestations, virtual bands are attempting to build a level of legitimacy and authenticity amongst their fans. The agency the characters gain from these efforts is a perceived and attributed degree of agency. This means that a critical recognition of agency as actual or as perceived can easily elude listeners, and perhaps even those who research and write about virtual bands.

The careful multimedia output crafted by virtual bands exists as an attempt to eliminate the (ultimately ridiculous) idea that these are cartoons playing rock and roll, and to aid the audience in suspending disbelief. There must be a certain extent to which fans see the characters as something other than a fabrication, an artifice built through different technologies. In academic discourse, terminology has been assigned to such artifices, and a growing amount of research has been dedicated to understanding theories of monsterization and of cyborgs.

Drawing from other discourses and the work of Bojana Kunst, Jelena Novak has expanded on the term ‘monsterization’ in her 2010 article, ‘Monsterization of Singing.⁶⁶ Kunst’s original work centres on the idea that the monstrous displays to humanity that which is inhuman, and more specifically, that which is inhuman inside ourselves. In Kunst’s article, her ‘monster’ in question is Mokgadi Caster Semenya, a middle distance runner whose biological sex was questioned after she won a race at the World Championships in Berlin in 2009. Semenya’s appearance, low speaking voice, and physical abilities were considered evidence that she was not female, and an investigation was undertaken to determine her sex. This Otherness in Semenya was what qualified her as a ‘monster’ to the press and raised controversy amongst medical and political communities.⁶⁷ As with essentialism, understanding the monstrous becomes a way to define and elevate the human, by identifying, labeling, and controlling something that is

⁶⁶ Jelena Novak, ‘Monsterization of Singing: Politics of Vocal Existence,’ *New Sound: International Magazine for Music*, 36:1 (2010), pp. 101–119.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 102.

not human.⁶⁸ Kunst argues that this is the reason why monsterization is so controversial and raises such heated debate; Semenya is one example of the ‘caesura inside the human,’ something that appears to be Other emerging from within a human body.⁶⁹ And Kunst insists that ‘the caesura is not between the human and the outside, but is always internal and shifting: human is constitutively inhuman.’⁷⁰

Novak’s fascination with this example and with Kunst’s interpretation of it translates interestingly to her writing on recent opera productions that have manipulated the human voice for dramatic or artistic purposes. In Semenya’s case, the low pitch of her speaking voice was an often-cited argument for those critics who insisted she could not possibly be female. However, a runner does not use their voice in any way during a race. Therefore, the obsession those critics fostered for the pitch of Semenya’s voice, ‘raises questions about the monstrosity of the voice and its embodiment.’⁷¹

As discussed previously, voice is often employed as a signifier of humanity, as a primary identifier of a subject. For theorists like Chion, this link is identifiable, though its origin is perhaps difficult to pinpoint. Listeners inherently use voice as a benchmark that must somehow relate to the body that produces it. And listeners must be able to comprehend how and why

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 103.

⁶⁹ Semenya is hyperandrogenic; her body contains a high level of androgens, or male sex hormones. See Andy Bull, ‘Caster Semenya wins Olympic gold but faces more scrutiny as IAAF presses case,’ 21 August 2016 <<https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2016/aug/21/caster-semenya-wins-gold-but-faces-scrutiny>> [accessed 2 January 2018].

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 104.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 103.

the voice does not match the body in those cases in which it does not. Otherwise, the voice can become monstrous. The relationship between voice and body is important, and yet it is not universally agreed upon. Grover-Friedlander provides examples of theorists who question the link between voice and origin of the subject. Derrida believes that the voice as indicator of presence is illusory; according to him, hearing the voice is hearing a foreign body, ‘a stranger to myself who can appear in different guises as, for instance, the voice of conscience, hypnosis, or the persecutor of paranoia.’⁷² Indeed, Lacan also identifies juxtaposition between the ‘auto-affective voice of self-presence and self-mastery’ and the ‘intractable voice of the Other’ that constantly oppose each other within the subject.⁷³ Lacan says that both voices have to be considered together, even though it is possible to control one and not the other. If the relationship between voice and body is so psychologically complex, why did those who doubted Semenza’s female biological sex believe that the pitch of her voice was a straightforward signifier of a different sex?

This question leads directly into Novak’s analysis of voice manipulation and monsterization in Steve Reich and Beryl Korot’s *Three Tales* (1998–2002). In the three pieces of the opera, human performers sing along with recordings of the human voice that have been altered (featuring prolonged final consonants, and slow motion singing that maintains its original pitch) and then played as part of the opera performance, and Novak

⁷² Grover-Friedlander, *Vocal Apparitions*, p. 23.

⁷³ Ibid, p. 23.

questions whether this makes the voice a monster – something inhuman. She argues, ‘The concept of monstrosity enters the vocal sphere through technology that emphasizes the audibility of the cessation between the human and the inhuman manifested through the voice produced simultaneously by the body and a machine.⁷⁴ In other words, the way the voices are produced and interact in these operas accentuates the difference between the live singing and the voices that have been captured and manipulated on tape, and thereby highlights the Otherness of the recorded voices, making those voices monstrous.

Applying the concept of monsterization to virtual bands and Vocaloids is a complicated endeavour. As discussed in chapter 1, there are many methods by which the body and a machine may be combined to create the voices of virtual band characters. Whether it is manipulated by vocoder, AutoTune, or more naturalistic recording techniques, the voice of the human artist changes when it is assigned to an animation or a puppet because a new non-human source is assigned to a human sound. Likewise, when a new Vocaloid character is created, a performer (usually a current Japanese pop singer or anime voice actor) is selected to voice that character. He or she will sing all syllable and vowel combinations on every note in the character’s vocal range. The sounds are recorded and distortion is added; the result is a voice that is somewhat human yet distinctly electronic. The sounds can then be put through Yamaha’s VOCALOID editing software by a VocaloidP to create any combination of lyrics. Vibrato, brightness, dynamics,

⁷⁴ Novak, ‘Monsterization of Singing,’ p. 106.

and even masculine or feminine tone can be manipulated within the editing platform to achieve any desired effect (this will be discussed further in chapter 6).⁷⁵

But Novak's discussion of monstrosity does not stop at the combination of human and machine. She goes on to hint that intention is an important factor in monsterization. Through manipulation of the voice into something that is inhuman, the voice becomes problematised. Drawing on Kunst's theories, Novak emphasises that monsterization distorts the 'natural order of authority' (that is, humanity's dominance over all else) 'because it is the constant production of otherness in the very *human* being'.⁷⁶ Simply modifying the voice does not create a monster. After all, '[a t]echnologically modified voice indicates that "hybrid connections between nature and culture force us to rethink the borders between different regimes of representation (like science, politics and art)".'⁷⁷ Conscientious viewers must ask themselves, what is the intention of the distortion? Is it meant to make us rethink the music we are hearing? Is it meant to alienate the listener from the character with the manipulated voice? Is it, in fact, meant to create a monster?

Using Novak's full definition, monsterization is not a term that we should immediately appropriate for virtual bands that deal primarily in bubblegum pop or catchy hip-hop hooks. Monsterization is a technique to

⁷⁵ Yamaha Corporation, *Interviews with Developers: Hideki Kenmochi, yamaha+ Division (Japan)* <<http://www.vocaloid.com/en/about/interview.html>> [accessed 29 April 2013].

⁷⁶ Novak, 'Monsterization of Singing,' p. 103. Original emphasis.

⁷⁷ Bojana Kunst, 'Restaging the Monstrous,' in *Anatomy Live*, ed. Maaike Bleeker (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2008), p. 216; quoted in Novak, 'Monsterization of Singing,' p. 104.

create Otherness, to inspire awe or possibly even fear, and none of these are candid goals of any virtual band creators that I have studied. And yet, it is worth asking, can theories of monsterization be used selectively, as in an opera where the villain has been ‘monsterized,’ or should they be investigated in all cases where the human voice or image has been distorted? In the case of Vocaloid, the human voice is distorted. And while this is notable, would Novak categorise Vocaloids as monsters? I believe she would not; for, based on the means of creating and distributing music using Vocaloid programmes, the supportive nature of Vocaloid fan culture, and even the affordable prices of Vocaloid games (which make them accessible to many), Vocaloids are inclusive creations, allowing anyone with the software to become a pop producer. The creators of the original VOCALOID software purposefully crafted singers that can be embraced and used by the fans to create works of art that are meaningful to them. As a construction, Vocaloids are meant to unite fans and make money by capitalising on Japanese character culture.⁷⁸ As such, they do not align with Novak’s ideas on monsterization (although they do take the idea of manufactured pop to an extreme, and one might easily reflect critically on the objectification of the female body and voice in many Vocaloids, and question the significance of an eager crowd hero-worshipping a virtual entity).

But ‘monsters’ are not the only symbolic creatures present in social theory. Cyborg theory has been discussed in many arenas since it came to

⁷⁸ For specific information about the creation of VOCALOID as related by the creators, see chapter 6. For more on Vocaloid programmes and games, Vocaloid fan culture, and Japanese character culture, see chapters 6 and 7.

popularity with Donna Haraway's 1985 article 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs'.⁷⁹ In it, Haraway argues that society would do well to view all creatures (both human and manufactured) as cyborgs. She intends to convince the reader that cyborg culture is a means of achieving gender neutrality. For example, cyborgs have no myths of origin, no references to maternal or paternal entities, which removes the need for women to fulfil a 'mother' role. Moreover, Haraway claims that in a cyborg society, 'nature and culture are reworked; the one can no longer be the resource for appropriation or incorporation by the other.'⁸⁰

The most relevant part of Haraway's theory to virtual bands comes in her explanation of ways that cyborg-ism is currently a part of our culture. She says that a grey area already exists between organism and machine. As technology advances, machines become smarter and even self-determining.⁸¹ Likewise, in *Virtual Theatres* (2004), Gabriella Giannachi defines a cyborg as any combination of human and computer/machine where the two exist harmoniously, a definition which includes a great deal of the human race. For her, any human who has received an immunization, has an

⁷⁹ Donna Haraway, 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s,' in *Identities: Race, Class, Gender, and Nationality*, eds. Linda Martín Alcoff and Eduardo Mendieta (Massachusetts: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 369–391. The original version of the essay was published in 1985, and has been updated by Haraway numerous times, including 1991 and 2004. While Haraway has made some changes to the work, much of it has remained the same over many revisions. Haraway's original is commonly viewed amongst scholars as a time capsule of an important point in academic history, and as the moment that sparked a 'cyberquake' that echoed across decades of cyber studies, and therefore, its significance should not be underestimated. For more on this, see David Bell, *Cyberculture Theorists: Manuel Castells and Donna Haraway* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 91–130. For a recent study on Haraway's influence including and beyond her work on cyborgs, see Margret Grebowicz and Helen Merrick, *Beyond the Cyborg: Adventures with Donna Haraway* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

⁸⁰ Haraway, 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs,' p. 370.

⁸¹ Ibid, p. 371.

artificial limb, or wears glasses is a cyborg.⁸² This is yet another nod to the idea of pervasive cyborg-ism already present in our society. The animation and voiceover processes used in the modern Alvin and the Chipmunks films or in episodes of *Daria*, or the literal machine modifications applied to human voices in VOCALOID software is cyborg-ism at its core.⁸³ They are prime examples of ways that humanity and technology co-exist ‘harmoniously’ within the music industry.

However, because cyborgism suggests a degree of gender neutrality, its link to virtual bands is not so simple. The majority of virtual band characters are represented as being somewhere on the gender spectrum (and indeed, there are many examples in which the characters exist at the far ends of the spectrum). Virtual bands comprised of robots that are represented as robots exist, such as Compressorhead and Z-Machines. Both are fascinating constructions, but even within purely robotic bands, references to gender exist. Compressorhead’s singer Mega-Wattson sings with a human, male voice that is recorded, while Z-Machines’ singing voices are roboticized and therefore do not tonally bear resemblance to the human voice. Additionally, Compressorhead’s drummer is named Stickboy, and Z-

⁸² Giannachi, *Virtual Theatres*, pp. 45–46.

⁸³ In another example, when Gorillaz were recording *Plastic Beach*, the folklore of the band relates that lead guitarist Noodle was missing (presumed dead) after a flying accident which occurred during the filming of the music video for ‘El Mañana,’ a single from Gorillaz’ previous album *Demon Days*. The final cut of the ‘El Mañana’ video features Noodle’s crash after her Flying Windmill Island is shot down by black helicopters that had been stalking her for some time. In order to record *Plastic Beach*, Gorillaz-founder Murdoc Niccals created a cyborg version of Noodle to fill in for her. Cyborg Noodle was made from cybernetic limbs and DNA that was recovered from the crash site of Noodle’s accident. Of course, all of this is fabrication as these characters are not real, but Cyborg Noodle became an integral part of Gorillaz’ story during the release of *Plastic Beach* and its subsequent publicity.

Machines' drummer Ashura is fashioned with breasts, even though all the robots in Z-Machines bear no other gender traits (except the lead guitarist who has cables emerging from the head that are arguably meant to look like long hair). It seems that even the most literally cyborg virtual bands are not immune to gender stereotypes.

Conclusion

The theories and studies discussed in this chapter reveal how virtual bands and Vocaloid intersect with concerns mapped out in media, performance, cultural, and popular music studies, and they highlight ways of defining and problematising this emerging field. However, this thesis specifically aims to address issues of gender and ethnic identity within virtual bands; therefore, some of the theories discussed in this chapter are more pertinent to my goal than others.

For example, Richardson's theories on surrealism will return in chapter 4 in relation to Gorillaz. Richardson undertakes close readings of certain examples of Gorillaz multimedia, making the case that these songs and videos are surreal because they attempt to explore and then break current popular music norms and boundaries. This analysis assists my dissection of the ways in which Gorillaz conform to (and sometimes subvert) identity expectations in their media output. Similarly, Rogers's theories on music video are utilised in my discussion of Vocaloid in chapter 6, where they support my claim that a 'live' Vocaloid performance provides the audience with a source for the sound, giving them a manifestation of the

Vocaloid body (the proposed source of vocal production) that appears to move in 3D space.

Conversely, Lindelof's documenting and associative visualisations are an enlightening means of classifying virtual band character manifestations, but the exercise of utilising her categories is straightforward, and therefore her categories will not merit greater dissection elsewhere in the thesis.

Likewise, the discussion of Levy's definitions of virtual reality are instructive and, I would argue, essential for any theoretical work that deals with virtual entities; while ideas found elsewhere in this thesis can be linked to Levy, I will not make specific mention of him again, not least because his theories are so germane as to be inherent to the discussion without requiring signposting.

In the remaining five chapters, I examine virtual bands and Vocaloid from the perspective of identity, ethnicity, and gender. This chapter has introduced several reasons why modern-day fans are willing to suspend their disbelief and engage with cartoons, puppets, and holograms who 'make music.' The televisual, the surreal, agency, and other cultural phenomena encourage processes of identification with fictitious characters, fostering the illusion that these are autonomous songwriters, lyricists, instrumentalists, and singers. But, as I will argue in subsequent chapters, an important reason behind this identification and suspension of disbelief is the perpetuation of gender and ethnic stereotypes, which are seldom challenged.

Chapter 3

‘Inside, Outside, Upside Down:’ Gender and Ethnicity in Virtual Bands

Image construction is a central concern in popular musicology, and much of this work has focussed on gender constructions and assumptions within the industry, while some has commented on the role of ethnicity in the creation of image.¹ These are two specific areas that merit further exploration in relation to virtual bands. The stereotypes associated with gender and with ethnicity are some of the most common and yet most nuanced in popular music. For many fans, gender and ethnic tropes provide contexts that are instantly recognisable. But are they also detrimental and limiting, reflecting negative cultural assumptions and aspects of society?

It is fascinating to consider the ways in which gender and ethnic stereotypes are reinforced or subverted in virtual bands. A virtual band is a medium that provides creative opportunities that are unlike other types of bands. The creators have no limits in terms of genre or style, but often still seem to be confined by gender and ethnic tropes similar to those that exist

¹ Important texts on popular music and gender include: Marion Leonard, *Gender in the Music Industry: Rock, Discourse and Girl Power* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); Lori Burns and Mélisse Lafrance, *Disruptive Divas: Feminism, Identity and Popular Music* (London: Routledge, 2002); Philip Auslander, *Performing Glam Rock: Gender and Theatricality in Popular Music* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006); Mavis Bayton, *Frock Rock: Women Performing Popular Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Matthew Bannister, *White Boys, White Noise: Masculinities and 1980s Indie Guitar Rock* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006); and others mentioned in subsequent footnotes. Important texts on popular music and ethnicity (specifically blackness) include: Ronald Radano and Philip V. Bohlman, eds., *Music and the Racial Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Steve Waksman, ‘Black Sound, Black Body: Jimi Hendrix, the electric guitar, and the meanings of blackness,’ in *The Popular Music Studies Reader*, ed. Andy Bennett, Barry Shank, and Jason Toynbee (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 64–70; David Brackett, ed., *The Pop, Rock, and Soul Reader: Histories and Debates* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Mark Anthony Neal, *What the Music Said: Black Popular Music and Black Public Culture* (London: Routledge, 1999); Ronald Radano, *Lying Up a Nation: Race and Black Music* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); and others mentioned in subsequent footnotes.

elsewhere in the music industry. Some virtual band creators use gender and ethnicity to comment ironically on popular music expectations, while others have adhered to stereotypes and have arguably gained commercial success in doing so (although whether or not that success relates directly to the use of such stereotypes is debatable).

Gender

Gender is a multifaceted social construct, linked but not equitable to biological sex. Gender studies is an equally multifaceted arena, and theorists agree that gender is a non-binary, fluid spectrum that does not have to be bound by traditional cultural expectations. By questioning why certain acts or expressions of being are so closely associated with one gender or another, gender studies has complicated traditional understandings of masculinity and femininity. Many factors (biological and otherwise) feed into why a person identifies as male, female, transgender, or any other way, and the manner in which a person expresses their gender identity need not be restricted by societal norms.

And yet, it is unfortunately easy to slip into discussions of gender that utilise a strictly binary model, and the conscientious commentator or researcher must constantly be aware of the way they choose to frame gender. Terminology must be carefully weighed and selected, ensuring that the discussion of biological sex and the different elements of gender and gender identity remain distinct. For example, the terms ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ are historically and culturally constructed concepts, which are

extremely fluid and open to discussion. As Judith Halberstam argues in *Female Masculinity* (1998), it is hard to define masculinity, but ‘as a society we have little trouble in recognizing [*sic*] it.² While her study focusses on female expressions of masculinity, and the way these have been largely ignored in popular culture and in scholarly investigations of masculinity, it is clear that strict adherence to preconceived codes linking masculinity and femininity to biological sex restricts expression and can cause strife for those who do not relate to or connect with traditional notions of gender identity.

Ian Biddle and Freya Jarman-Ivens have recently asserted that, ‘crucially, musical genres are gendered spaces and operate according to highly codified conventions.³ This statement indicates that contexts of gender expression are different across musical genres, and that the manner and means by which men and women express themselves in popular music is accordingly also different. Much of this can be traced back to social norms of the 1920s–1960s, when women did not necessarily have control over their own money, images, or careers. In popular music history, women have frequently had to fight for creative and fiscal control, and in some cases, fight for agency and to express themselves as they wished. Often, powerful men have told women how to act, perform, and dress. Men in the music industry have traditionally had more control, even if it is not complete control.

² Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (London: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 1.

³ Ian Biddle and Freya Jarman-Ivens, ‘Introduction: Oh Boy! Making Masculinity in Popular Music,’ in *Oh Boy! Masculinities and Popular Music*, ed. Freya Jarman-Ivens (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 9.

This relates directly to the ways that male and female artists have expressed their gender identity in popular music. For decades, men have experienced more freedom in gender expression: male musicians could choose to employ traditionally ‘masculine’ styles of performing and being, but gender-bending artists like David Bowie and Mick Jagger could also have hugely successful careers, becoming icons and inspirations of different versions of maleness, which explored and incorporated more traditionally ‘feminine’ expressions. Conversely, female artists have rarely strayed so far into gender ambiguity, and if they have, they have seldom reached as iconic a status as the male artists mentioned above.

The most successful ‘rock goddesses’ (Stevie Nicks, Lita Ford, Evanescence’s Amy Lee) are beautiful, thin, and must have an edge to their look – a well-placed piercing or an edgy haircut will suffice. Overwhelmingly, they must look feminine (i.e. possess physical traits that are widely identified as female traits in Western popular culture) in order to be taken seriously. Reviews of female performance often include reference to their appearance ('All eyeliner and hair, she's the spellbinding rough diamond you hope refuses to be polished.'⁴) Women in rock must choose their attire carefully, constantly negotiating between clothing that will make them look appealing but also help them to be taken seriously.⁵

A small sampling of female artists who display more traditionally masculine traits or appearance, like Patti Smith, have found great success,

⁴ Siobhan Grogan, ‘Llama Farmers/Twist,’ *NME*, 9 October 1999, p. 34; quoted in Leonard, *Gender in the Music Industry*, p. 100.

⁵ Leonard, *Gender in the Music Industry*, p. 101–103.

but the discourse surrounding these artists is usually more tied up in their lyrics and music than in their appearance. In Smith's case, she is heralded as the 'Queen of Punk,' and her lyrics are viewed and analysed as brilliant poetry. But in the earliest years of her career, Smith's choice of traditionally 'masculine' clothing was not focussed on by those analysing or critiquing her work, and was certainly not viewed favourably, unlike the way that Bowie's jumpsuits and make-up were heralded as groundbreaking. Discourse about the two artists was and is different.

This disparity between modes of expression and reception for those who identify as male and as female exists in more instances than just clothing. Demeanor, singing and speaking voices, and performance gestures are just some of the elements of an artist's persona that are often assigned a degree of masculinity or femininity. From time to time, female performers will participate in more 'feminine' acts on stage, sometimes genuinely and sometimes ironically. And still others will adopt physically or sexually aggressive personas in an attempt to shock their audiences or appropriate power. Women who engage in this behaviour find themselves subject to commentary and labels that would not be assigned to male performers behaving in the same way; men are simply being rock stars, while women must be analysed or understood when they exhibit these traits.⁶

The need to analyse or understand them stems from the fact that such exhibitions are not considered to be the 'norm' for women. Certain 'norms' of gender construction have traditionally gained a strong enough foothold that

⁶ Ibid, p. 90–96.

they are rarely stated and merely understood. As Judith Butler explains, these norms are ‘instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*.’⁷ An audience ‘knows’ what is male and what is female, without having to be told. The notion of what it is to be male or female (ontology of gender) is culturally ingrained. Gender is therefore performed, as Butler so famously argues, and there are unspoken rules of its performance. But as stated earlier, the ways in which male and female popular musicians abide by or subvert these rules are dissimilar.

Butler’s *Undoing Gender* (2004) includes much discussion and analysis of drag, or dressing in clothing that is not traditionally associated with the wearer’s biological sex. Her discussion of the reasons for drag’s popularity and why it also often garners strong negative reactions emphasises points she introduced in *Gender Trouble* (1990). Importantly, she says,

When one performance of gender is considered real and another false, or when one presentation of gender is considered authentic, and another fake, then we can conclude that a certain ontology of gender is conditioning these judgments, an ontology (an account of what gender is) that is also put into crisis by the performance of gender in such a way that these judgments are undermined or become impossible to make. [...]

The point to emphasize here is not that drag is subversive of gender norms, but that we live, more or less implicitly, with received notions of reality, implicit accounts of ontology, which determine what kinds of bodies and sexualities will be considered real and true, and which kind will not.⁸

⁷ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 191. Original emphasis. Butler also discusses the ‘understood’ nature of gender norms in society on pp. 32–34, and 187–190.

⁸ Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 214.

If such notions are being imposed on humans, they must surely also be imposed on cartoons, holograms, and other virtual band characters.

In the case of a human pop star, Butler's assertion is employed by Theresa L. Geller to discuss Lady Gaga's male alterego Jo Calderone. Gaga first appeared as Calderone in a few non-musical endeavours starting in 2010, but garnered the greatest attention when she played him in scenes with herself in her video for 'Yoü and I' (2011). Gaga later attended the 2011 MTV Video Music Awards as Calderone, never breaking character, and even accepting an award as Calderone on 'Gaga's behalf.'

Gaga has stated that she thinks Calderone is a representation of a normal, relatable male. Geller points out that Gaga has taken that normative representation of manhood and turned it into a drag show. Calderone was indeed received with mixed reviews at the VMAs; many people did not understand Gaga's performance and did not try to. Others wrote it off as just another Gaga stunt. But there is more to consider, especially when Gaga's appearance as Calderone is compared with her other outrageous appearances at VMAs past. As Geller states,

Gaga's usual VMA drag might have been yet another wave, disruptive but expected; however, Jo Calderone thaws the phallic rigidity of *Jersey Shore* masculinity by drawing attention, via drag, to the 'three dimensions of significant corporeality: anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance.'⁹

⁹ Theresa L. Geller, 'Trans/Affect: Monstrous Masculinities and the Sublime Art of Lady Gaga,' in *Lady Gaga and Popular Music: Performing Gender, Fashion, and Culture*, eds. Martin Iddon and Melanie L. Marshall (London: Routledge, 2014), pp. 209–230 (p. 216).

By manipulating these three dimensions, Gaga illuminates expectations of her audience, which explains the mixed reactions she received at the VMAs (some of the audience were clearly uncomfortable with the appearance of Calderone). Gaga's ability to draw attention to assumptions about gender normality in this way is unique to her because of her position in popular music, and her willingness and means to experiment artistically. But the gender assumptions themselves apply universally.

In the case of virtual bands, the characters' power to subvert gender norms in ways similar to Gaga is more complicated. Firstly (and quite obviously), a fictitious entity cannot make its own decisions about representation. But beyond that, anyone creating a virtual band character takes an enormous risk if they go against gender representations or standard gender performance. The creators are already asking the audience to bypass a step of logic: to 'agree' that the characters are making the music. Creators aid this by fashioning characters that only push boundaries in specific ways. There is a balance that must be struck in order to keep the audience engaged. The characters of a virtual band must be unique enough to spark interest, but familiar enough to provide a frame of reference.

Because assumptions about gender performance are so strong in culture, performers, producers, and record executives must carefully choose the ways in which they represent and subvert gender expectations. There are many examples of these meticulous decisions in the human realm of popular music. By examining the roles of men and women in various genres of popular music, one can see the ways in which human performers (and

their managers and producers) make calculated choices about the way they engage with, represent, or undermine gender norms. This is an especially important exercise for female musicians, as will be shown. The rest of this section will discuss the genres and subgenres of rock, hip-hop and R&B, and pop; using various artists, I will examine how gender is represented and performed in each. I have chosen to cover these genres in depth because they are the ones most often utilised by my two main case studies: Gorillaz (chapters 4 and 5) and Vocaloid (chapter 6 and 7).

Particularly in rock, men are assumed to be the more authentic artists, most often writing or producing the music, and taking the virtuosic roles in performance. With regards to vocals, harsh tones, lyrics about male domination, and escalating vocal aggression are all typical to what Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie termed ‘cock rock’.¹⁰ The concept of ‘cock rock’ is problematic, and has been questioned and challenged since Frith and McRobbie first introduced the concept. Indeed, Frith has stated that he feels embarrassed that the term is so commonly employed, even though he holds firm that he and McRobbie were correct in their commentary of who creates and consumes rock.¹¹ Frith and McRobbie’s use of ‘cock rock’ is binaristic in its discussion of how gender is performed in popular music, giving no room for other types of gender expression other than traditional expectations of masculinity and femininity. The article also lays out reasons why women do

¹⁰ Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie, ‘Rock and Sexuality,’ in *On Record: Rock, Pop and the Written Word*, eds. Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 317–332 (p. 319).

¹¹ Susan Fast, *In the Houses of the Holy: Led Zeppelin and the Power of Rock Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 163.

not participate as often in rock, claiming that women stay away from rock and roll because of its aggressive performance of male sexuality, which women find to be ‘unfamiliar, frightening, and distasteful.’¹² Men, according to the theory, relish the ferocious expression of male sexual dominance in rock and roll. These assertions paint a false picture that all men and all women have only one perception of sexuality, an idea that is at once essentialising and demeaning to both genders.¹³ In other words, it reinforces a picture of gender in rock and roll that is far too simplistic.

Regardless of its pitfalls, however, the idea of ‘cock rock’ signposts, albeit crudely, that men participate in rock more often than women. The number of men who produce, write, and perform in rock is larger than their female counterparts, and research by Mavis Bayton on women and the electric guitar suggests that there are complex social and economic reasons why women do not always engage with rock in the same way as men.¹⁴ Drawing on Biddle and Jarman-Ivans’s assertions that genres are gendered spaces, when women enter into genres like rock, which are socially and culturally coded as masculine, they will always enter as outsiders, no matter how they approach music making or how they represent themselves. This places women who participate in rock in a specific position where autonomy, authorship, and authenticity are not as straightforward as they are for men.

¹² Ibid., p. 162.

¹³ Ibid., p. 163.

¹⁴ Mavis Bayton, ‘Women and the Electric Guitar,’ in *Popular Music: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies, Volume I*, ed. Simon Frith (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 270–281.

A notable number of female musicians have risen to prominence as rock performers, employing more masculine vocal timbres or lyrical styles as part of their sound. For example, Joan Jett's crude vocals in songs about sexuality, rock and roll, and 'not giving a damn' about maintaining a positive female reputation drew recognition and respect from both male and female rock musicians in the early 1980s. Harsh vocals were part of her overall image: sexualised, impulsive, and dangerous.

Women like Jett, Pat Benatar, and Cyndi Lauper also use music video to control their image. These performers do not depict themselves as wilting flowers in their music videos; they are strong women, expressing strength and sexuality in their own way. They take positions of independence, usually reserved for men. When their videos feature narratives, the stories often focus on strong women making their own way in the world, or breaking free of male or familial tyranny (for example, the videos for Benatar's 'Love Is a Battlefield' [1983] or Lauper's 'Girls Just Wanna Have Fun' [1983]).¹⁵ Again, these representations of female independence and strength are specific choices that align with the personas that the performers and record labels are presenting to fans.

Beyond the singing voice, women in rock and roll are rarely considered to be gifted instrumentalists. Specifically well-discussed in popular music discourse is the relationship between women and the guitar, an instrument often linked in popular music studies to male gestures of

¹⁵ Lisa A. Lewis, 'Form and Female Authorship in Music Video,' in *Popular Music: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies, Volume II*, ed. Simon Frith (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 208–227.

sexuality and dominance. Female guitarists must be extremely accomplished to be recognised for their skill. The electric guitar has long been written about as a phallic symbol. Drawing from Judith Butler's discussion of the Phallic, Steve Waksman has written extensively on the guitar as symbol of the phallus.¹⁶ Waksman states that historically,

The electric guitar as 'technophallus' was built out of a highly charged relationship between white and black men, within which white men sought to appropriate what they perceived to be the potency of black men. The electric guitar mediated this relationship in at least two ways. Visually, it was used to accentuate the phallic dimensions of the performing male body. Aurally, the volume and distortion generated by the instrument had a similar effect, amplifying the physical presence of the performer.¹⁷

For decades, therefore, the guitar was seen as a man's domain. If the guitar substitutes for the phallus, it logically follows that men should be able to harness it, control it, and use it to prove their dominance over a musical event. While instances of females playing guitar are numerous, Bayton states that the musical, social, and cultural terrain that would allow women to flourish as equal guitarists to their male counterparts does not exist. For example, she claims, women often avoid guitar shops, which are viewed as "male" terrain,' and Bayton argues that the intimidating (male) atmosphere of these shops is not likely to change.¹⁸

Some prominent female guitarists have emerged, but their style often closely resembles that of their male counterparts. Ruyter Suys of the band

¹⁶ See for example Steve Waksman, *Instruments of Desire: The Electric Guitar and the Shaping of Musical Experience* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2001).

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 244.

¹⁸ Bayton, 'Women and the Electric Guitar,' p. 274.

Nashville Pussy is one example. Suys plays lead guitar, but she uses the same broad stance that many male guitarists use; she keeps the guitar low on her hips, positioned where a penis would be. Other elements of Suys's playing further suggest that the guitar is a phallic symbol. She whips her long hair, lies across the stage, and writhes as she plays. And she often does all this in revealing clothing or just her underwear. However, Suys's performance gestures, while mirroring male performance gestures, complicate and perhaps parody the relationship between men and the guitar. Whereas a male guitarist expresses dominance through his gestures, portraying control over the phallus and the event, Suys simultaneously recreates the male subject and serves as the female object. This arguably emasculates the men who watch her perform, while masculinising Suys. Nonetheless, she maintains a degree of control over the event, even while she performs in a complex, sexualised way.

As this example demonstrates, or parodies, rock and roll contains gestures that are coded as masculine by default. And yet, certain subgenres of rock also celebrate androgyny. Where this appears to be expected from women rock artists, whose performance styles overwhelmingly include male performance gestures, for male rockers, androgyny is optional. For men in rock, exploring androgyny allows them to be experimental and groundbreaking while never diminishing their star status. For example, the androgynous 'glam rock' genre, which grew out of the experimental representations of gender in the 1970s, used female elements to further assert male dominance over women, '[overcoming] fear of the feminine by

incorporating it.¹⁹ For female rockers, however, androgyny is more about necessity and conformity than innovation, experiment, and empowerment.

Rap and R&B are also effectively male gendered genres, in which women are more often featured as singers rather than rappers. One explanation is that these standards, '[reinscribe] a longstanding (and hopefully binaristic) stereotyping of music as feminine, concerned with senses, and of language as masculine, a rational structure.²⁰ Indeed, the idea of music as feminine and language as masculine stretches back many centuries to classical music traditions.²¹ Standard R&B forms are then the modern-day continuation of such thinking.

Of course, several female rappers have garnered immense popularity, despite their largely male counterparts. An interesting dichotomy of image construction of female rappers can be seen when comparing Missy Elliott and M.I.A. The former has a 'street' style that includes wearing baggy trousers, baseball caps, and sports jerseys; these are similar to what many male rappers wear, although Elliott will often modify the look with soft make-up and feminine jewelry. Elliott's music is usually light-hearted, with catchy hooks and lyrics that focus on fun and female appropriation of sexual freedom or power. Conversely, M.I.A. raps largely about world issues, like poverty, trafficking, and gun violence. She wears more traditionally feminine clothing, sometimes even donning traditional clothing of the women in the

¹⁹ Andy Bennett, *Cultures of Popular Music* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2003), pp. 50–51.

²⁰ Biddle and Jarman-Ivens, 'Introduction: Oh Boy!', p. 10.

²¹ See chapters 1–3 of Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); and chapter 4 of Marcia Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

areas she raps about. M.I.A. presents herself with many of the same looks that R&B female singers use – close-fitting, colourful, and heavily accessorised clothing.

In pop music, a wide variety of niche genres breeds variations on gender expectations as well, although it is safe to say that in most types of pop, the male image is not as overtly obsessed with domination and sexual potency as in rock. Meanwhile, the female image is represented in a variety of ways, from strong, resilient women to naïve ingénues who play with themes of sexual innocence, sometimes for the pleasure of men.

For instance, bubblegum pop (a genre which emerged early in the 1970s and is characterised by saccharine, catchy songs with simple chord patterns, marketed to teens) provides telling examples of gender representation. At its inception, the focus of bubblegum pop was on successful singles rather than albums; teens were more likely to be able to afford singles or EPs, rather than full LPs. Many of the early cartoon bands mentioned in chapter 1 could be classified as bubblegum pop, from The Archies to The Neptunes. One prominent trend in bubblegum pop was the emergence of family bands like The Jackson 5 and The Osmonds. While these two groups were made up of biological siblings, some family groups, like The Partridge Family, were fabricated. A simple fact united them all, however: they were kid-friendly and non-threatening. Their songs were simple and spoke of love in sweet, committed terms, never about sex and certainly not blatantly about promiscuity. Their squeaky-clean personas made bubblegum pop stars, both male and female, objects of (clean,

appropriate) desire amongst young people, skyrocketing the careers of certain musicians (such as Michael Jackson, or The Partridge Family's David Cassidy).²²

Other genres of pop also encourage gentler male identities and female identities that adhere to the more 'feminine' end of the gender spectrum, while still capitalising on 'GirlPower.' Solo male pop singers or those in boy bands often sing about monogamous, long-lasting love. Their appearance is made to appeal to women, but usually aimed at younger women and teens. They rise to prominence thanks to those young fans who scream wildly at their concerts, yet the singers often publicly wish to graduate to more 'serious' or 'mature' music (read: music that a predominantly male audience will enjoy).²³ Their movements on stage and in music videos include dancing, but not raunchy dancing or any movement that over-emphasises the phallus. Their image revolves around the idea that sex sells, but also that sex sells to girls and women in specific ways (after all, a 'good girl' cannot engage in promiscuity of any kind).²⁴

²² Don Breithaupt and Jeff Breithaupt, *Precious and Few: Pop Music in the Early 70s* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), pp. 23–29. When Jackson was first achieving fame, he was still young and prepubescent. This is noteworthy because even though a child who has not reached puberty ostensibly has a gender, the expression of that gender through adult performance gestures is complex, especially when it is done in such a public manner. Jackson received more attention than his brothers for his remarkable talent at a young age, but he also dressed and danced like them, even though they were much older. Other examples (such as David Cassidy) were teenagers when they hit their heyday. Of course, these performers' roles as objects of desire are also complicated by their young age; most, but certainly not all, of their fans were similarly aged, meaning that the vehicles that led to their stardom posited them as objects of affection or desire for the public at large.

²³ Sheryl Garratt, 'Teenage Dreams,' in *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*, ed. Simon Frith (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 399–409 (p. 400).

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 400–401.

Solo female pop singers or those in girl groups are more likely to sing with feminine tone, rather than the harsher tone of their rock and roll counterparts. They capitalise on exploiting ‘the male gaze’ (by adhering to looks that appeal to men), but convey varying messages, from songs about true or spurned love to ones about female empowerment.²⁵

These are just a few examples of Biddle and Jarman-Ivens’ ‘highly codified conventions’ referred to earlier in this chapter. The conventions are not hard and fast rules, and while they are overwhelmingly present across genres of popular music, there are also examples of more intersectional representations in popular music.

Intersectionalism refers to the idea that many elements of a person’s identity work together to create their social, cultural, and political experience. The term has been adopted by a multitude of disciplines and schools of thought, and most agree that, like the essence of the term itself, the meaning can vary based on the context of its use. It has been discussed as a ‘theory,’ a ‘framework,’ and as ‘politics’ by an array of theorists, and has been particularly employed by feminist theorists when arguing against monolithic, homogenising concepts of feminine identity.²⁶ Rather, it is argued, there are many ways of experiencing and expressing feminine identity, as demonstrated by Missy Elliot and M.I.A., discussed above. For many

²⁵ Elizabeth Eva Leach, ‘Vicars of “Wannabe”: authenticity and the Spice Girls,’ in *Critical Essays in Popular Musicology*, ed. Allan F. Moore (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 541–565 (pp. 544–548).

²⁶ Maria Carbin and Sarah Edenheim, ‘The intersectional turn in feminist theory: A dream of a common language?’, *European Journal of Women’s Studies*, 20/3 (2013) <<https://doi.org.abc.cardiff.ac.uk/10.1177/1350506813484723>> [accessed 8 November 2017] (¶ 2).

theorists, the preferred criteria for investigating intersectionalism are class, gender, and race, as these three concepts are ‘more than “merely cultural”’.²⁷

Every possible combination of class, gender, and race has its own concerns, issues, and triumphs, creating a myriad of feminist obstacles that have unique weight and meaning. Over time, popular music has adapted to include more and more representations of these unique experiences.

Beyoncé’s *Lemonade* (2016), for example, was praised as a specific representation of black feminism.²⁸ However, in the case of virtual bands, the presence of intersectionalism is often superficial. The female characters of virtual bands, especially those of non-white ethnicities, do not necessarily represent these diverse realities. In some cases, the race of female characters is not referred to in the band’s folklore, but rather, is signaled by visual rendering alone. Additionally, musical references that could be linked to the varying ethnicities of the characters are often lacking (although to mark a non-white virtual band character with an exotic or ‘different’ sound might also be problematic). I return to the question of intersectionalism later in relation to Valerie from Josie and the Pussycats and Cherry from Studio Killers (both in this chapter), and in the analysis of Noodle in chapter 5.

Ethnicity

²⁷ Carbin and Edenheim, ‘The intersectional turn in feminist theory,’ (¶ 5).

²⁸ Miriam Bale, ‘Beyoncé’s “Lemonade” Is a Revolutionary Work of Black Feminism: Critic’s Notes,’ 25 April 2016 <<http://www.billboard.com/articles/news/7341839/beyonce-lemonade-black-feminism>> [accessed 9 November 2017].

Noodle is also an interesting construction in terms of ethnicity. She is the only non-Western character in Gorillaz and has an extremely mysterious past, which not even she remembers until she travels back to Japan during her post-*Demon Days* disappearance.²⁹ The ethnicity of Noodle and other characters in various virtual bands can be revealing when examining ethnic expectations and stereotypes in popular music. Particularly germane to this discussion are assumptions about black music, as well as elements of Orientalism.

There has already been mention of the use of the guitar as a symbol of the penis (Phallus); and as discussed above, Waksman further explains that in many cases, this also serves as an appropriation by white men attempting to glean the ‘potency’ of black men. He gives the example of Eric Clapton, who was largely influenced by blues, which at the time was dominated by black musicians; Clapton was lead guitarist of the Yardbirds from late 1963–1965, but decided to leave the band when they migrated towards a more polished sound, which Clapton felt was untrue to his blues influences.³⁰ Clapton achieved great success playing with blues bands and with his solo career, and he is widely considered to be one of the world’s best guitarists. But a great deal of his playing style is due to blues influence. For example, one of his biggest hits ‘Layla’ (1971) strongly resembles the

²⁹ A thorough account of these details can be found in chapter 5.

³⁰ Waksman, *Instruments of Desire*, pp. 244–245.

vocal line from Albert King's 'As the Years Go Passing By' (1967).³¹

The potency that white musicians were trying to glean was a construction related to a long-held feeling that black music was strongly tied to the body, rather than the mind.³² Where as white (classical, Western, art) music was meant to speak to the listener's intellect, the rise in popularity of 'black music' (rhythmic, primitive, untouched) in the early 20th century was largely due to its association with the sensual.³³ While this way of thinking was essentialising, it was not necessarily meant to deride black music; black culture was considered to be uncorrupted and more natural than white Western cultures, so its music and dance were considered to be 'more directly in touch with the body.'³⁴ For those who attempted to criticise rock music in its early days, however, drawing attention to its wild and untamed nature (and its roots in black music) made for easy ammunition against the genre. Many critics labeled rock as vulgar or immoral, citing its 'tribalistic' sounds and its 'maddening effect' on the listener.³⁵

Simon Frith calls upon Bernard Gendron's argument that, 'the claim that rock and roll brought real sexuality to popular music is usually understood to be related to the claim that it brought real blackness.'³⁶ Frith goes on to explain that 'real blackness' is a complicated term, made more

³¹ '100 Greatest Guitarists,' *Rolling Stone* (online), 18 December 2015 <<http://www.rollingstone.com/music/lists/100-greatest-guitarists-20111123>> [accessed 3 March 2016].

³² Simon Frith, *Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure, and the Politics of Rock 'n' Roll* (London: Constable, 1987), p. 19.

³³ Ibid., pp. 16-21.

³⁴ Simon Frith, *Performing Rites: Evaluating Popular Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 127.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 129.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 130.

complicated by early trends in rock and roll of white performers attempting to perform in a black manner. White male rockers (Frith and Gendron cite Jerry Lee Lewis) performed wildly and rhythmically, dazzling some audience members and scandalising others. But what Lewis and others like him were truly creating was a caricature, a minstrel show of sorts. And as the popularity of such performances rose, black rockers had to become caricatures of themselves. They were playing to white audiences who had certain expectations (expectations that, ironically, had been nurtured by white rockers). Gendron notes that Chuck Berry, Little Richard, and Ray Charles all changed their performance styles.³⁷ Elements of Jimi Hendrix's performances were also labeled as minstrelisation. Because overt sexuality featured in his performance style, 'Hendrix's own "minstrel" stance seems to have been received as a sign of his authentic blackness by the white rock audiences on which his pop career was solidly based.'³⁸

Unlike the influence of black music on rock, which becomes evident upon investigation, hip-hop and R&B are styles born directly out of African-American traditions, and in the case of rap, out of the discontent and revolution of the Harlem Renaissance. Hip-hop and R&B are largely dominated by black artists today, and certain discussions within African-American studies and women's studies help to qualify hip-hop and R&B performance.

³⁷ Bernard Gendron, 'Rock and Roll Mythology: Race and Sex in "Whole Lotta Shakin' Going On",' in *Popular Music: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies, Volume II*, ed. Simon Frith (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 297–310, (p. 305).

³⁸ Paul Gilroy, 'Sounds Authentic: Black Music, Ethnicity and the Challenge of the *Changing Same*', in *Popular Music: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies, Volume IV*, ed. Simon Frith (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 182–205, (p. 191).

In his essay ‘The Modern Athlete, Hip-Hop, and Popular Perceptions of Black Masculinity’ (2008), Thabiti Lewis discusses the idea of the ‘bad man,’ a ‘motif [that] figures prominently in Black American folk culture as a symbol of resistance to racism and white oppression.³⁹ Lewis states that jazz or blues musicians were at one time considered to be the ‘bad man.’ And he argues that the idea has been more recently realised by hip-hop artists and professional athletes who refused to submit to societal rules. Hip-hop is a genre built upon expressing black dissatisfaction, and the trope of the ‘bad man’ originally aided hip-hop artists by creating an image of defiance against white supremacy.

But Lewis laments that this is no longer the case; the images of rap artists are now controlled by studios, and Lewis claims that artists are now too complicit in allowing the studios to define what it means to be a ‘bad man,’ stating, ‘The hard guise associated with bad men and expressed in hip hop [*sic*] culture is appropriated by popular culture, [*sic*] what is often lost is that hip hop is an expression of young peoples’ despair and resistance.⁴⁰

Black women in rap are likewise often trapped into stereotypes referred to as the ‘Jezebel’ or the ‘Mammy.’ These are essentialising terms that relate to race; in black feminist theory, they are viewed as two of the three categories into which black women are often placed (the third is the ‘Sapphire,’ a term based on an Amos ‘n’ Andy character who turned every

³⁹ Thabiti Lewis, ‘The Modern Athlete, Hip-Hop, and Popular Perception of Black Masculinity,’ *Ameriques*, 6:1 (2008) <<http://ejournals.library.vanderbilt.edu/index.php/ameriques/article/view/146/164>> [accessed 17 March 2014].

⁴⁰ Ibid.

discussion into an argument or blamed her husband for all her troubles. She is a ‘hands-on-hips’ stereotype of a black woman). The ‘Jezebel’ is a highly sexualised female, an object with promiscuous appetites, and the stereotype most often utilised in rap music; the ‘Mammy’ is a caring figure, non-sexualised, who exists only to nurture others. Within R&B and hip-hop, these stereotypes appear often, not only in the way that women rappers represent themselves, but also in the way that male rappers rap about them.⁴¹

These types of stereotypes and classifications emerge because of identity politics, the tendency to group others and ourselves into identities, often intended to foster ‘understanding’ between those who are different. The concept of differentiation is very important to identity politics, because it forms a large part of how we classify people: we can say what they are, and for further clarification, we can say what they are not. Throughout history, this has resulted in conceptualisations of same vs. other. And in such discussions, same is considered to be normative. But the current focus of identity study has turned to determining the class and social structures that foster the same-other hierarchies.⁴²

Important theoretical perspectives on Otherness are offered by the concept of Orientalism, particularly as formulated by Edward Said in his book of the same name. Since the publication of Said’s book in 1978, the term

⁴¹ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 69–96.

⁴² Stan Hawkins, *Settling the Pop Score: Pop texts and identity politics* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), pp. 12–13.

has grown to refer to essentialism applied toward many kinds of Others, not just those from the literal Orient (a broadly conceived geographical area defined principally by European imperialism in the nineteenth century). Said gives examples of depictions of the Orient and its people in art, literature, and popular culture throughout the centuries, but mostly during the nineteenth century. According to Said, Orientalism amounts to Western attempts to control the Orient through representations of the Orient as mysterious and beautiful, dangerous and enticing. The men of the Orient are savage or sage; the women are wild seductresses who must be tamed, but once subdued, remain loyal to their male subduers. The Orient is a place of untouched, uncorrupted beauty, but one that should be conquered and saved from itself by the people of the West. Only Western culture is developed enough, intelligent enough, and omniscient enough to know what is good for the Orient.⁴³

The creators of virtual bands use the ethnicity and genders of their characters in a variety of ways, sometimes purposefully employing stereotypes and at other times unwittingly perpetuating or dismantling ethnic and gender stereotypes. The next section will touch upon three examples: the white, male characters of heavy metal virtual band Dethklok; the female, ethnically-varied characters of bubblegum pop cartoon songstresses Josie and the Pussycats; and the feminist singer and lyricist of Studio Killers. These small case studies will serve to introduce how ideas of gender and

⁴³ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979). Orientalism will be discussed at great length in chapter 5.

ethnicity can be applied to virtual bands, which will lead directly into discussions of these phenomena in the larger case studies found in chapters 4 to 7.

Case Studies: Dethklok, Josie and the Pussycats, Studio Killers

In 2006, America's The Cartoon Network took animated bands for adults to a highly satirical level, with the premiere of *Metalocalypse* in their nightly, adult-only programming schedule, Adult Swim. *Metalocalypse* is a comedy about Dethklok, an animated band that plays heavy metal. In the world of the show, the band is extremely popular, touted as the best band in the world, and making so much money that they are 'the seventh largest economy on Earth.'⁴⁴ The show also features a group of world leaders who meet in shadowy rooms to discuss ways to bring Dethklok to its knees: religious leaders want Dethklok's Satanic music stopped, cultural leaders want the world to stop revolving around the band, and financial and political leaders want to regain control of the masses. Dethklok comprises five men who are blissfully ignorant of the hatred they garner from the most powerful people on earth, and have no idea about the massive conspiracy to eliminate them. Their realm of awareness only extends to money, drugs, alcohol, sex, and heavy metal. The two lead guitarists are from Sweden and Norway respectively, a creative choice that reflects the large volume of heavy metal

⁴⁴ 'Dethrelease,' *Metalocalypse*, Season 2, Episode 19, dir. by Jon Schnepp and Chris Prynoski (Time Warner, 7 September 2008) [on DVD].

music from Scandinavian countries since the late 1980s. The lead singer, bassist, and drummer are all American.

Each episode features at least one original song from the band, usually a mocking twist on themes in heavy metal (songs include ‘Briefcase Full of Guts,’ ‘Bloodrocuted,’ and ‘I Ejaculate Fire’). The comedy of the show thrives on male-dominated rock and roll tropes. The bandmates themselves are stupid and selfish, but ultimately crafted as a mockery of masculinity in rock. Each episode also features extreme violence, with animated fans regularly crushed to death at concerts, or Dethklok’s enemies violently killed by their bodyguards or manager, while the band members unwittingly carry on with their lives.

In his essay ‘Forging Masculinity: Heavy Metal Sounds and Images of Gender’ (2004), Robert Walser points to some heavy metal signifiers that very much apply to Dethklok.⁴⁵ He states that ‘heavy metal often stages fantasies of masculine virtuosity and control,’⁴⁶ something we see in *Metalocalypse* when Dethklok stages epic concerts on the tops of mountains or a massive flying aircraft. Walser continues, ‘Metal songs usually include impressive technical and rhetorical feats on electric guitar, counterposed with an experience of power and control that is built up through vocal extremes, guitar power chords, distortion and sheer volume of bass and drums.’⁴⁷ All of these elements can be found in most Dethklok songs, and are sometimes

⁴⁵ Robert Walser, ‘Forging Masculinity: Heavy Metal Sounds and Images of Gender,’ in *Popular Music: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies, Volume II*, ed. Simon Frith (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 343–372.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 343.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 343–344.

the focus of whole episodes. According to the band's mythology, lead guitarist Skwisgaard Skwigelf is renowned as the fastest guitar player in the world, and season 1, episode 11 centres on his virtuosity as he prepares for 'The Skwisgaard Skwigelf Advanced Hand Finger Wizard Master Class Pay Per View Event.'⁴⁸

Another of Walser's assertions about metal applies to Dethklok in a more general sense: 'Visually, metal musicians typically appear as swaggering males, leaping and strutting about the stage, clad in [...] visually noisy clothing, punctuating their performances with phallic thrusts of guitars and microphone stands.'⁴⁹ Dethklok's performance attire is plain by comparison to this description, with the characters primarily wearing jeans and t-shirts (the attire they are usually seen in – part of their character design and an aide to continuity in the animation).⁵⁰ However, they are occasionally featured in other attire that aligns with Walser's assertion, such as in season 2, episode 18, when lead singer Nathan Explosion dons a suit of medieval armour to increase the 'metalness' of his vocals.⁵¹ And Dethklok consistently exhibits the 'swaggering male' movement and 'phallic thrusts' mentioned by Walser. They headbang and use power stances in much the same way as human metal performers, and they also use guitars as phallic replacements.

⁴⁸ 'Skwisklok,' *Metalocalypse*, Season 1, Episode 11, dir. by Jon Schnepp (Time Warner, 15 October 2006) [on DVD].

⁴⁹ Walser, 'Forging Masculinity,' p. 344.

⁵⁰ The use of consistent attire for virtual band characters varies based on the band. In the case of a band featured on a television show like *Metalocalypse*, entire seasons are produced in small periods of time, and the use of uniform character design aids the artists. With bands like Gorillaz, the characters are featured in a variety of costumes because the stream of output is released much more slowly.

⁵¹ 'Dethrecord,' *Metalocalypse*, Season 2, Episode 18, dir. by Mark Brooks and Jon Schnepp (Time Warner, 31 August 2008) [on DVD].

As is typical of the treatment of heavy metal tropes on *Metalocalypse*, the guitar as phallic symbol is taken to comic extremes when bassist William Murderface plays the American national anthem at a NASCAR event using only his penis.⁵²

As Walser's article continues, he delves deeper into masculine tropes in heavy metal, but suggests that metal must constantly re-enact resolutions of masculine power and gender anxiety. It is important for metal to consistently address anxieties related to gender and power because the music's negotiations of them 'are never conclusive.'⁵³ The representation of maleness in rock and roll 'can never be definitive or totally satisfying' because the very idea of maleness is constantly changing, and it must therefore be restructured or renegotiated time and again.⁵⁴ This is why we see the same issues and themes addressed in a wide array of heavy metal, as well as its related artwork and music videos. Themes, for example, of the seduction of beautiful women and the 'rock and roll lifestyle' are prevalent, even though the overall cultural standard of beauty or the elements of the lifestyle change over time. And while Dethklok is meant to be a lovingly-crafted parody of metal (indeed, *Metalocalypse* creator Brendon Small is a devoted heavy metal fan and plays lead guitar in the live band that performs when Dethklok tours), perhaps it is logical that the male tropes and anxieties of metal should be explored in a new medium – through an animated band

⁵² 'Dethrace,' *Metalocalypse*, Season 2, Episode 11, dir. by Jon Schnepp (Time Warner, 15 June 2008) [on DVD].

⁵³ Walser, 'Forging Masculinity,' pp. 344–345.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 345.

whose music, violence, and selfishness have no physical effect on reality.

This idea of the virtual band as medium for exploration is equally applicable in other genres that are known for negotiating their own questions of gender (or any stereotype).

Dethklok has released three studio albums. Their first - *Dethalbum* - debuted at No. 21 on The Billboard 200 in 2007, while *Dethalbum II* debuted at No. 15 in 2009.⁵⁵ Dethklok has also been featured in comic books, a video game, and on many kinds of merchandise. In 2007 and 2012, Dethklok toured America. The live band, as mentioned, is comprised of Small and the musicians who provide instrumentals for the series; they play on stage while images of the band are projected above. Small said in 2007 that the tour is, 'like The Gorillaz, with the animated characters.'⁵⁶

Vastly different from the hyper-masculine world of heavy metal is the sugary realm of bubblegum pop, where we find the ultra-feminine Josie and the Pussycats, idols for girls and potential pin-ups for boys. As mentioned in chapter 1, Josie and her two female bandmates (Melody and Valerie) achieved success on Saturday morning television in two different series from 1970–1974. The girls are a mixture of female stereotypes and female empowerment, meant to appeal to young members of both genders. While the three band members had animated friends who travelled with them and

⁵⁵ 'DETHKLOK To Perform Aboard USS Midway Battleship At San Diego Comic-Con,' *Blabbermouth*, 13 July 2012 <<http://www.blabbermouth.net/news/dethklok-to-perform-aboard-uss-midway-battleship-at-san-diego-comic-con/>> [accessed 17 October 2013].

⁵⁶ 'Dethklok's Brendon Small: "This Show is for Guitar Geeks",' *UltimateGuitar.com*, 27 October 2007 <http://www.ultimate-guitar.com/interviews/interviews/dethkloks_brendon_small_this_show_is_for_guitar_geeks.html> [accessed 9 October 2013].

appeared in all episodes of the series, I will focus solely on the musicians, discussing their character traits and appearances, and the ways in which these elements adhere to or subvert expectations of females in rock.

First is Josie, the red-headed, plucky leader of the gang. She plays lead guitar and sings. Josie's guitar is the only guitar in the group, and she is never exhibited as having more than rudimentary playing skills. This aligns with the assumption that women do not become proficient guitarists and rarely achieve virtuosity. In the musical numbers featured in each episode of the show, there are more instruments heard than the instruments played by the girls on screen, but the audible presence of these instruments is never explained. Josie's vocals are soulful, playful, and pleasing. She, like the other girls in the band, performs at gigs wearing a leopard-print leotard with long sleeves and a high neckline, leaving the character's legs exposed; all three girls also wear leopard-ear headbands when they play. Throughout the show, Josie is portrayed as intelligent and witty, kind but unafraid of confrontation. She is not just the musical leader of the band, but also the leader of the entire group of friends who travel from town to town playing shows and solving mysteries.

Next is Melody, the blonde 'bimbo' of the group. Melody is the drummer, but her intelligence only stretches to keeping steady rhythms. Her ignorance and cluelessness are major comedic elements of the show. She is beautiful and dresses fashionably when not in her performance attire. Melody is extremely likeable and well-intentioned, but she is modeled on the stereotype of the blonde airhead. Her drumming is basic but sufficient, and

in her animated performances, she swings her hair back and forth to the rhythm and smiles widely.

Completing the Pussycats' line-up is Valerie, the African-American tambourine player and most intelligent member of the friend group. Valerie is often the first to put together clues to solve the mystery in each episode. She is levelheaded and rather sassy, though she does not exude the 'hands-on-hips' trope found in some female black characters. Importantly, Valerie is treated as an equal in the dynamic of the group, and others look to her for solutions. Valerie's role as tambourine player in the band is rather disappointing and confusing; the reasons for not giving her another guitar or a keyboard, instruments that are seen in plenty of other Hanna-Barbera cartoon bands of the time, are unclear. However, it is not unreasonable to conclude that the creators of the show linked Valerie's position as a rhythm instrumentalist to ideas about black cultural heritage and blackness in music, even though her white counterpart Melody was already playing a prominent rhythm instrument. In Universal Pictures 2001 live-action film of *Josie and the Pussycats*, Valerie plays bass guitar; perhaps this is an endeavour by the filmmakers to create a more well-rounded instrumental ensemble, or perhaps it is a change intended to portray a black character in a different light than many preceding representations of black characters in popular music culture. A dissection of the assumed links between blackness and rhythm will be undertaken in chapter 4's discussion of Gorillaz' fictitious percussionist Russel Hobbs. But as those links are examined, it will be clear that the animated character of Valerie also aligns with them.

Beyond Valerie's role as tambourine player, and therefore her association with rhythm and primitivist racial stereotypes, there is little musically in Josie and the Pussycats that could be linked to an African-American influence. Josie and the Pussycats' music employs basic pop structures and chord progressions, with some influence from rock and roll but very little influence from genres like jazz or funk. Valerie is not depicted as singing backing vocals, although (as mentioned in chapter 2) vocal harmonies from an unknown source are audible on several Josie and the Pussycats tracks; because we cannot firmly identify her singing voice, it is impossible to know if her singing contains traits of vocalisation heard in gospel, reggae, or other distinctive styles that grew from African traditions.

Just as surprising, considering the era in which the cartoon thrived, is that Valerie does not face plot points in the television series that would have been common to African-Americans of the time. Granted, she was a character on a show geared towards children, and the subject matter was often light. But African-American children would have been watching, and compared to the number of white characters in Saturday morning cartoons, Valerie was one of only a few black characters represented. As mentioned before, Josie and the Pussycats premiered in 1970, six years after Jim Crow laws were abolished in the United States. Yet in the bands' travels, Valerie never dealt with issues that would have been pertinent to an African-American woman in a country that viewed itself as post-racial but which was

most decidedly not.⁵⁷ Valerie did not face racism, and she also did not face increased danger, criticism, or systemic resistance because of the intersection of her female and black identities. She held a place of esteem in her friendship group, a dynamic which was potentially intended to foster optimistic feelings in children of colour, and to encourage white children to embrace black children as equals. While noble, these intentions did not (and still do not) accurately portray what black women encounter in the United States. She is therefore an example of the superficial intersectionalism mentioned earlier in this chapter; her representation as both female and black does not advance the narrative of black or intersectional feminism.

Yet, to over-analyse Josie and the Pussycats and the way they mirror popular music gender and ethnic stereotypes might be a misstep. For example, with regards to Josie's rudimentary guitar playing, the performance portion of each episode largely employed limited animation. The same bopping and basic strumming motions were recycled repeatedly, copied over new backgrounds into each episode. Josie was animated using convenient techniques that were prominently used in similar programmes featuring male guitarists, so the simplistic depiction of her playing was not necessarily intended to stereotype women guitar players.

At the same time, the stereotypes which are present in Josie and the Pussycats are enlightening about cultural tropes of the 1970s, and can be

⁵⁷ The New York Times ran an article in the early 1970s that contained the word 'postracial,' using it to describe a group of Southern-American government officials who 'believed that their region had "entered an era in which race relations are soon to be replaced as a major concern".' Anna Holmes, 'America's "Postracial" Fantasy,' *New York Times* (online), 30 June 2015 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/05/magazine/americas-postracial-fantasy.html>> [accessed 7 November 2017].

revealing about which societal assumptions translate into successful virtual band characters, especially when viewing these tropes in light of the show's target audience. It is also revealing to see that the tropes in Josie and the Pussycats remain applicable and recognisable to audiences of today. Even though there are many female popular music acts that have broken these stereotypes (Blondie was never represented as a 'bimbo,' for example), modern audiences still recognise and can easily relate to the tropes present in a show more than four decades old.

While elements of Dethklok and Josie and the Pussycats closely align with gender and ethnic expectations, some bands do indeed challenge certain gender and ethnic stereotypes in their output. It is far too generalising to state that all virtual bands fall prey to the same tropes that are prevalent within other types of popular music. One such example is Studio Killers, a virtual band with a rather mysterious backstory. Even according to their creators, 'No one knows where they came from; one day they were just here staring back at us through our high definition flat screens.'⁵⁸

One of their creators is graphic designer and artist Eliza Jäppinen; she is responsible for the band's visual output, and by contrast to Hewlett (who designs and animates Gorillaz), brings a feminist perspective to Studio Killers' lead singer and lyricist, Cherry. Cherry (sometimes referred to as Chubby Cherry) is a short, curvy female character with a large, round face, heavy thighs and midriff, and relatively small breasts. She is always drawn

⁵⁸ 'Studio Killers' <<https://www.youtube.com/user/StudioKillers/about>> [accessed 19 September 2017].

with smeared or running eye make-up, and she has large smatterings of freckles underneath her eyes. Her make-up bears resemblance to a Pierrot clown, a type of clown known for its sadness; Cherry's lyrics and the themes of the music videos she stars in illustrate that she is a 'sadder but wiser' character. She sings about the untrustworthiness of men and her empowerment as a woman, and the words she has penned tell the audience that she has learned these things through experience. Her sometimes morose words of warning are placed over the top of joyful-sounding, catchy synth pop, a juxtaposition that is at once jarring and enticing. A sad clown is therefore an apt metaphor for Cherry.

In addition to her smudged make-up, Cherry is sometimes depicted with bags under her eyes, as if she has not slept in awhile; she also bears stretch marks around her knees, and her stomach spills over her waistband. While she does have classically beautiful facial features (symmetrical face, plump lips, vibrant green eyes), her body shape reflects a more average female shape than the tall, thin figures of Vocaloid characters.

But Cherry's female-positive aspects are not restricted to her appearance. The band's music is full of lyrics about female empowerment. Studio Killers' output is largely comprised of upbeat synth-pop, with prominent use of drum loops and synth patches. The tunes are catchy and could easily qualify as club anthems. Cherry's singing is sensual and unpolished, and often explores a vocal range that is low in the female register. Her voice has a breathy, gravelly quality to it, like the aspirated vocals on 'In Tokyo' (2013). In short, Cherry's singing voice is not

immediately recognisable as female to the listener. (Importantly, Cherry has an online presence that includes a fashion vlog and a video diary, and her speaking voice sounds very much like a woman, although the voice actor is not credited. It is solely Cherry's singing voice, therefore, that is ambiguous.) Cherry's singing voice aligns with the character's construction (there is little about her that aligns with a traditional, binary conception of 'female'), but has also led to speculation that the singer who provides her voice is not female. One of the most common theories is that Cherry is voiced by Teemu Brunila, a Finnish male singer who fronts the band The Crash. Indeed, Brunila's vocals and Cherry's are quite similar, but Studio Killers have never revealed who performs Cherry's voice.

The possibility that Cherry's singing might be performed by a male vocalist complicates her representation. A powerful, clever, female character voiced by a man seemingly contradicts the point of creating such a character. It is also a direct parallel to the question of monsterization discussed in chapter 2. As with the example of Semenya's speaking voice, the difference between Cherry's female appearance and the ambiguity of the gendered qualities of her singing voice could qualify her as a 'monster.' But as with the example of Vocaloid discussed earlier, the voice that is linked to Cherry is not particularly Other. While it may not strike the listener as particularly female, it is most certainly human. It does not alienate but rather exhibits strong emotion and human expressiveness in each song. The emotions are relatable, and even expressions of sarcasm are discernable at moments. For example, the description of the man in 'Eros and Apollo'

(2013) is tinged with sardonic explanations of the traits that draw women to him. A sarcastic ‘Wow!’ follows verse two, as if Cherry is rolling her eyes at his non-existent merits. Whether the voice is male or female, it is clearly human and not alien.

Beyond the sound of the music, the lyrics that Cherry writes are focussed on feminist issues and the dynamic between men and women, including warning fellow women about men with poor intentions (‘All Men Are Pigs’ [2013]), holding men accountable for sexualising women and exploiting their male privilege (‘Ode to the Bouncer’ [2011]), and depicting a passionate, devoted lesbian relationship between two best friends (‘Jenny’ [2013]). A closer investigation of these particular tracks reflects these feminist themes.

In ‘All Men Are Pigs,’ Cherry’s witty lyrics specifically refer to Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986), the prominent French feminist, philosopher, and social theorist who championed female sexuality and wrote some of the most well-known treatises on feminism (1949’s *The Second Sex*, for example). Cherry quotes the men she claims are only out to seduce women, noting their disdain for de Beauvoir and feminism at large:

I’m the swan that crashed on your lawn.
 Yeah, I’m the boy that will heal you, fix you up.
 Because I’m not typical,
 And Simone?
 You are just cynical.
 I am better than you think.
 Let me buy you a drink.
 Cha’mon, I’m not so typical.

Her response to this kind of talk? ‘All men are pigs.’

The track does not have a fully animated video on the Studio Killers

website or YouTube channel, but the band have posted a Karaoke loop video that includes all of the lyrics. In the video, tiny cartoon men with pig heads pelvic thrust around the edges of a large insignia that features Cherry in the middle. Cherry wears a wolf mask pushed back to the top of her head so that her face can be seen, and she casts her blinking eyes to the side with a disinterested look on her face, as if she is listening to the overused lines of a man trying to pick her up. To her left and right in the insignia are her bandmates Goldie Foxx and DJ Dyna Mink. Foxx and Mink are both male characters, who, importantly, are credited with creating all of the instrumental elements of the music, while the singing and the lyrics come from the female character; these roles within the group align with gender roles often seen in popular music. In this video, however, Foxx and Mink are relegated to the same position as the other men: they wear pig masks covering their faces. The visual juxtaposition of the female as the predatory wolf and the men as pigs, while the singer warns of males who would belittle women in order to seduce them, provides an amusing layer of ironic meaning to the song.

Likewise, the video for ‘Ode to the Bouncer’ reflects the ideal of women owning their sexuality, not shying away from it. The song speaks of a bouncer at a club door who wields his power:

It's futile to debate
With St Peter at the gate
Made of protein milkshake
And low carb intake.

‘Cause all in all, you’re just another prick at the door.
[...]

Bouncer, empowered and aroused,
I see it in your trousers,

And in the way you browse her.
 Look she's in!
 [...]

So you can play karate,
 You thick illiterati.
 I'm a black belt in life,
 So go home to your ugly wife.⁵⁹

The reference to protein milkshakes and low carb intake tells the listener that the bouncer is a muscular man, and that he is body obsessed. She also refers to him as 'You thick illiterati,' which completes the stereotypical picture of a bulked-up, slow-witted man guarding the door. Cherry refers to his sexual arousal at being in charge of letting people into the club, and specifically to the way that he investigates the appearance of the women in the queue before admitting them. Cherry suggests here that she does not fit the bouncer's criteria of attractiveness in order to be let in; she is rebelling against his authority, and uses her sexuality and her wit to try to gain admission. Cleverly, the line, 'All in all, you're just another prick at the door,' is a nearly exact musical quotation of the line 'All in all, you're just another brick in the wall,' from Pink Floyd's 'Another Brick in the Wall' (1979).

The video depicts Cherry dancing in a highly sexualised way; she straddles and shakes the bouncer, who is drawn as a large silhouette of a man wearing a zippered mask with glowing yellow eyes. She rips off his mask, revealing only a white skull underneath. The video shows close ups of

⁵⁹ This line, so obviously derogatory to another woman, is problematic to the feminism espoused by Studio Killers. To insult another woman, especially one who cannot defend herself, is contradictory when one considers how much time Cherry spends warning other women about men, or how she celebrates Jenny in 'Jenny.' Cherry's brand of feminism is very often about female empowerment, so this is a strange moment lyrically.

her animated breasts bouncing as she sings, ‘Bounce-, bounce-, bouncer!’ She glides her hands along her body sensually as she dances, clearly demonstrating that her sexuality is vital, and that she will not allow it to be ignored. She is unashamed and in control of the way she uses her sexuality.

In the video for ‘Jenny,’ Cherry is seen driving with her best friend Jenny, a young black woman with yellow glasses. The two friends ride in a car together to a club, where Jenny embraces a large man that the lyrics imply is her boyfriend. But Cherry implores Jenny to forget about him, saying that she loves Jenny and has longed to be more than friends.

Jenny take my hand, ‘cause we are more than friends.
I will follow you until the end.
Jenny take my hand. I cannot pretend
Why I never like your new boyfriends.

Oh, your love for them won’t last long.
Forget those amigos.

I wanna ruin our friendship.
We should be lovers instead.
I don’t know how to say this,
‘Cause you’re really my dearest friend.

The lyrics paint a picture of a strong friendship and the singer’s great romantic devotion to Jenny. The choice to depict Jenny in the video as a black woman reflects a desire for inclusivity and representation for more than just white women. Additionally, Cherry’s representation as a lesbian or bisexual woman in this song illustrates intersectionality in Studio Killers’ output. It allows a female protagonist to relate the experience of a homosexual love and desire, an important voice that is potentially relatable to many women. In the video, Cherry whispers her true feelings to Jenny at the

club; she and Jenny flee together on a motorcycle, escaping Jenny's boyfriend and his friends, who morph into wolves, and the two women disappear into the jungle as Jenny morphs into a tiger and Cherry rides her away to safety.

While the story in the video may be meant to have truly occurred between the characters (after all, Studio Killers exists in a fabricated, animated universe that has its own rules), it is also possible that the entire narrative is a fantasy, playing out in Cherry's mind. Perhaps Jenny is bisexual and abandons her boyfriend to be with Cherry, or perhaps Cherry only desperately wishes she would. The end of the story that blends the metamorphosis of some characters into what was previously a realistic club scene suggests that perhaps this is all Cherry's dream, and that she does not get to be with Jenny in reality.

The fact that Cherry (white, female) remains human while all other characters become animals is noteworthy. The men becoming wolves relates to much of the band's output about Cherry's rejection of men. This is an important aspect of the band, and as gender expectations for women in pop go, is a very unorthodox recurring theme. By creating a large amount of music about Cherry's observations that men are not worth the trouble they cause and that they cannot be trusted, Studio Killers present a character that is more outspoken, stronger, and (admittedly) more bitter than most female voices in pop.

The transformation of Jenny is rather more complex, however. Even though Jenny is black (her nationality is never made clear, but the hue of her

skin suggests African ancestry), she turns into an animal that is indigenous to Asia. Her fierceness and desire to protect Cherry is linked to an animalistic fervor. However, the animal is exotic and not directly linked to the visual clues about the character's race; it serves as a representation of Otherness in the character that does not have a clear motivation. Why a tiger and not another animal?

The exotic visuals of the tiger are accompanied by exotic sounds in the music. Each verse of 'Jenny' includes steel drums playing underneath Cherry's vocals. The timbre of the steel drums layers in with the underlying drum and bass texture that is found on many Studio Killers tracks. The drums provide a Caribbean flavour to the song, suggesting that perhaps Jenny has links to the West Indies.

The relationship between the 'exotic' Jenny and Cherry could be interpreted as a straightforward representation of same-sex attraction and love. This theme has emerged in several songs in the past decade released by prominent female pop stars. For example, Lady Gaga's public identification as bisexual illuminates the meaning of 2008's 'Poker Face,' but heterosexual female stars also release songs about same-sex female relationships. Rihanna's 'Te Amo' (2010) paints a female relationship in turmoil; curiosity and experimentation were the themes of Katy Perry's 'I Kissed a Girl' (2008). Whether the musician identifies as gay or not does not prohibit her from singing about a lesbian encounter. Based on the number of songs that feature lesbian relationships, it seems they are more acceptable to depict in popular music than gay relationships, an observation that reflects

the idea that lesbianism is overall more acceptable because it is pleasing to the male gaze.⁶⁰ However, that does not mean that female artists who choose to include such elements in their songs do so for male approval. In certain cases, the act of depicting a same sex attraction or relationship between females by females may be an act of empowerment.

The feminist aspects of the Cherry character are not surprising when one investigates her creator. Jäppinen has some very specific thoughts about the dynamic between men and women in society, and about the (sometimes disingenuous) roles that women are often asked to play in their everyday lives. Jäppinen began her career working in an office where she was the only female, and she reflected in a May 2017 interview that, at the time, she was young and believed that her ability to alter her actions and her attitudes to match those of her male counterparts was a credit to her. She states, ‘You don’t realize you’re part of the sexist picture. You often feel better than other girls because [...] you’re being accepted as one of the guys, when actually, you’re just being a macho sexist to yourself and thinking it’s okay. But it really isn’t.’⁶¹

Jäppinen also speaks about gender and ethnic expectation in her work as an animator and the creator of a virtual band, saying,

We are [...] so influenced by visual things. And this is the thing – I don’t know how we’re going to tackle [issues of] race and gender and all these things because they’re so visible. I don’t think we’re

⁶⁰ Jude Elund, *Subversion, Sexuality and the Virtual Self* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), pp. 114–115 [Google ebook].

⁶¹ Lilian Darmano, ‘SPECTRUM: Eliza Jäppinen,’ 12 May 2017, *Motionographer* <<http://motionographer.com/2017/05/12/spectrum-eliza-jappinen/>> [accessed 26 September 2017].

supposed to all look the same. I don't think that's the answer – but instead, I think we're supposed to keep pressing the 'random' button on what we see culturally. Like, let's have the 'blue-haired-president.' The 'black-doctor-scientist-ninja'! We need to spruce it up all the time. Always try to be subversive in some little way.⁶²

The interviewer spoke with Jäppinen more than once in the months preceding the publication of this interview. In one of their earliest conversations, she asked Jäppinen about creating characters that reflect certain races and genders. At the time, Jäppinen felt that 'changing the world for the better requires time, and that designing a white, male character could be used as an "entry point" for an audience as something familiar.'⁶³ Jäppinen even said that characters of other ethnicities or genders could be 'bounce[d] off' of the white, male character, who would serve as a reference point. However, a few months later, the interviewer revisited the question, and Jäppinen's answer had changed. Upon further reflection and 'observing recent current events around the world,' Jäppinen changed her answer.⁶⁴ Even though Jäppinen acknowledges that from a business perspective, it may not be advisable to become too radical with one's approach to a project, 'we should demand more from ourselves and one another in the name of progress in general.'⁶⁵

The important thing to note from this is that Jäppinen is actively thinking about these questions and trying to create art that challenges the

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid. The interview does not specifically name the world events that changed Jäppinen's view.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

status quo. She wrestles with gender and ethnicity and the way it is represented in popular culture. The change in her answer over time also shows that she is willing to change her thinking and adapt it to the world around her. This type of engagement with difficult issues is reflected in Studio Killers' output, and positions them as a virtual band that is actively pushing against gender and ethnic expectations.

Overall, Studio Killers provides a strong female character in Cherry; the band also has made conscientious choices about its representations of ethnicity in its output, specifically through the character of Jenny in the 'Jenny' video. They are a good example of a band that provides unexpected or fluid representations of gender, sexuality, beauty, and more.

Conclusion

The question of gender and ethnic construction in virtual bands will be discussed in more detail through case studies presented in chapters 4 and 5, with specific consideration for the band members of Gorillaz, and with most attention given to Noodle, the only female character in the band. Chapters 6 and 7 will dissect the popularity, appearance of, and fan folklore surrounding female Vocaloid characters. These chapters will address how these more contemporary examples of virtual bands reinforce or subvert gender and ethnic stereotypes. It will become clear that the connection between virtual band characters and popular culture tropes is still strong, decades after the first examples of these characters appeared. These connections are a vital part of marketing virtual bands, because they give fans a frame of reference

for understanding and engaging with new characters. The following case studies will attempt to outline the reasons for the success of Gorillaz and of Vocaloid, and to draw a connection between that success and the gender and ethnic familiarities found in their characters' construction.

Chapter 4

‘Spitting Out the Demons:’ Gorillaz’ Creation Story and the Construction of Authenticity

Gorillaz is one of the most successful, influential, and meticulously crafted virtual bands. Founded in 1998, the band’s first album *Gorillaz* sold over seven million copies, and the follow up *Demon Days* went seven times platinum in the UK and double platinum in the US.¹ These two albums and their associated music videos received numerous accolades and award nominations, including six Grammy nominations, eight BRIT Awards nominations, four Billboard Video Music Awards nominations, NME’s John Peel Award for Innovation (2006), and numerous MTV Video Music and Europe Music Awards (including Best Song for ‘Clint Eastwood’ in 2001 and Best Group in 2005). Their next release *Plastic Beach* also met with success, debuting at number two on both the UK Album Chart and the US Billboard 200; a flood of nominations for EMAs, VMAs, Grammys, and a GQ Award win for Band of the Year followed. When their fourth album *The Fall* was released, it received largely favourable reviews, but was mostly praised because it was recorded entirely on Albarn’s iPad during the North American Escape to Plastic Beach tour. Through all of their endeavours, Albarn and Hewlett managed to create something unique and successfully marketed it towards a more mature audience than the vast majority of virtual bands that have preceded them. They brought virtual bands into the mainstream.

¹ ‘Gorillaz,’ BBC <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/music/artists/e21857d5-3256-4547-afb3-4b6ded592596>> [accessed 28 October 2015].

When the band first emerged, Albarn and Hewlett were relatively quiet about their involvement. It was no secret that they had formed the band and were responsible for its visual and musical output, but they shied away from interviews and kept public information about their creative process to a minimum. When they did speak about their creation, the language of their motivations was similar across different interviews and articles: Gorillaz was a response to the current popular music climate of the time, with its predictable music played by pre-fabricated celebrities. In interviews from the time, Albarn repeatedly spoke about the cult of personality, and the nature of celebrity:

The whole pop aesthetic is more and more about personalities and you can get carried away with that and end up being let down. [...] Humans are such fragile creatures and the whole nature of celebrity screws you up. Look at all the manufactured bands in the world. Even those that claim not to be are, in some way. Bands such as Coldplay are a little bit too clean to be real. Then there's Westlife, A1. [...] Gorillaz is about trying to destroy that and take it further, to manufacture something with real integrity. It requires a leap of faith.²

Gorillaz was meant to be something new, something created to push the existing limits of the manufactured pop group. In a slightly contradictory statement from the same month, Albarn told *The Observer* that, 'We – I mean they – are a complete reaction to what is going on in the charts at the moment. [...] Everything is so manufactured these days. [...] Gorillaz are different. They may only appear in cartoon form, but believe me, they are

² Albarn in *Metro*, as quoted in Martin Roach and David Nolan, *Damon Albarn: Blur, Gorillaz and Other Fables* (Shropshire: Independent Music Press, 2007), p. 161.

larger than life.³ This would suggest that Gorillaz was meant to be entirely different from the manufactured output of the day, rather than a parody or ‘logical conclusion’ of manufactured music.⁴ Albarn commented that,

everything seems so manufactured these days, even the kind of, well, the kind of tradition that I come from, indie, even that’s manufactured now, you know? So, I think we just felt that, let’s just sort of play everyone at their own game, and make something better, that’s manufactured, that’s actually good.⁵

While statements from Gorillaz’ creators are contradictory (they claim their product is a manufactured reaction against manufactured bands), it is certain that Hewlett and Albarn were parodying the popular music industry when they created the band. The term parody is complicated. In common usage, parody often refers to a comical re-imagining of material that the parodists wish to denigrate, but in a more extensive interpretation, Linda Hutcheon has defined parody as, ‘a form of imitation characterized by ironic inversion, not always at the expense of the parodied text.’⁶ Indeed, the relationship between the parodied and the parody is complicated by the fact that the original Greek (parodia), which forms the root of ‘parody,’ featured a prefix (*para*) that can mean ‘against’ or ‘beside,’ the latter suggesting ‘an accord or intimacy instead of a contrast.’⁷

As revealed in interviews contemporary to the creation of the band, Albarn and Hewlett were disillusioned with popular music, and with popular culture at large. But this disillusionment does not mean that the goal of

³ Albarn in *The Observer*, as quoted in Richardson, *An Eye for Music*, p. 203.

⁴ Roach and Nolan, *Damon Albarn*, p. 160.

⁵ Ibid., p. 162.

⁶ Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody* (New York and London: Methuen, 1985), p. 6.

⁷ Ibid., p 32.

Gorillaz was to alienate or defame the popular music industry. Instead, it seems that Albarn and Hewlett used their knowledge of the popular music industry, and their intimacy with its workings, to create a commentary on the state of popular music. This idea will be important to recall during further discussion in this chapter of the ways Gorillaz employs stereotypes and takes those stereotypes to new levels.

What Gorillaz achieved with their parody was a crossing of genre boundaries, serving as an outlet for Albarn's musical ideas (that according to him were unique and artistic, instead of the same old recycled beats and melodies found in other artist's musical output). But the question remains: was it ever possible for Gorillaz to be truly groundbreaking when they purposefully played on stereotypes and cultural expectations? The answer is a complex one, especially in relation to the creators' use of gender and ethnicity in the formation of their characters.

The origins of Gorillaz – as constructed by Hewlett and Albarn – are consistent with those of numerous prominent bands. In Gorillaz' official folklore, a misfit kid struggles and fails to make it; then a near-death experience, a chance meeting, and an ad placed in *NME* bring four artists together. According to the story, Murdoc purchased an ad in the music magazine seeking a guitarist; the text read, 'Global phenomenon seek guitarist for World domination. Blah blah blah. GSOH required. No hippies, etc...⁸' Given these beginnings, the trajectory of Gorillaz seemed steeped in normalcy; however, the careful crafting of Gorillaz' story and the online

⁸ Browne and Gorillaz, *Rise of the Ogre*, p. 29.

culture that grew because of the folklore reveal that there was more happening. Perhaps more interesting than a group of cartoons winning Grammy and Billboard Music Video Awards is the careful construction that caused societies worldwide to embrace the cartoons as real entities, as autonomous artists, and as gifted musicians and performers.

It is also interesting to note that Hewlett and Albarn built themselves into Gorillaz' folklore; they are satellite characters, consulting with the band on certain albums, directing or producing music videos, or even giving musical lessons (a device used to explain why 2D's singing sounds so similar to Albarn's, who voices the character on albums but not necessarily in interviews). On the band's first album *Gorillaz*, Albarn is credited with only backing vocals in the liner notes.

This chapter will begin by briefly outlining previous academic discourse on Gorillaz, which is surprisingly small given the band's status and the myriad questions it raises. There are only a few texts dedicated to the band, and a small number that mention them; I will use these texts to summarise existing discussions about Gorillaz. Some of these do include discussion of gender and ethnicity within Gorillaz, but they do not begin by investigating gender and ethnicity as the main issue. Any argument related to gender or ethnicity found within these texts has been introduced in correlation to another aspect of Gorillaz, rather than serving as the point of departure. Nevertheless, these perspectives on gender and ethnicity are valuable and useful. I will then move on to discuss the specific and detailed backstory of Gorillaz. A close investigation of the band's official folklore will

reveal that a great deal of attention was paid to crafting the characters and building a believable alternative reality in which they could exist. I argue that the gender and ethnic traits we see in Gorillaz' characters reflect Hewlett and Albarn's interpretation of gender and ethnicity, and of gender and ethnic tropes in the popular music industry at large.

Special focus will be given in this chapter to the three male characters in the band: Murdoc, 2D, and Russel. The personal backstory of Noodle, the only female in the group, will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter. The extremely detailed folklore surrounding Gorillaz is important to my argument that Gorillaz is perhaps not as groundbreaking as it was meant to be, at least not in terms of the way it deals with its characters' gender and ethnicity. A discussion of the ways the characters align with or subvert ethnic and gender stereotypes in rock and roll will show that Albarn and Hewlett relied heavily on existing tropes in popular music, tropes that were key in helping Gorillaz fans accept the characters as rock stars. The story of each album and the themes that emerge from them advance the overall Gorillaz legend, and vice versa. The folklore paints a slightly altered universe, while staying grounded enough in the reality of popular music to provide a reference point for fans.

Finally, I will briefly discuss Gorillaz' fanbases and the ways in which they engage with Gorillaz' music and multimedia output. Marketing for the band contains elaborate opportunities for fans to immerse themselves in Gorillaz' fictitious world, and the Internet provides a platform for them to do so instantaneously. I will provide examples from Gorillaz fansites that reflect

the degree to which Gorillaz fans suspend their disbelief and submit to the heightened universe of Gorillaz.

Academic Discourse on Gorillaz

One of the most thorough discussions of Gorillaz can be found in chapter 6 of Richardson's *An Eye for Music*. In this chapter, Richardson focusses on framing Gorillaz within surrealism studies, as well as using the band to discuss current trends in virtual reality. To do so, he explores a wide array of aspects of Gorillaz' construction, including Albarn and Hewlett's motivations for creating the band, Albarn's musical influences and career, and genre-bending in much of the band's output. He uses certain Gorillaz performances (the 2005 VMAs, 2006 Grammys, and others), songs ('Clint Eastwood' [*Gorillaz*]), and videos ('Feel Good Inc.' [*Demon Days*]) to examine ways that the band hearkens back to surrealist movements throughout history. Richardson proposes ways that Gorillaz attempts – and succeeds only to certain degrees – to break boundaries and forge new models. Richardson also touches on ethnic and gender stereotypes present in the band, and these observations will be referred to later in this chapter.

Richardson's chapter on Gorillaz is expansive, mentioning a great number of aspects of the band's construction. One of the chapter's first goals is to analyse Gorillaz as an embodiment of virtual reality. Richardson recounts Baudrillard's most well-known assertion that copies and simulations in today's mainstream (digitally-driven) society have distorted reality and left only hyperreality, which alters signification to the point that it becomes

useless.⁹ Baudrillard's theory seems hopeless, for he offers no solution to escaping hyperreality. What is real has been transformed into the 'hyperreal,' which is a construction built by those in power, by capitalists for consumption by workers. They engineer the world so that perception is malleable and controllable.¹⁰ Baudrillard points to the idea that with enough money, mass perceptions of 'reality' can be altered. However, Baudrillard does propose that hyperreality can be subverted by surrealist forms, and Richardson believes that this is exactly what Albarn and Hewlett were attempting to do when they created the band. In short, Gorillaz exists as an entity within the mainstream that aims to parody or subvert the mainstream.¹¹

Richardson moves on to discuss a framework from Manuel Castells to illustrate how a virtual reality experience in our current culture is not a lesser or secondary experience. According to Castells, today's means of human-to-human interaction often happen in 'spaces of flows,' so that direct contact is not as important within modern societies as it once was. Any reality, be it tangible or virtual, is 'communicated through symbols.'¹² Additionally, temporality is becoming a far less important consideration when investigating human interaction because our multitudinous means of communication de-emphasise chronology. Richardson explains that with modern forms of instant communication available at any time, 'the logic of timelessness and instant communication substitutes for the traditional emphasis on chronology

⁹ Richardson, *An Eye for Music*, pp. 205–206.

¹⁰ Jean Baudrillard, 'Simulacra and Simulations,' 1981, in *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings*, ed. Mark Poster, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 169–187.

¹¹ Richardson, *An Eye for Music*, pp. 205–206.

¹² Ibid., p. 207.

and temporal sequence.¹³ For these reasons, distinctions between ‘real’ and ‘virtual’ begin to blur.

All of this is helpful when considering reception of Gorillaz, because it provides yet another explanation for how such creations slip seamlessly into our culture. At this point, Richardson shifts his line of enquiry to discuss other aspects of the band: the balance of human/creator influence against the presence of the cartoon musicians, and a dissection of the music for ‘Clint Eastwood’ (both on the album and in live performance) and the video for ‘Feel Good Inc.’ Richardson explains how Gorillaz’ criticism of the culture industry is manifested in their output.¹⁴ He draws together this analysis with his earlier points to solidify the link between Gorillaz and surrealism as he draws the chapter to a close. After all, as Richardson says in his conclusion,

Perhaps [Gorillaz’] deployment [of Derridean deferral] has a critical edge, with the partial withdrawal of the ‘real band’ from the public eye allowing audiences to re-examine their relationship to acts that employ more conventional modes of representation, and to recognize their own alienated condition as propagated by a nonbenign and dehumanizing music industry.¹⁵

In other discourse, a chapter on Gorillaz in *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Virtuality* was contributed by the book’s editor Shara Rambarran. Her work gives a basic breakdown of characters and brushes over the virtual

¹³ Ibid., p. 207.

¹⁴ One of the ways Richardson achieves this is through an insightful dissection of the ‘Feel Good Inc.’ video. 2D repeats the words ‘Feel good’ twenty-one times in the track, an ironic ‘churning out [of] the party line’ that 2D must recite, even though he is visibly detached from and depressed by the capitalistic elements of the music industry that surround him. Ibid., p. 231. Likewise, Richardson argues, the prevalence of zombie references in Gorillaz’ folklore and the ‘dehumaniz[ation]’ of the Gorillaz characters (especially of 2D in the ‘Feel Good Inc.’ video) ‘stand in allegorically for alienated human subjectivity in an increasingly mediated and consumption-orientated world.’ Ibid., pp. 231–232.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 236.

space of Kong Studios that can be found on Gorillaz.com (I will return to this later in this chapter). Like Richardson, Rambarran uses the music and video of ‘Feel Good Inc.’ to explore the themes of the song. Her purpose is to establish a possible ‘Third Meaning’ for the song, in line with Barthes’s concept of the third meaning in media: that ‘infinite’ element that ‘outplays the interpretation’ of the ‘informational’ and ‘symbolic’ levels found in the first and second meaning.¹⁶ The third meaning can be hard to establish, and indeed may be different for everyone, so Rambarran’s interpretation is offered as one possible reading. She focusses in depth on the music of the song, using lyric analysis to suggest that the song is about Gorillaz’ desire to escape from the music industry and its crushing control. She then uses the music video and the ways in which its imagery complements the lyrics to explain the third meaning; she argues that the video hints that the music industry is actually trying to seduce Gorillaz into compliance, and that the band (2D especially) finds this depressing and desires to rebel against it.¹⁷

In addition to Barthes, Rambarran’s chapter calls upon Baudrillard’s theory of the ‘orders of the simulacra,’ of which, she claims, simulation is the most germane to a discussion of Gorillaz. Within Baudrillard’s framework, simulation is achieved when the “original” cannot be detected: the representation of the simulation blurs the boundaries between reality and

¹⁶ Shara Rambarran, “‘Feel Good’ with Gorillaz and ‘Reject False Icons’: The Fantasy Worlds of the Virtual Group and Their Creators,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Virtuality*, eds. Sheila Whiteley and Shara Rambarran (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 148–165 (p. 154).

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 150–159.

fantasy, and is usually digitally produced.¹⁸ Of course, Baudrillard argues that there is no reality, only hyperreality. The constructs of capitalism have removed the real and replaced it with a heightened or hyperreal version of reality. The ties between Baudrillard's theories and Gorillaz fall into place because Gorillaz are human-like without being human, virtual without being robots or cyborgs; they are 'neither real [n]or unreal.'¹⁹

Other research on Gorillaz includes a recently-completed PhD thesis by Alex Jeffery, which takes *Plastic Beach* as its principal case study in a discussion of transmedia narratives in which music is the primary text.²⁰ A 2010 Masters thesis from the University of Wyoming discusses Gorillaz as a postmodern construction, with many elements of pastiche and folklore that create a space for 'play'.²¹ Neither of these studies discuss gender constructions or ethnic tropes in depth. The remainder of this chapter will attempt to do precisely that, in order to further illuminate the pervasiveness of such stereotypes in virtual bands and in the popular music industry at large.

Masculinity in Gorillaz

The three male characters in Gorillaz mirror a variety of masculine tropes that are common in rock and roll and hip-hop. Some of these stereotypes are pushed to the furthest possible limit, which suggests that these character

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 150.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 150.

²⁰ Jeffery's work will be further discussed later in this chapter.

²¹ Renaud, Matthew, 'Respect false icons: A postmodern analysis of hip hop culture and the advent of virtual bands' (Masters thesis, University of Wyoming, 2010).

elements were specific choices by Albarn and Hewlett. Indeed, Albarn used male examples to describe his efforts in creating the band: ‘If you can believe in figures such as Eminem and Marilyn Manson, why not get your head around something which takes that to its logical conclusion?’²² These stereotypes are played out through the unfolding of Gorillaz’ folklore, which provides fans with exactly the same traits as other figures in the popular music industry, but presented as caricatures that expand or reimagine each trope in comical, satirical, and other ways.

In the detailed alter-universe of Gorillaz’ backstory, Murdoc Niccals is credited as the founder of the band. He is the ‘visionary’ who wanted to start a ‘global phenomenon.’ According to the story, Murdoc was born in Stoke-on-Trent on 6 June 1966; his mother is unknown, rumoured to have given birth while still a patient in nearby Belphagor Sanitorium. Murdoc was raised by an alcoholic, abusive, overbearing father, and, at the age of seven, was sent away to Sodsworth Comprehensive School.²³ The suggestion that Murdoc lived at school in his youth provides an intriguing element to the character. If Murdoc was indeed boarded at school, his father would have incurred the expense. Murdoc’s description of events relates that his father could not wait to send him away. And yet, for many families, boarding children at school is something that only the wealthy or privileged can afford. Moreover, in the UK educational system, comprehensive schools do not offer boarding; this is the preserve of the private (in English ‘public’) system.

²² Roach and Nolan, *Damon Albarn*, p. 160.

²³ Browne and Gorillaz, *Rise of the Ogre*, pp. 13–14.

Immediately, questions arise about the authenticity of Murdoc's tortured youth: was he more privileged than his story suggests? If he was privileged, how would that affect his relatability as a rock star? Of course, the abuse he suffered from his father could have been carried out in any privileged, wealthy household. But the story is not as straightforward as it may at first seem, especially when considering the layered and dynamic class relations that are still present in Britain today.

Importantly, Murdoc turned to Satanism as a teenager, striking a deal with the devil that earned him Satan's bass guitar ('El Diablo') in exchange for Murdoc's soul.²⁴ Like many of his rock counterparts, Murdoc is said to have started a variety of bands that met with no success before he founded Gorillaz.²⁵ Throughout all of the media and print materials created about Gorillaz, Murdoc is consistently painted as the one who tries to alienate, disgust, and arouse his bandmates and fans in a variety of misguided ways.

There are many things about Murdoc's history and outlook that position him as a typical rock and roll 'badass.' The story of Murdoc obtaining 'El Diablo' aligns with a long tradition of folklore in which musicians sell their souls to the devil in return for musical talents. From notorious violinists Nicollo Paganini and Giuseppe Tartini, to tragic blues guitarist Robert Johnson, to countless fictitious characters in film and television (Tommy Johnson in *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* [2000]; Bobby Shelton in *O God! You Devil* [1984]; Peter Tork in 'The Devil and Peter Tork,' season 2,

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 15–16.

²⁵ Among these are the wonderfully named Motley Dude, The Stupid Name Gang, Patchouli Clark, and Kiss 'n' Make Up. Browne and Gorillaz, *Rise of the Ogre*, p. 16.

episode 20 of *The Monkees* [1968]), the idea of the devil trading musical prowess or bewitched instruments for the right to own the musician's soul is a familiar one, and always associated with those who display extraordinary musical talent, and who are almost exclusively male. The rumours of Satanic intervention are never assigned to those who simply play their instrument well; any musician believed to have made a deal with the devil plays in a manner which is unpreceded or inexplicable to current tastes and trends. With this trope built into Murdoc's folklore, the audience can assume that he and his bass guitar possess something otherworldly.

Unlike many other musicians in actual and fictional history who have had devilish rumours circulated about them, Murdoc embraces the story, and practices Satanism openly. He does not shy away from the idea of Satanic gifts, but uses the tale to establish his dominance in the popular music world. Since Murdoc himself tells the story of his interaction with the devil in *Rise of the Ogre* (2006), we have some reason to believe it is false, but it reflects the unrelenting masculine bravado that is essential to the character's construction, a trait often found in rock musicians. Although the Satanic elements of Murdoc's character are perhaps not as sinister as those found in certain male-gendered genres, such as black- and death-metal, and many human Satanic bands, such as Marilyn Manson, Morbid Angel, Behemoth, and Deicide, the discourse we hear and read from Murdoc invites fans to relate him to other male artists who employ dark elements and motivations in their careers.

Whether driven by Satan or poor temperament (or comical writers), Murdoc unashamedly carries on with his dastardly ways throughout Gorillaz' history. He is consistently disrespectful and verbally abusive to the other members of the group (particularly 2D). In interviews, he makes enormous decisions and announcements about the band without consulting anyone. He destroys hotel rooms, ruins relationships with venues and promoters, and fails to maintain any hygienic standards required in polite society. Most of his antics are amusing and light-hearted, and hardly any reflect a truly evil side.

But his potential for evil falls into question during certain parts of the story. For example, Murdoc admits to devising an elaborate plot with Wee Jimmy Manson (a satellite character in the Gorillaz' folklore, who was psychologically unstable and became the head of Gorillaz' label in the United States) to murder all the other members of Gorillaz so that Murdoc could start a solo career, coasting on the hype of his recently deceased bandmates, with Wee Jimmy Manson playing in the backing band.²⁶ The video for 'El Mañana' (2005) depicts Murdoc's attempt at murdering his bandmates, and at the end, we see Noodle disappear in a fiery crash. For months, fans speculated about her whereabouts or whether she was even alive. By the time a new album was in the works and with Noodle still missing, Murdoc used some of her DNA to create Cyborg Noodle, a replacement that could act as guitarist for the group, and could also serve as Murdoc's bodyguard.

²⁶ Browne and Gorillaz, *Rise of the Ogre*, pp. 273–274.

However, despite all these sinister and outwardly diabolical plots, Murdoc discloses in the final chapter of *Rise of the Ogre* that the entire plot was devised in order to do away with Wee Jimmy Manson instead. Murdoc's seemingly evil plan was a ruse to protect his bandmates, helping them escape the machinations of Wee Jimmy Manson and other larger forces that had plagued the band since the 'Feel Good Inc.' video.

After the 'El Mañana' incident, Murdoc became involved in illegal arms dealing with a mysterious entity known as The Black Cloud. Yet again, this 'evil' side of Murdoc is not what it seems, as it soon became known that the weapons he sold were not real. The Black Cloud set out to find and murder him, so Murdoc burnt down the band's home and production studio (Kong Studios, refurbished from an abandoned and haunted insane asylum), faked his own death, and fled to an island known as the Plastic Beach (the location that lent its name to the band's third album). The island was not a natural formation, but rather a collection of ocean debris, plastic, and litter that had floated together to form a strong enough foundation for Murdoc to build a new studio. The band members would reunite at the Plastic Beach shortly thereafter under strange and dangerous circumstances (discussed in chapter 5).

Murdoc's other male, British cohort, Stuart '2D' Pot is not exactly smart, but his gentle tones and effortless good looks earned him a spot as Gorillaz' frontman. In the folklore, the character was born in Crawley New Town on 23 May 1978. 2D grew up and eventually found a job in a music shop (Uncle Norm's Organ Emporium) in Stoke. Murdoc and 2D met when

Murdoc drove his car through the shop in an attempt to steal equipment for his new band. Murdoc's car landed on 2D's face, knocking out one of his eyes and leaving him in a catatonic stupor. Murdoc was arrested and as part of his punishment, he was sentenced to take care of 2D. Later, 2D lost his second eye but regained his mental faculties in another driving accident with Murdoc at the wheel.²⁷

Murdoc gave 2D his nickname because of the two dents in his head made by Murdoc's two driving accidents, and dubbed him the lead singer and keyboardist of Gorillaz. It did not take long for Murdoc to realise that 2D would make a great frontman: 'There he stood [...] "love's young deity": whippet-thin, spiky, deathly-white pallor, black-hole eyes. Awkward and angular, like a speed-ridden corpse with Grade Eight keyboard skills. Perfect!'²⁸

2D's tall, thin, handsome yet tousled appearance is indeed a well-known look for frontmen, especially when we compare him to other prominent frontmen of the 1990s to early 2000s when Gorillaz was first emerging. Like the slender, stovepipe clad silhouette of Weezer's River Cuomo, or the pretty, high cheekbones of Fall Out Boy's Pete Wentz, 2D's 'awkward and angular' looks give him the same appearance as many frontmen. Indeed, Albarn himself is handsome, and in his Blur frontman days, he was slight and brooding. The similarities are instantly apparent. As Richardson points out, 'Albarn clearly resembles zonked out, post-punk

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 20–23.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 23.

prettyboy 2D in both physical appearance and body language.²⁹

For the frontmen of rock, a masculine appearance or demeanor has never been a prerequisite to a masculine identity. The gender-bending traits and performance practices of ‘rock gods’ in genres like hair metal or glam rock have attracted huge male followings for decades, and have been discussed at length in a great deal of popular musicology studies.³⁰ Consider, for example, the swaggering, sexually ambiguous persona of Mick Jagger. In the 1960s, Jagger’s attitude, demeanor, and performance style became crucial to defining men in rock, and rock culture at large. As Norma Coates observes, this was because Jagger was one of the most influential rock stars at a time when rock journalism was growing quickly; rock journalism was investigating a diverse number of aspects of rock and roll and bringing them to consumers in weekly, biweekly, or monthly installments. So Jagger’s opulent lifestyle, featured and discussed in many outlets of rock journalism, became a standard for other rock performers and for fans.

Coates emphasises,

Jagger was charismatic, flamed the desires of both sexes, lived an increasingly flashy lifestyle, and dated the most beautiful woman on the pop scene, singer Marianne Faithfull. [...] Indeed, the relationship with Faithfull defused his provocatively ambiguous

²⁹ Richardson, *An Eye for Music*, p. 210.

³⁰ Articles and books about this phenomenon are plentiful. For example, see Sheila Whiteley, ‘Which Freddie? Constructions of Masculinity in Freddie Mercury and Justin Hawkins,’ in *Oh Boy! Masculinities and Popular Music*, ed. Freya Jarman-Ivens (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 21–37. See also Simon Frith, *Performing Rites*, specifically the chapter on ‘Performance,’ pp. 203–225. Currently, Carla Shriever is conducting as yet unpublished field research of Prince’s ‘Purple Army’ that will focus on how the feminine traits of the performer appeal to a male, white, heterosexual fanbase between the ages of 40–60.

public sexuality, moving the perception of it from the negatively-charged ‘deviant’ to the more positive ‘decadent.’³¹

This precedent of ambiguous male gender and sexuality has spread across genres and decades and is still common today.

The fact that the standards for masculinity in rock are moveable and malleable is thrown into even sharper light when we consider the more stringent rules for femininity in rock, as discussed earlier in chapter 3. The difference is substantial. In contrast with aspects of image construction and females in rock and roll, the vocal sounds of the male ‘rock god’ do not have to align with their gender. In much the same way that guitar solos ‘shred’ and thereby show prowess in rock recordings and performance (and are laced with performance gestures of dominance and phallocentrism), the use of falsetto in male popular musicians is a technique that expresses passion and skill. For example, Marvin Gaye’s use of falsetto in the sexual anthem ‘Let’s Get It On’ (1973) signals his growing desire, and Robert Plant’s crescendo into falsetto in ‘Stairway to Heaven’ (1971) evokes power and is the climax of one of the most iconic prog rock songs recorded.

Importantly, the voice is more linked to ideas of authenticity in the performer than any other instrument. As Simon Frith asserts, ‘Even when treating the voice as an instrument, in short, we come up against the fact that it stands for the person more directly than any other musical device.

³¹ Norma Coates, ‘Whose Tears Go By? Marianne Faithfull at the Dawn and Twilight of Rock Culture,’ in *She’s So Fine: Reflections on Whiteness, Femininity, Adolescence and Class in 1960s Music*, ed. Laurie Stras (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 183–202, (p. 186).

Expression with the voice is taken to be more direct than expression on guitar or drum set, more revealing.³²

In this light, 2D's role as singer becomes extremely important to establishing the overall authority of the band; his physical image must match the sound being produced, so his resemblance to a young Albarn becomes key to Gorillaz' construction. 2D uses falsetto in several tracks in the Gorillaz catalogue, which is unsurprising when one considers Albarn's affinity for it. The sound is sweet, soaring, and often emotional. And while it is a more feminine sound, it reaffirms 2D's place in popular music by aligning him with a tradition of male falsetto in rock and roll.

Ethnicity in Gorillaz

Gorillaz' sole black character – Russel Hobbs – brings questions of ethnicity into the band's construction, emphasised by his backstory, his sense of rhythm, and the addition of dub and reggae styles into the Gorillaz catalogue. My aim in this section is to analyse how race is portrayed and functions within Gorillaz, with particular focus on ethnic stereotyping and the contested concept of 'black musical identity.'

In Gorillaz' story, Russel was born in Brooklyn, New York, on 3 June 1975. He was sent to live in the UK for his own protection, as the only surviving witness to a drive-by shooting that killed all of his friends, including Del (a character in the Gorillaz folklore based on human rapper Del the

³² Frith, *Performing Rites*, p. 191.

Funky Homosapien). The spirit of Del possessed Russel in an attempt to escape death, and Russel channels him as Del the Ghost Rapper on ‘Clint Eastwood’ and ‘Rock the House,’ two singles from *Gorillaz*. Russel views himself as an open receptacle for spirits of many kinds, having been possessed by demons and ghosts at various periods of his life. This links Russel to the racist stereotype of black or non-white people existing as vessels for talent.³³ Rather than talent being inherent to their race, they serve as the object through which inspiration passes, like a ghost living inside and delivering rhythms and lyrics through the vessel. It also, as will be discussed further below, plays into the idea of ‘black music,’ in particular the notion of black music as the channeling of oral cultures, sounds, and songs passed down aurally, in contrast to Western literate traditions.

According to the band’s folklore, Russel’s possession by Del and his other rapping friends after the drive-by shooting is partly responsible for his remarkable rhythmic ability.³⁴ Their souls can also be channeled through Russel’s ‘legendary Hip Hop Machine,’ which he describes with fondness and reverence in *Rise of the Ogre*,

Russel: That box contains every beat known to man. The thing’s irreplaceable. It’s the TARDIS of the hip hop [sic] world. Its rhythms span both time and history, right across the Universe. Never mess with that machine – it’ll eat you whole.

As the big man says, the machine is a towering hybrid of every drum machine, beatbox, rhythm-track, breakbeat and sample ever created. The fact that it also contains the souls of many dead

³³ Kevin Gaines, ‘Duke Ellington, *Black, Brown, and Beige*, and the Cultural Politics of Race,’ in *Music and the Racial Imagination*, eds. Ronald Radano and Philip V. Bohlman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp. 585–602.

³⁴ Browne and Gorillaz, *Rise of the Ogre*, pp. 23–25.

drummers that roll endlessly round its circuits, well, you can see why the box is so highly coveted. Now you can't buy that kind of equipment out the back of Exchange and Mart, can you?³⁵

Throughout Gorillaz' four albums and numerous B-sides, Russel channels the souls of rappers, drummers, and other musicians.

As stated before, Russel is the only black character in Gorillaz, but he is also the only American character in the band. In *Rise of the Ogre*, Murdoc touts him as one of the world's greatest living percussionists, and an asset to the band who Murdoc was particularly keen to recruit. Russel's rhythmic authority (as well as his ability to encapsulate all the rhythms, backbeats, and samples of the world into the 'legendary Hip Hop Machine') is easily tied to his ethnic background. Russel's blackness is linked to his rhythmic prowess, as black music has historically been perceived as having particular traits, especially bold, wild, or 'primitive' rhythmic structures.³⁶

In a long tradition of arts discourse, black culture has often been associated with the body, while white culture has been associated with the mind. In music, white musicians were considered to be cerebral, pulling from what was seen as the intellectual, classical music canon (i.e. Bach and Beethoven), while black musicians were seen as emerging straight from the jungle and into the dance hall. Black art, specifically music, was seen as passionate and pulsating, emerging from a different, animalistic place within

³⁵ Ibid., p. 27. It is interesting to consider here that the 'legendary Hip Hop machine' makes a fitting symbol for the medium of virtual bands by and large. The machine is a postmodern pastiche instrument, drawing on many sources. Virtual bands often include elements of pastiche, with many influences and musical ideas combined together to form a coherent entity.

³⁶ See Bernard Gendron, *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club: Popular Music and the Avant-Garde* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

the performer. Of course, these perceptions were essentially popularised by white society.³⁷

In his ‘Open Letter about “Black Music”, “Afro-American Music” and “European Music”,’ Philip Tagg attempts to dismantle these stereotypes and question their continued prevalence in academic discourse and in the popular music industry as a whole.³⁸ Terms like ‘Race,’ ‘R&B,’ ‘Blues,’ and ‘Soul’ have been used to categorise music or as genre descriptors in popular music for decades.³⁹ Tagg disassembles the practice of using such labels from both a musicological and an ideological standpoint. He begins by pointing out how common the use of terms like ‘black music’ and ‘European music’ are, when in fact,

the meaning of the terms seems to be taken for granted. We are all implicitly expected to know exactly what everybody else means and to have clear concepts of what is black or African about ‘black music’ or ‘Afro-American’ music, just as we are presumed to have a clear idea about what is white or European about ‘white’ or ‘European’ music. [...] Very rarely is any musical evidence given for the specific skin colour or continental origin of the music being talked about.⁴⁰

Tagg elaborates on the problem by using dictionary definitions of ‘Black’ and ‘White,’ terms which are racial but not racist; the entries explain ‘Black’ and ‘White’ as descriptors linked to people of indigenous African or Australian Aboriginal descent, or to people of Caucasian descent respectively. But as

³⁷ Gendron, *Between Montmartre and the Mudd Club*, pp. 103–116.

³⁸ Philip Tagg, ‘An Open Letter about “Black Music”, “Afro-American Music” and “European Music”,’ *Popular Music*, 8:3 (1989), pp. 285–298, [accessed via <<http://www.tagg.org/articles/xpdfs/opelet.pdf>>, 10 March 2016], p. 1–18. This version includes an introduction that importantly reminds the reader of the social context of the time it was written, 1987, although the arguments still hold up and are largely applicable today.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

Tagg points out, if we choose then to label music as ‘black’ or ‘white,’ we must be willing to admit that the elements of the music that earn its label are physiologically linked to blackness or whiteness, and are not resultant from cultural development.⁴¹ This is dangerous territory, and it can quickly spiral into essentialism and racism.

Tagg also gives great weight to rhythmic expectations for ‘black music;’ this analysis is important to discuss here, as so much of Russel’s contribution to Gorillaz is rhythmic. Tagg argues that specificity must be employed when discussing elements of music; for example, a rhythmic figure that is well-documented in Sudanese music could be labelled ‘African’ and contrasted with ‘European music’ that lacks any examples of the figure. But calling the figure representative of ‘black music’ is imprecise. And it is even more incorrect to say that syncopation is an inherent trait of black music, as there are well-known examples of syncopation being used in madrigals and chamber music composed in Europe centuries ago.⁴²

However, although Tagg’s letter focusses on essentialism in music, and while it makes some interesting, valid points, there is more to consider about historical constructions of black music, and black identity in general. In Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, he argues that black identity cannot be strictly confined to a simple definition of that which culturally originated in Africa. In fact, he states, cultural nationalism (in this case, the notion that black identity and culture is ‘sealed

⁴¹ Ibid., pp. 3–4.

⁴² Ibid., pp. 7–10.

off hermetically' from the Western cultures who invaded and colonised Africa) is dangerous, for it does not reflect the mutual influences that Africans and their oppressors had on each other.⁴³ There is, therefore, a culture that is African and European and Caribbean and American simultaneously: a Black Atlantic culture.

With regards to music, Gilroy painstakingly draws a historical portrait of black music after slavery. It is important to note, he says, that the terror of slavery had a direct influence on black music; slaves were kept from literacy and other forms of shared or recorded knowledge, but they could express themselves and their pain with music. As Gilroy says, 'Though they were unspeakable, these terrors were not inexpressible, and [...] residual traces of their necessarily painful expression still contribute to historical memories inscribed and incorporated into the volatile core of Afro-Atlantic cultural creation.'⁴⁴ Music therefore played and plays an important role in black culture during and since slavery, but that role is fragile and often falls prey to manipulation or distortion. Gilroy points to 'distinctive attributes of black cultural forms' that 'have struggled to escape their status as commodities and the position within the cultural industries it specifies.'⁴⁵

It is therefore important not to dismiss wholly the notion of 'black music,' for this music serves an important purpose for black communities

⁴³ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993), p. 2.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 73.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 73.

(and holds up an important mirror to white communities). As Tricia Rose explains,

oppressed people use language, dance, and music to mock those in power, express rage, and produce fantasies of subversion. These cultural forms are especially rich and pleasurable places where oppositional transcripts, or the ‘unofficial truths’ are developed, refined, and rehearsed. These cultural responses to oppression are not safety valves that protect and sustain the machines of oppression. Quite to the contrary, these dances, languages, and musics produce communal bases of knowledge about social conditions, communal interpretations of them and quite often serve as the cultural glue that fosters communal resistance.⁴⁶

In a manner that may at first appear contradictory to Rose, Stuart Hall theorised as far back as 1988 that representations painted by the term ‘black’ were shifting drastically in British culture. ‘Black’ had once been used as a hegemonic description for many types of Otherness in Britain (whether it described actual black culture or African or Caribbean people was beside the point). But Hall signposts what he believes to be a change in political and cultural studies: the idea of representation was beginning to be understood as having a constitutive role, rather than a reflexive one.⁴⁷ In other words, representation (and its ‘scenarios’ – ‘subjectivity, identity, politics’) has an active role in society, rather than a passive one. Hall says this new way of viewing representation should bring an end to the ‘essential black subject’ because such a construction can no longer exist; ““black” is essentially [sic] a politically and culturally *constructed* category, which cannot be grounded in a

⁴⁶ Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1994), pp. 99–100.

⁴⁷ Stuart Hall, ‘New Ethnicities,’ in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, eds. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 441–449, (p. 443).

set of fixed trans-cultural or transcendental racial categories and which therefore has no guarantees in nature.⁴⁸

While Rose's analysis upholds the idea of the subversive power of 'black' culture and music, and Hall's seems to suggest that the term 'black' is too vague and does not have a strong enough grounding to be useful, the two are not as contradictory as they may seem. Both angles approach the idea of 'blackness' from the perspective of empowerment for black communities. It is at once the non-essentialising concept of representation and the history of black resistance through cultural products that give black people the power of the term 'black.'

Russel's birth and childhood in the largely black community of Brooklyn, New York, in the 1970s would have had an impact upon him musically. Brooklyn was and is an enormously diverse borough, with large African American (and Hispanic) communities throughout; their presence is a result of the Great Migration that brought scores of African Americans north between 1910–1970 in search of civil rights that they were not receiving in the south. Neighbourhoods like Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant have been hailed as black cultural meccas, comparable to Harlem in Manhattan, and (if he was real) Russel would logically have been exposed to a variety of musical experiences during the early years of his life there.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 443. Original emphasis.

⁴⁹ For a discussion of hip-hop culture that includes ways in which Brooklyn's neighbourhoods were influential, see Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal, *That's the Joint! The Hip-Hop Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

As previously mentioned, Russel's rhythmic authority is augmented by his ability to channel dead musicians. Russel's channeling ability therefore provides a unique opportunity to apply Stanyek and Piekut's ideas of agency and the intermundane. Because the deceased speak through Russel, these moments function as collaboration between the 'living' (although that term is admittedly problematic since the living contributors here are fabricated) and the dead (who, ironically, were once truly alive). In a playful way, this collaborative effort provides agency to both the 'living' and 'dead' animated characters. Gorillaz' ability to harness musically the words and rhythms of deceased rappers lends legitimacy to their prowess in the studio; they can take control over something supernatural for their own musical means, which is quite a feat for a band of animated characters. Simultaneously, in the same way that recordings of deceased human artists are used by living human artists and producers for new purposes, 'dead' rappers who collaborate with Gorillaz through Russel attain agency because their voices and messages are heard from beyond the grave.

Russel's channeling ability can be viewed from two perspectives when considering his race. In Russel's case, the channeling of dead musicians might subvert the black cultural stereotypes of corporeal creation, but more likely, it aligns with those ideas.

Russel's ability to channel the dead comes straight from his mind, where the rapper's souls reside. In the purest of senses, the ability is therefore cerebral. However, the ability to channel a spirit is often associated with the occult, and is found in voodoo practices, which are linked to black

culture and can be traced to religions in the Caribbean and in West and Central African countries. Ceremonies that invoke spirits also traditionally include music and dance. In ceremonies where a spirit is channeled, the vessel through which the spirit speaks is often operating subconsciously. They move and speak, but frequently claim to remember nothing of the event once it is over.⁵⁰ Indeed, for Russel, channeling causes him to enter a trance-like state, depicted in music videos for the tracks in which he channels. He might continue to drum, but does so mechanically and without any mental presence. This would suggest that the rhythm is not cerebral at all, but is rather a manifestation of Russel's body, or rather, a special talent housed within Russel's body.

Russel's role as a vessel for the dead, specifically for his rap 'ancestors,' is an important nod to Caribbean and African traditions, and is also a clear example of the intertextual nature of the character. Russel uses channeling in musical texts that include elements of hip-hop, reggae, rock, and pop. But channeling can be found in other music of various black cultures, especially African-American cultures. Its inclusion in the character of Russel arguably serves as a homage to the channeling tradition of a wider cultural heritage.

That cultural heritage is one in which great attention must be given to written (and to musical) texts, as Henry Louis Gates, Jr, argues. As black

⁵⁰ Peter Manuel, Kenneth Bilby, and Michael Largey, *Caribbean Currents: Caribbean Music from Rumba to Reggae [Revised and Expanded Edition]* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006), pp. 146–151. One of the field studies discussed in this section was observed at a ceremony in a basement in Brooklyn.

people worked and fought to prove themselves as human, and not merely subhuman, especially in the 18th and 19th centuries, the written word was an important medium for them. The written word was considered by white critics to be a litmus test for black intelligence, and black authors, scholars, and thinkers worked diligently to produce texts that would prove their intelligence and worth.⁵¹ Writing became a strategic manoeuvre for the black community, who rose to and met the standard of expression and intellect that dominant white culture had placed before them.

The written texts of black authors also include what Gates refers to as ‘Signifyin(g),’ a complex term that he differentiates from the homonym ‘signifying’ that is used in Western (white) standard English.⁵² Signifyin(g) in black literature refers to a knowing use of rhetorical figures and games, ‘function[ing] to name a person or a situation in a telling manner.’⁵³ It differs from signifying in white literature by the complexity of its possible meanings or interpretations; it can refer to the cajoling, joking nature of a text, or talking around a subject without ever explicitly addressing it, or parodying a topic, or making fun of someone or something. Gates refers to Claudia Mitchell-Kernan’s hypothesis that ‘Signifyin(g)’ in black discourse is effective because

⁵¹ Henry Louis Gates, Jr, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 127–131.

⁵² Gates uses a bracketed *g* each time that he refers specifically to the black term ‘Signifyin(g)’ as opposed to the white term ‘signifying.’ He states that, ‘The bracketed *g* enables me to connote the fact that this word is, more often than not, spoken by black people without the final *g* as “signifyin.”’ This arbitrary and idiosyncratic convention also enables me to recall the fact that whatever historical community of Afro-Americans coined this usage did so in the vernacular as spoken, in contradistinction to the literate written usages of the standard English “shadowed” term.’ *Ibid.*, p. 46. Where I have similarly used ‘Signifyin(g)’ in my text, it is with the same meaning and intention as Gates’s use.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

often those it parodies or mocks do not understand that they are being parodied or mocked.⁵⁴ And Gates rightly observes that such Signifiers exist in music as well; for example, ‘Signifyin(g) in jazz performances [...] is a mode of formal revision, it depends for its effects on troping, it is often characterized by pastiche, and, most crucially, it turns on repetition of formal structures and their differences.’⁵⁵

All of these statements could be used to describe Gorillaz, and specifically, Russel’s role within the group. Gorillaz was established in order to break the monotony of the forms of popular music as Albarn and Hewlett saw them. The band employs tropes, including tropes within its characters, like Russel’s rhythmic prowess and his channeling. Because channeling is a well-known element of African and Caribbean religious traditions, Russel’s ability to channel functions as a knowing representation of a recognisable cultural artefact. Additionally, the musical output of Gorillaz relies heavily on pastiche. The music draws together instruments, styles, artists, and references that come from a variety of sources. These include, as discussed above, elements that align with Russel’s African-American heritage, but also the borrowing of The Kinks’ ‘Sunny Afternoon’ for the melody of the chorus in ‘Feel Good Inc.,’⁵⁶ and the audio from zombie films edited into tracks like ‘M1-A1’ (*Gorillaz*). The band clearly aims to repeat and assign difference to the expectations of popular music audiences. Gorillaz functions as a

⁵⁴ Henry Louis Gates, Jr, *Figures in Black: Words, Signs, and the ‘Racial’ Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 241.

⁵⁵ Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*, p. 52.

⁵⁶ Richardson, *An Eye for Music*, p. 233.

Signifyin(g) ‘structure of intertextual revision,’ because it revisits and reimagines tropes and ‘rhetorical strategies’ found in other popular music.⁵⁷ From its simultaneously recognisable and unique characters to its employment of AABA pop music song structures on many tracks, Gorillaz is constantly referring to and manipulating what has already been created by popular music.

Russel’s ability to channel the rappers began because of a drive-by shooting, an event that sheds further light on Russel’s relation to black culture. Drive-by shootings are related to hip-hop culture, and his survival adds further credibility to him and his musicianship. Drive-by shootings are viewed as common gangland activity and are also the subject of a number of hip-hop songs by a wide variety of artists. Experiencing a drive-by (whether as the victim or the perpetrator) enhances one’s ‘street cred.’ Stories of such shootings are included in rap for a variety of reasons, from bemoaning the state of African American relations and ‘black on black’ crime (Compton’s Most Wanted’s ‘Hood Took Me Under’ from *Music to Driveby* [1992]); to memorialising lost friends (Notorious B.I.G.’s ‘You’re Nobody [Til Somebody Kills You]’ from *Life After Death* [1997]); to elevating oneself to godlike status for surviving (Tupac’s ‘Hit ‘Em Up,’ a B-side to 1996’s single ‘How Do U Want It’).

Songs that discuss elements of violence like drive-by shootings have proven popular with hip-hop fans, not least because it is an important marker of authenticity. Eric K. Watts argues, ‘My point is not simply that these artists

⁵⁷ Gates, *Figures in Black*, p. 242.

exemplify a “street” orientation in their artistry and in their lives, but that there exists a spectacularly symbiotic relationship between the dictates of the street code and an energetic American consumerism.⁵⁸ In the street code of American urban spaces, aggression aggregates possessions and power, so the celebration of acts of aggression links directly with credibility. Russel’s survival and his subsequent ability to channel the victims of the crime add immensely to his hip-hop credibility.

Russel’s ethnic and racial identities are also more audible in Gorillaz’ music than those of his Japanese bandmate Noodle, and there is evidence in Gorillaz’ catalogue of Russel’s hip-hop roots and influence.⁵⁹ The rhythms and drum patches that are supposedly housed in the ‘legendary Hip Hop Machine’ are prominent across all of Gorillaz’ studio albums. Many songs feature rap, and collaboration with prominent hip-hop artists is also common. Mos Def and Snoop Dogg appear on tracks on *Plastic Beach*; De La Soul collaborated on ‘Feel Good Inc.’ and ‘Superfast Jellyfish’ (*Plastic Beach*), and Andre 3000 joined Gorillaz on their single ‘DoYaThing.’ Gorillaz also have songs that could easily qualify as pure hip-hop. ‘Rock the House’ (*Gorillaz*) features only rap (no singing) and repeated musical hooks (the horn blasts interspersed between lines of the lyrics, which break up the consistent drum and high-hat rhythm that runs through the whole track; the syncopated piano

⁵⁸ Eric K. Watts, ‘An Exploration of Spectacular Consumption: Gangsta Rap as Cultural Commodity,’ in Forman and Neal, *That’s the Joint!*, pp. 686–705, (p. 695).

⁵⁹ The lack of instances of Noodle’s virtuosic guitar playing or of Japanese influence in Gorillaz’ catalogue is problematic. This gap between the band’s folklore and the actual musical output of the group will be discussed at length in chapter 5.

doubled in both hands played underneath the choruses) which are often found in hip-hop.

The strong presence of percussion in Gorillaz' output is clear on almost every track. And yet, there is no particular element or figure in the music that one can pinpoint as particular to Russel. Indeed, this is the point of a character who has access to every possible rhythm, percussion instrument, and sample in one machine, and who is additionally depicted as playing drums himself. Because he can do anything rhythmically, there is not a moment in the Gorillaz catalogue that strikes the listener as characteristic of Russel's playing style. The pastiche nature of Russel's musical abilities are representative of the 'Signifyin(g)' that Gates discusses.

It can also be argued, however, that without a distinct voice, Russel is pushed into the background. This argument is reinforced by the fact that Russel's voice is never heard in the music; even when Russel channels rappers, his mouth does not move, and it is not his voice that we hear. When he channels Del, for example, we see (as a cartoon ghost in the 'Clint Eastwood' and 'Rock the House' videos) and hear Del. In many pop and rock groups, the drummer is rarely present vocally in the mix, but because one of Russel's gifts and contributions to the band is his channeling, it is important to be conscious of the way his channeling is represented.

To conclude, Russel's presence serves several purposes beyond simple rhythmic needs. He provides legitimacy to Gorillaz' exploration of types and styles of music: many of the hip-hop, reggae, and dub elements of the music can be attributed to Russel's presence in the studio. Additionally,

Russel makes the music accessible to a wider audience by drawing in fans of hip-hop and similar genres; his presence facilitates collaboration with a wider group of artists by signalling that Gorillaz is a diverse and open musical group. However, Albarn and Hewlett's white identity complicates the use of a black character to achieve these goals, and raises important ethical questions regarding the exploitation of black music and musicians by advantaged white Europeans, not least because Russel's virtual presence invites a suspension of disbelief among Gorillaz fans and apparently – although problematically – circumvents the racial inequalities and prejudices of the real world. On the one hand, Russel's virtual presence is empowering, giving voice to other black styles and artists, and reaching out to black fans. On the other hand, he could be interpreted as an example of 'blaxploitation,' a portrayal that draws heavily on racial stereotypes and seeks to exploit the racial cachet of black music for the benefit of a band created and controlled by two white artists.

Gorillaz Fandom

For the purposes of this study, I have used online forums as my sole means to explore attitudes amongst Gorillaz fans. The benefit of using online resources in this case is that the presence of the fandom online spans more than a decade. Gorillaz was emerging during a period when online fandom was truly coming into its own; the early 2000s saw a huge rise in online fan group membership, and sparked a large amount of posts, debates, and webpages of all different types. This means that it is possible to cast a wide

net when researching what fans have written about Gorillaz. The late 1990s and early 2000s were also the time when scholarly interest in online fandom began, and some of the resulting published studies have guided my efforts here. For example, Andrea MacDonald's article 'Uncertain Utopia: Science Fiction Media Fandom and Computer Mediated Communication' (1998) greatly informed my research of both Gorillaz and Vocaloid online fandoms, but I have chosen to cover her work at length in chapter 6, as we need only touch upon it briefly in this section's discussion of fan hierarchy.⁶⁰ Similarly Kirsten Pullen's 'Everybody's Gotta Love Somebody, Sometime: Online Fan Community' (2004) discusses the important concept that online fandom is anonymous and therefore extremely democratic, erasing boundaries that might otherwise inhibit fans based on their gender, age, ethnicity, or disabilities.⁶¹

Pullen's observations about the anonymity of online fandom are an important departure point because of this study's focus on gender and ethnicity within virtual band characters. The gender and ethnicity of fans affect the ways they interact in fan communities, as gender and ethnicity affect the way any person interacts in any community. Social constructs are present within fan communities. Before the Internet was prevalent, for example, women often chose objects of fandom that reflected ideals of gender equality, and would engage more frequently with fan communities

⁶⁰ Andrea MacDonald, 'Uncertain Utopia: Science Fiction Media Fandom and Computer Mediated Communication,' in *Theorizing Fandom: Fans, Subculture and Identity*, eds. Cheryl Harris and Alison Alexander (New Jersey: Hampton Press, Inc., 1998), pp. 131–152.

⁶¹ Kirsten Pullen, 'Everybody's Gotta Love Somebody, Sometime: Online Fan Community,' in *Web Studies*, eds. David Gauntlett and Ross Horsley (New York: Arnold, 2004), pp. 80–91.

based on those objects.⁶² With the introduction of the Internet, this trend no longer holds true. The anonymity of online fan interaction allows women and other minorities to interact in the way that they choose, disclosing as much or as little information about themselves as they wish, or allowing them to construct a new identity for themselves.

However, even if the focus of gender and ethnicity identity is removed from the participants of Gorillaz' online fanbase, the gender and ethnicity of the characters themselves remains vital to the band and its reception. As explained in the preceding sections (and as will be shown in the next chapter), the gender and ethnic attributes of the members of Gorillaz are carefully crafted decisions, adhered to strictly in the band's official folklore, and they predominantly align with larger cultural tropes of gender and ethnicity. They therefore are key factors in the way that fans understand and relate to the characters. The stereotypes of gender and ethnicity in Gorillaz' characters are recognisable to audiences, even if subconsciously, and become an important element in fans' suspension of disbelief as they engage with the band online and elsewhere.

Focussing specifically on online sources to discuss Gorillaz fandom is also appropriate because of the strong web presence of the Gorillaz characters and of Albarn and Hewlett during the periods of greatest musical output. There is a verified Gorillaz twitter account (created April 2009), and Murdoc also has his own verified account (created March 2009). While the Murdoc account has not tweeted since 2012, it is still open; the Gorillaz

⁶² Ibid., p. 83.

account tweets sporadically, usually with news or retweets from Albarn and Hewlett, or from guest artists on past records. Albarn and Hewlett also have verified accounts that post news about Gorillaz when new information is released. For the years between the release of *Plastic Beach* and *Humanz*, the official Gorillaz website was only a reflection of post-*Plastic Beach* days, with limited updates (for example, intermittent news about new singles, or about Albarn's opera *Monkey: Journey to the West*). But the website served as an archived example of the serious attempts to draw fans into online engagement. The website has official accounts for Murdoc, 2D, Russel, and Noodle, which were used to make announcements or to interact directly with fans. With games, forums, media players, and merchandise, the site holds much of what a fan would be searching for. The unofficial fan forums I will discuss below are similar. It is easy to see the flood of activity from previous periods of Gorillaz' timeline, especially around the release of new albums, new videos, or announcements of 'live' performances.

I approached my research by creating a systematic means of combing through forums. I compiled a list of Gorillaz fan sites and music sites that featured Gorillaz forums, then did a broad investigation of each to determine which had the most material to peruse and to see if there were any sites that represented anomalies (for example, sites that seemed to be aimed at a particular demographic, or sites where the discussion of particular albums seemed plentiful but was lacking for other albums). I then began to simply skim through posts, looking for particular keywords ('background,' 'folklore,' 'past,' 'origin,' and in later research, more honed keywords based on each

album ['Noodle's arrival' for *Gorillaz*, 'Murdoc conspiracy' for *Demon Days*, and 'The Boogieman' and 'The Evangelist' for *Plastic Beach*, amongst others]).

From the earliest days, the topics discussed in Gorillaz forums are wide-ranging, but as one can tell from the above list of keywords, I have focussed my search on posts that dealt with the mythology of the band, in an attempt to see how fans have engaged with the story and with the identities of the characters since Gorillaz' beginning. The backstory of the band unfolded before the fans in pieces, and certain cliffhangers were left unresolved for large periods of time. The anticipation of new albums was paired with the anticipation of new information about the location and identity of certain characters. Each new album signalled a new Phase in the Gorillaz folklore. Phase One: Celebrity Take Down encompassed *Gorillaz* as well as all the music videos, bonus singles, and promotional materials that accompanied it. Phase Two: Slowboat to Hades supplemented *Demon Days*; Phase Three: Escape to Plastic Beach included both *Plastic Beach* and *The Fall*; and Phase Four (accompanying the release of *Humanz*) remains unnamed at the time of writing. Each Phase has created with it the anticipation of new DVDs, new videos, new content on the official website, new merchandise, and more. To have seen, heard, or own as much material as possible from each Phase gives fans the chance to compare their fandom with that of other fans in easily quantifiable pieces.

In the hiatus between *Gorillaz* and *Demon Days*, there was an almost four-year (2001–2005) period of silence from the band, when no new

information was released and there were no hints about a new album. The band eventually released a statement claiming that they had to leave Kong Studios because there was too much paranormal activity occurring there, so they went to California to begin shooting a movie. The movie was never made, though rumours about it spread across many forums (and the *Bananaz* documentary [2009] that will be discussed in chapter 5 provided much of what fans were hoping for from the earlier rumoured film). But before the band released their statement, there was enormous speculation from fans about what had happened to the band members.

The amusing thing about these threads is that they suggest scenarios that align with the outlandish and hyperbolic nature of the overall Gorillaz folklore. One post from a prominent fan forum (Fan Forum A) built a poll, asking forum users to vote for the scenario they thought was most likely:

- [a] Murdoc convinced the band that the only way to get ontop [*sic*] was to sell their souls to satan [*sic*], but alas satan decided to collect a little sooner than they planned!
- [b] Their [*sic*] stuck in some studio somewhere, chained away by the record execs and are only let out once a week for exercise?
- [c] 2D went in search of spiritual enlightenment somewhere in the Himilayas [*sic*] and ended up marrying a hermaphradite [*sic*] goat hearder [*sic*]. No more band...aaaaw! [*sic*]⁶³

Any of these scenarios are possible in the bizarre and creative mythology of Gorillaz, and the nature of these options suggests that fans appreciate the distinct style of Gorillaz' storytelling and are happy to engage with it. Importantly, Murdoc's associations with the devil are recalled here, signalling

⁶³ Post on Fan Forum A, April 2003.

that the story of him selling his soul in exchange for talent is well-known and accepted amongst fans.

A great number of threads ask questions about peripheral characters and their places within the folklore. A thread found on another forum (Fan Forum B) titled ‘Whaddya [*sic*] think of Del?’ starts a debate about whether or not Del the Funky Homosapien can be considered one of the Gorillaz himself, since he is technically ‘part of Russel.’⁶⁴ The discussion clearly indicates that the question is important to fans, since an official position within Gorillaz would be an honour. But it also reflects that fans are willing to accept Russel as a vessel for channeling Del and other rappers, making him a conduit for talent, a trope of ‘blackness’ discussed earlier.

There is also often speculation about whether or not those satellite characters might be responsible for Gorillaz’ various troubles and disappearances. Common topics of discussion after *Plastic Beach*’s release addressed the identity of The Boogie Man and The Evangelist. Conspiracy theories were abundant, including one speculating that the members of the live human band were possibly involved in the attempt to destroy Gorillaz at the Plastic Beach compound: (as posted on another, more recent fan forum [Fan Forum C]) ‘I noticed that the crew the boogieman [*sic*] summons in the Rhinestone Eyes video look a lot like the Gorillaz Live band members. Is that just a coincidence, or was the Live band gonna [*sic*] be revealed to be the

⁶⁴ Post on Fan Forum B, 21–23 December 2007. This fan is referring to the fact that Del the Funky Homosapien lives in Russel’s head, and is claiming that this makes the ghost physically linked to Russel.

boogieman's henchmen or something?''⁶⁵ This type of speculation is common as fans attempt to draw connections that they think other fans may have missed.

These examples illustrate the ways in which fans discuss, review, and extend elements of the official Gorillaz folklore; but they have not covered another common phenomenon within the Gorillaz fandom: the appropriation of ideas, characters, and settings into new, non-canonical works of fiction, art, video, and to a lesser extent, music. In short, I am referring to new artefacts that exist outside of Albarn and Hewlett's narrative of Gorillaz. As in many fandoms, artefacts that exist outside of the official narrative are numerous and easy to find online. They include many genres of fan fiction, fan videos, and a plethora of fanart that combine familiar pieces of the Gorillaz universe, or see those pieces reimagined into new settings or new scenarios.

Jeffery's work in his PhD thesis provides an overview of the vast array of these types of fan materials, and dissects a few examples of each thoroughly.⁶⁶ In his investigation, he specifically notes that fans take liberties with the characters, and there are many examples of fans manipulating the characters' heteronormative portrayals. For example, in Gorillaz' canon, Murdoc is represented as straight and highly sexualised, bragging of his conquests and flaunting his prowess as a womanizer thanks to his rock-god status. 2D's relationships are depicted as being more low key and genuine,

⁶⁵ Post on Fan Forum C, 17 July 2015.

⁶⁶ Jeffery, 'The Narrandscape of Gorillaz' *Plastic Beach*, pp. 174–8, 206–17, 239–51.

painting him as more of a heartfelt lover than jumping from groupie to groupie; like Murdoc, he is always depicted as straight.⁶⁷ But there is a wide body of slash fan fiction dedicated to tales of a romantic (often tumultuous or guilt-ridden) relationship between Murdoc and 2D.⁶⁸

Jeffery notes that stories about Murdoc and 2D are prevalent. For example, at the time of his research, just one site (fanfiction.net) contained 635 entries about Gorillaz. Looking at a breakdown of different genre tags on the site, Jeffery summarises that, ‘If the most relationship-focused genres are combined (Romance, Family, Friendship, Angst and Hurt/Comfort) they total over half of the total genre tags.’ Romance alone had 236 tags.⁶⁹ While it is true that not all of those 236 tags pertain to stories about a sexual relationship between Murdoc and 2D, many of them do.

The fact that fans so readily and easily take the canonical characters of Gorillaz and reimagine them in new scenarios, particularly in such highly sexualised scenarios, is not insignificant. The characters of Gorillaz are continuously painted with the brushes of gender binarism and heteronormativity. The males overwhelmingly behave the way males are expected to behave, especially the way they are expected to behave in rock and roll and hip-hop. And (as will be seen in the next chapter), the female behaves the way females are expected to behave, especially when they are Other in a Western world. Yet fans do not feel bound to these depictions.

⁶⁷ See Browne and Gorillaz, *Rise of the Ogre*, pp. 27–31, 133, 239.

⁶⁸ ‘Slash’ is a genre of fan fiction that describes sexual interaction between characters and often contains detailed erotic material.

⁶⁹ Jeffery, ‘The Narrandscape of Gorillaz’ *Plastic Beach*,’ p. 133.

In many examples of Gorillaz slash fiction, 2D and Murdoc's sexual relationship brings guilt to the characters, especially to Murdoc, who is constantly bullying, berating, and dominating 2D in the band's canonic folklore. Some fans take his bullish behaviour and extend it into the story of a romantic love between the two male characters; but that is where the links to the canon fade. Jeffery discusses one example extensively in his research: a large-scale, detailed piece of fan fiction that uses ten chapters to build up to Murdoc and 2D's first sexual encounter. Jeffery notes that, 'the story leading up to this sexual encounter is in fact a subtle exploration of the hidden tensions in the Murdoc/2D relationship where Murdoc passes through several emotional stages.⁷⁰ But the eroticised story serves a significant purpose because,

2-D [sic] and Murdoc's essential character traits remain intact, while the real emotional consequences that these traits might cause [...] are able to be explored, albeit through an eroticized homoerotic filter. The rather two-dimensionally drawn Gorillaz characters (in both senses) are here made potentially more identifiable in real human terms.⁷¹

By creating these artefacts, fans are forming new avenues to relate to the characters. Importantly, this output also contributes to a new, less restrictive framing of the characters. The activities and actions of the characters described and depicted in fan output break the mould of heterosexuality that is adhered to in the official Gorillaz canon. Albarn and Hewlett may not be undertaking it officially, but fans are regularly bending and shifting the boundaries of heteronormative representation in the Gorillaz

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 134.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 134.

characters. If, as this thesis posits, creators of virtual bands make conscious decisions in the gender and ethnic traits of their characters to ensure that they align with social and cultural expectations so that fans are more easily able to suspend their disbelief and accept the characters as autonomous, these examples of fan output are proof that at least a portion of Gorillaz' fanbase are ready to extend and reimagine traits in the characters. These extensions and reimaginings do not hinder but rather enhance their relationships with the characters.

Conclusion

The astounding commitment of Gorillaz' creators to the formulation and execution of a complete folklore is what has attracted fans and held their attention for more than a decade. The extensive detail crafted for each member of Gorillaz reflects a passionate desire from Albarn and Hewlett to form well-rounded characters. When examined closely, the construction of the male Gorillaz characters is both logical and problematic. It is plain to see why Albarn and Hewlett chose specific trajectories for their characters, as these trajectories reflect a great deal of what we see of the male image in rock and hip-hop culture. The tortured, turbulent, and ultimately loveable characters figure in genuinely engrossing stories. But importantly, the stories are recognisable enough that fans know how to relate and react to them; fans can recognise stories like a musician selling his soul to the devil, or a singer whose looks (not intelligence) are a vital asset to the band. The characters are both innovative enough and familiar enough to please millions

of fans. This seems an important balance to strike, since a virtual band that is too avant-garde could potentially alienate fans (or at least, a majority of fans). To make music consumers feel that they are experiencing something unique while simultaneously and subconsciously reminding them of tropes they are already acquainted with is a viable and effective strategy, and one that Albarn and Hewlett have navigated deftly.

However, as seen in this chapter, the predictable elements of the characters reflect the fact that there are a multitude of tropes and stereotypes very much present in popular music (a revelation that is hardly new); this becomes disquieting when one investigates tropes and stereotypes related to race, such as Russel's blackness and his rhythmic prowess. In the next chapter, I delve more deeply into the character of Noodle, and discuss the racial stereotypes that trouble her image construction. I will also explore the gender stereotypes at play in her character, and attempt to show that in Noodle's case, the realms of racial and gender stereotyping directly influence each other, forming an Orientalist construction.

Chapter 5

‘All Alone:’ Noodle’s Role within Gorillaz

This chapter will investigate the construction of Noodle and her position in Gorillaz. She is a key figure, intensely popular amongst Gorillaz’ fans. The specific facts of her backstory and her role as the only female and only non-Westerner in the band are fascinating when viewed through the larger lens of virtual band history. Female characters in virtual bands often mirror tropes and stereotypes of human females in popular music. Likewise, as we have seen, the ethnicity of specific characters in virtual bands also becomes important to the overall image of the band.

Ethnic and gender constructions in virtual bands often align with musical styles and help fans accept that these virtual characters are truly creating the music. Ethnic and gender stereotypes are also influential in determining who the fanbases of the bands will be, by appealing to certain demographics. Gorillaz appeals to a great number of people due to the variety of the makeup of its characters. And Noodle’s Japanese, feminine mystique further broadens the band’s appeal, even though her fans are neither exclusively female nor exclusively East Asian. She gives the band diversity and mystery; she conforms to visually appealing norms of cuteness and femininity, but challenges female stereotypes as the virtuosic lead guitarist of the group – albeit problematised by the fact that there is a lack of virtuosic guitar playing in Gorillaz’ catalogue – and as a frequent songwriter within the band.

This chapter will begin by exploring Noodle's role as a female in popular music, drawing parallels between her and her human counterparts. I will then use Edward Said's work in *Orientalism* as a departure point for a discussion of Orientalism, colonialism, and colonial studies, employing commentary from colonial studies to explore the tropes of Noodle's ethnic construction more closely. Noodle does not perfectly align with all aspects of Orientalism, but there are some interesting parallels, especially considering the origins of her human creators.

Noodle's Background

As in the previous chapter, examining Noodle's fictitious backstory will contextualise and illuminate aspects of her character that align with gender and ethnic stereotypes, specifically Orientalist stereotypes. Below, I have detailed elements of Noodle's story that emphasise the mystery and danger surrounding her character, as well as her 'rescue' by the men of Gorillaz.

In Gorillaz' folklore, Noodle came to the band in response to the advert Murdoc placed in *NME*. But instead of contacting the band or showing up for an audition, Noodle arrived on the band's doorstep in a FedEx crate, the same day that the advert was placed. She was between ten and thirteen years old, and she did not know where she was or how she had arrived there; she remembered nothing from her past. But once her crate was opened,

Out jumps a small Japanese person carrying a Les Paul. I [Murdoc] couldn't make out a word she was saying. Just gibberish. But then she unleashed a massive guitar riff wot [*sic*] sounded like

200 demons screaming in Arabic. Brilliant! She ended it with a 20ft hi-karate jump. She bowed and said just one word. ‘Noodle.’¹

The mysterious guitar-shredding girl was dubbed ‘Noodle’ on the spot, and instantly accepted by Murdoc. Noodle had found her new home in England. Shortly thereafter, the band moved into Kong Studios. This would be their home while they recorded their first and second albums.

All of Noodle’s bandmates are Western, which makes her mysterious origins and lack of English more complicated. However, after her bizarre arrival, she seemed to fit into the group and became a creative force. After the success of the first Gorillaz album, the folklore indicates that Noodle travelled back to Japan, where she discovered the truth about her dark past while sitting in a steamed fish shop one day. Noodle learned that she had been part of a Japanese government experiment to create the perfect race of child soldiers. She describes the moment of her realisation in *Rise of the Ogre*, saying,

Suddenly, out of the kitchen, the chef appeared, to see what had happened [...] and it was my mentor and trainer, the army officer Mr Kyuzo!

Mr Kyuzo revealed to me that I was one of 23 children trained as part of an elite crack team for the Japanese government at a secret military compound! I had been placed in Kyuzo’s custody from birth and raised under his strict guidance. It was Mr Kyuzo’s duty to train the children in every martial art, including sonic warfare. He taught us all languages, including sign and lip-reading. Computers, mechanics, Gameboys [...]

It was here that I also re-discovered my ability to speak English. Along with my other gifts, it was something that had been wiped from my memory. Our skills and talents were endless. He also

¹ Browne and Gorillaz, *Rise of the Ogre*, p. 29.

gave every child a special individual skill of their own. I was taught as a musician, my specialized instrument was guitar, but I became completely fluent in all instruments. But the real purpose of our training was as a junior fighting militia and a covert attack weapon!²

Kyuzo had been ordered by the government to abandon the project, and soon discovered that a special envoy had been deployed to destroy all the evidence, including the child soldiers. So Kyuzo wiped Noodle's memory using a special password, put her in a FedEx crate, and shipped her to England to live her life as a musician.³

Noodle returned to England shortly after making this discovery about her past, and went back to work on the next Gorillaz project, using it as a cathartic exercise for what she had learned. Noodle is credited with writing the majority of the band's second album *Demon Days*. However, as described in chapter 4, during the explosive filming of the video for the album's last single, 'El Mañana,' Noodle disappeared. In Gorillaz' story, her disappearance is an elaborate scheme concocted by Murdoc to outwit conspirators against the band, but it is executed perfectly because of Noodle's military training and wits.

After the band's hiatus following Phase Two, the backstory continued: Noodle returned in a mysterious manner to rejoin the group. She had been in hiding, but reappears in the video for the single 'On Melancholy Hill' (a track from *Plastic Beach*). She is seen on a cruise liner called the *M. Harriet*, which sinks while Noodle heroically attempts to defend it from pirates. Noodle is later seen being rescued from the water by an oversized Russel (in

² Ibid., p. 165.

³ Ibid., pp. 165–166.

the folklore, when Gorillaz disbands and then reunites at Plastic Beach, Russel swims there; however, on the journey, he swallows so much pollution and debris that he becomes a giant. In the videos and artwork for *Plastic Beach*, he is depicted as being as large as the entire island).

Noodle and Russel go on to rescue Murdoc and 2D from would-be assassins, employing appropriately outlandish means in their outlandish alter-universe. Noodle's training as a child soldier makes her a deadly force, one skilled and calm in battle, and a dangerous entity not to be trifled with. But Noodle's creative, artistic side is also vital to her construction.

Noodle as Songwriter, Producer, and Lead Guitarist

Within Gorillaz' folklore, a great amount of attention has been given to painting the cartoon characters as writers, arrangers, and producers of the music. The original CD sleeves credit authorship of the songs to the characters, and sometimes feature Albarn's name or the names of human guest artists in conjunction with Murdoc, 2D, Noodle, and Russel.⁴ Because Noodle takes a prominent position as a songwriter and producer for the group, it is necessary to explore these roles in relation to the wider presence of human female songwriters and producers in popular music.

The discussion of genres as gendered spaces found in chapter 3 is instructive in this endeavour. Because certain genres have traditionally masculine expressions of performance built into them (or at least, historically

⁴ See any Gorillaz album sleeve, but specifically Gorillaz, *Demon Days*, CD, Parlophone 0946 311691 2 0, 311 6912 (2005).

associated with them), women will always enter these genres as outsiders. In other genres, however, women are more welcome. Overwhelmingly, women are expected to follow the gendered rules of the genre they seek to break into, while men have more licence to experiment. When a woman defies the rules of a genre, it has the potential to ruin her or turn her into an icon. For example, in Susan McClary's *Feminine Endings* (2002), she discusses Madonna as a pillar of new feminine expression in popular music, and contextualises Madonna's career in the larger realm of women's participation in composition and performance across several centuries.⁵

Historically, McClary points out, women have been ostracised from music, or have been allowed to participate only in very controlled ways. No matter the gender of the composer, music has long been recognised as a powerful force, capable of influencing the listener's emotions and 'engaging the body.'⁶ In Western cultures, the mind is traditionally associated with masculinity, while the body is associated with femininity.⁷ And as McClary argues, if music has the power to 'engage the body,' does it not thus follow that music is feminine? And if music is a feminine entity, then is it not logical for men to exclude women from music making if they wish to maintain control over such an important force?⁸ Women's contributions to music were, for many years, considered too corporeal and emotional, as opposed to the

⁵ Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings*, pp. 148–166. When the first edition of the book was published in 1991, the analysis of Madonna was some of the first and most groundbreaking in gender studies in popular music, and laid a foundation for many scholars to follow; the contextualisation of Madonna's work in a traditional discourse lent legitimacy to the chapter's popular music focus.

⁶ McClary, *Feminine Endings*, p. 151.

⁷ Ibid., p. 151.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 151–152.

cerebral, intellectual music composed by men. It is not hard to see why women were restricted in musical careers for so long, and why stigmas about their abilities as creators have continued into modern popular music.

McClary touches on the fact that Madonna is credited as writing or co-writing a great deal of her music, and that she also has control in editing and producing tracks. McClary correctly asserts that this position is uncommon for women in popular music, who are often closely controlled by male producers and agents. The fact that Madonna maintains a great deal of control over all aspects of her image and music was (and to a certain extent still is) remarkable.⁹ She is still seen as a peculiarity in the popular music industry, more than two decades after McClary's work was published.

Noodle is credited as the writer of many Gorillaz tracks, but unlike Madonna, her level of creative control and her ability to make decisions about the band pales in comparison to Murdoc's. Despite her musical contributions, she maintains a lower position in the band's hierarchy. Madonna's unique approach to the popular music industry paints her as the author of her work, even though she collaborates with male songwriters and producers. Noodle, however, is entirely controlled by male creators, yet those male creators chose to imbue her with an autonomous creative narrative.

Noodle's story includes songwriting as a means of exploring her difficult past and troubling emotions, particularly in tracks written for *Demon Days*; in Gorillaz' folklore, this album is Noodle's way of dealing with Mr Kyuzo's revelations about her childhood in Japan. Noodle's complicated

⁹ Ibid, pp. 153–154.

past lends legitimacy to her songwriting, especially when one considers that for many years, the majority of female popular song writing was considered to be dull and secondary to male writing.¹⁰

Women songwriters have found consistent success in only a few genres, most notably folk, country, and protest music. And they have only truly emerged as important artists in these genres since the late 1950s–1960s. Most women in the popular music industry were only successful as vocalists before this time. During the radical social changes of the 1960s, women singer-songwriters were finally taken seriously, resulting in the success of artists like Peggy Seeger, Joni Mitchell, and Janis Joplin.¹¹ But to this day, female success in songwriting remains limited to gentler genres, where articulate lyrics and simple melodies are staples. With a long list of successful tracks on rock albums featuring hip-hop and reggae influences, Noodle joins a comparatively small number of female musicians who have excelled in ‘more masculine’ genres.¹² The blending of genres on Gorillaz’ albums means that Noodle – if we accept her as author – is successfully writing in several styles that are not typically approached (at least, not with measurable commercial success) by female songwriters. Interestingly, Noodle seems comfortable allowing elements of dub, reggae, and hip-hop into her writing. What is lacking, however, is musical influence from her native country.

¹⁰ Lucy O’Brien, *She Bop II: The Definitive History of Women in Rock, Pop and Soul* (London: Continuum, 2002), p. 473.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 179–209. This chapter gives detailed histories of many of the most influential female songwriters of the 1950s–1970s.

¹² For example, Joan Jett, Chrissie Hynde, Debbie Harry, or Lita Ford.

Despite her Japanese origins, the tracks she is credited with do not feature non-Western modes, any instrumentation that might be labelled as ‘Japanese,’ or any obvious reference to genres of Japanese popular music. The songs she writes are Western, with recognisable chord progressions and tonalities. However, if ‘Japanese’ features were introduced in this Western rock band context, they would no doubt be open to charges of Orientalism and essentialism. It is important to note that various forms of Western-style popular music have co-existed or intermingled with Japan’s own popular music since as early as the 1920s; therefore, although the inclusion of a Japanese musician need not require a noticeably different set of musical signifiers, it might include reference to the various styles of rock and pop that have developed in Japan.

A great number of Japanese pop stars, including several prominent supergroups, perform songs that fall into bubblegum pop or even Europop genres. Important musical movements, such as the Japanese hip-hop movement,¹³ are directly plucked from the West and adapted for Japanese contexts and consumption. Given that much of Gorillaz’ catalogue features influences from a variety of cultures, as evidenced through multiple tracks with prominent elements of Spanish, reggae, and dub styles, the lack of any reference to Japanese musical elements is therefore surprising – although this could be explained narratologically in terms of Noodle’s apparent ignorance of her origins during her work on *Gorillaz*.

¹³ For a thorough overview of the hip-hop movement in Japan, see Ian Condry, *Hip-Hop Japan: Rap and the Paths of Cultural Globalization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006). The book also brushes upon other similar cultural movements in Japan.

In ‘Left Hand Suzuki Method’ (the final track of the US deluxe edition of *Gorillaz*, the title and subject matter of which relate to the Suzuki teaching method created by Japanese violinist Shin’ichi Suzuki), the violin ‘exercise’ we hear is a derivation of a Western diatonic melody with a jazz piano accompaniment. The use of a Western melody is in keeping with the Suzuki method itself, which was developed for training students to play Western art music. The choice to emphasise a Japanese technique devised to teach Western music (therefore an Eastern understanding of the West), illustrates the complex nested Orientalisms brought into play as a consequence of Noodle’s presence in the band. Notably, twice in the track, Noodle speaks in Japanese, describing some basic precepts of the Suzuki method. But even this marker of ethnic identity does not last throughout the track, as she immediately follows each instance of Japanese with a translation in careful, halted English. Overall, Japanese musical influence, or any awareness of culturally specific forms of Japanese popular music, are lacking in *Gorillaz*’ catalogue, which is surprising given Noodle’s importance as a songwriter.

In this way, Noodle’s construction mirrors many of the problems flagged around Josie and the Pussycats’ Valerie in chapter 3. There is very little about Noodle’s identity as female and Japanese that represents an intersectional approach in the audiovisual realm, or, following Gilroy, a sense of ‘double consciousness’ (besides the notable exception of ‘Left Hand Suzuki Method’). It is reflected only minimally in her backstory. Her two identities do not further an understanding of what it means to be a Japanese woman in a Western band; indeed, the elements of Noodle’s backstory that

took place in Japan could have and did happen to girls and boys, since both were included in the experiments to create child super soldiers. In her musical and social interactions with her bandmates, there is little to suggest that her Japanese culture or heritage comes into play, especially after she regains the ability to speak English fluently. Rather, the overarching impression is that Noodle is a clever, intense weapon; dangerous, gifted, and cunning. As will be argued, this reflects an Orientalist view of Noodle's heritage, rather than a nuanced representation of her Japanese background. Thus, it seems that Noodle's gender and ethnicity only pay lip service to the diversity she is meant to signal, rather than provide a true representation of a female Japanese, or hybrid female-Japanese-Western, experience.

With her significant contributions to Gorillaz' albums, Noodle's songwriting is not the only element of her membership in the band which should break stereotypes. In her rocky career with Gorillaz, one of the biggest gender tropes that Noodle subverts is as a female, virtuosic guitar player. Musically, however, Noodle's position as a guitar phenomenon is complicated by the fact that Gorillaz' catalogue does not feature exhibitions of virtuosic guitar playing. Even though Noodle's guitar playing is her most often-mentioned musical trait, her talent is discussed in interviews and official literature but is not carried through into the band's musical output.

It is well-traversed territory in popular music studies that women guitarists are rarely seen as equal to their male counterparts.¹⁴ This is linked

¹⁴ For a presentation of cultural and social contexts that construct women as 'lesser' guitarists (and reasons why women are under-represented) in rock, see Mavis Bayton,

to the fact that women in rock and roll have often been marginalised and positioned as outsiders. Given rock and roll's early development during an era when women had specific societal roles to play (and no others), women have had a difficult time breaking into rock and roll, and are rarely included as part of any rock canons. Even within media that is attempting to empower women, phrases like 'women in rock' amplify women's position as outsiders.

While the phrase is often meant to define a position for women in rock discourse, it assigns them a label, rather than simply referring to them as 'rock performers.' Men are rock performers, but women must be given special distinction, and their work must be given specific attention, rather than it simply existing as contributions to the overall rock oeuvre.¹⁵

One need only look to writers like Freya Jarman, Mavis Bayton, Lucy O'Brien, and Ian Biddle to see how guitar playing has been linked to masculinity for decades. As with any contribution to rock, a woman who displays proficiency on the guitar is the exception rather than the rule, and she often achieves acclaim because she is a woman who plays well, rather than achieving acclaim simply for playing well.¹⁶ Noodle's talents as an incredible guitar player are emphasised repeatedly in Gorillaz' folklore. Her unique talent, which was programmed into her by Mr Kyuzo, subverts gender stereotypes of a woman's usual role in a rock band. But one must not overlook that her unique talent was given to her by a man; Noodle's distinct

¹⁵ 'Women Making Music: Some Material Constraints,' in *The Popular Music Studies Reader*, eds. Andy Bennett, Barry Shank, and Jason Toynbee (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 347–354.

¹⁶ Leonard, *Gender in the Music Industry*, p. 32.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 34, 38.

gift and position within Gorillaz would not have been possible without a specific male influence in her life.

Noodle's talents on guitar have been mentioned many times by Albarn and Hewlett, especially in the band's earliest days when the characters were first being introduced to the public. The story of how Noodle joined Gorillaz is only one example of the ways that her talents have been told, but how often are they heard? Although Noodle is touted repeatedly and insistently in Gorillaz' folklore as a virtuosic guitarist, the music in Gorillaz catalogue does not reflect this narrative. The guitar playing that we hear on Gorillaz albums and b-side releases is at best proficient, but does not veer into the arena of virtuosity. Indeed, there are many instances where the bass line (played by Murdoc) features more prominently than Noodle's acoustic or electric guitar playing. In fact, both of the major single releases from *Demon Days*, 'Dirty Harry' and 'Feel Good Inc.,' include complex bass lines that reveal greater skill than the heavily distorted electric (in the former) and extremely simplistic acoustic (in the latter) guitar playing.

This is an important observation because in the official Gorillaz storyline, *Demon Days* is the album that Noodle writes in order to deal with her realisation of her past as a government-engineered child super soldier. Admittedly, it does bear more instances of guitar use than the other albums, but the guitar playing we hear consists largely of repeated chords ('White Light') and simple arpeggios ('All Alone,' 'Fire Coming Out of the Monkey's Head'). In 'O Green World,' guitar bending opens the track, and those bends are soon overlapped with some quick arpeggios on metal strings. While

these elements might signal to the listener that virtuosic guitar playing will follow, the opening texture is soon interrupted, as the sampled sound of a tape rewinding enters within the first twelve seconds. Throughout the remainder of the song, the guitar plays repeated power chords, and its sound is often lost in the texture of other instruments, samples, and effects.

G-Sides (2001), the release of b-sides that followed *Gorillaz*, features some guitar work, and is arguably the only other portion of Gorillaz' catalogue that gives attention to Noodle's guitar playing. Acoustic guitar features most heavily on 'Hip Albatross.' The song is structured so that instruments enter one by one, and this gives the track an improvisatory feel; it is easy to believe that it was recorded during a jam session in the studio and mixed with dialogue from classic zombie films (a device used on other tracks on *Gorillaz*). The acoustic guitar is played thoughtfully and melodically, and there is a degree of passion evident in the performance, exhibited through the intimate sounds of fingers sliding along strings and in the specific use of string bending. However, the guitar remains mostly diatonic and never veers into chromaticism because the guitarist (Noodle) is not exploring other tonalities. The guitar also stays within a very small pitch range, remaining largely in the middle register, never exploring the higher or lower notes of the instrument.

Listening to Gorillaz' other releases reveals even less use of guitar, which is not surprising when one considers that the overall trajectory of Gorillaz has focussed largely on collaboration, especially from the release of *Plastic Beach* and beyond. Performers invited to contribute to Gorillaz

albums include prominent hip-hop and electronica artists, and Albarn allows a great deal of input from them as they engineer tracks together. For *The Fall*, Albarn wrote most of the album on his iPad during the *Plastic Beach* tour, and the infrequent uses of guitar are so rigidly repeated that they are most likely sampled. Examples of this include the catchy opening hook of ‘Revolving Doors;’ the intricate, bluesy riff that is played with unsettling rigidity and precision throughout ‘Bobby in Phoenix;’ and the arpeggiated acoustic pattern underlying ‘California and the Slipping of the Sun.’ In these examples from across Gorillaz’ studio releases, Noodle’s supposedly ‘virtuosic’ playing is often lost within busy electronic textures.

Additionally, Noodle’s visual performances rarely reflect a virtuosic style of playing. In all sixteen of Gorillaz’ music videos from *Gorillaz* through *The Fall* (and including the video for ‘DoYaThing’), Noodle is only depicted as playing an instrument in five of the videos, and in only three of those does she play guitar. The various visualisations used by the band in live performances over the years have included detailed video and holograms of Noodle playing, but these often do not display a virtuosic playing style either; for example, in the 2006 Grammys performance, Noodle’s hologram remains seated on a stool, strumming an acoustic guitar for the whole of the number.

Albarn and Hewlett: Modern-day Orientalists?

While Noodle’s musical contribution to Gorillaz does not seem to exhibit virtuosity, it is still significant that so much official writing about Noodle focusses on her abilities as a guitarist. With regards to an instrument that is

often seen as a man's domain, the selection of a female character as a genius guitarist is noteworthy, but that selection is more reflected on paper than through speakers or on video. And Noodle does not only subvert stereotypes. Some stereotypes are reinforced in the construction of her character, particularly ethnic stereotypes related to Orientalism.

Both of Noodle's creators are male and English. Both men are also successful artists in their respective fields of popular music and graphic art. And together they have control over their malleable Japanese female construction. At the inception of Gorillaz, Albarn and Hewlett attempted to remain relatively unknown, with publicity focussed on the characters rather than themselves. Of course, Albarn and Hewlett were completely in control of how all the Gorillaz characters developed. However, to reduce the discussion of Noodle to whether or not Albarn and Hewlett were 'right' or 'wrong' in creating her would not do justice to a larger discussion about signification in the dialectics of art.

It is also important to note the historical context in which Albarn and Hewlett created Noodle. Their creation exists in our current society, decades after the height of the Orientalist craze. Orientalism peaked during eras of imperialism, as Western cultures attempted to discern and dissect non-Western cultures. In this way, Orientalism was deeply connected to 'the imperial project,' and those who participated were 'camp follower[s], marching in the train of imperialism at least, if not [...] actual belligerent[s].'¹⁷ The motivations behind historic Orientalism are even more complex when

¹⁷ A. L. Macfie, *Orientalism* (London: Longman, 2002), p. 59.

examined culturally. More than a simple racist fascination with the Oriental Other, John MacKenzie argues,

in portraying such stereotypical images of the East the artists of the orientalist genre were, for the most part, not so much attempting to diminish the ‘other’, as to liberate the ‘self’ from the narrow constraints increasingly imposed in Europe by middle-class convention and the exigencies of an industrial society.¹⁸

In short, Orientalism has never been reducible to overt racism because it must be viewed within a larger context. And indeed, Orientalism was not widely criticised until after World War II, meaning its status as a negative term is relatively recent.¹⁹ In today’s society, Orientalism is frowned upon and viewed in a harsh, essentialising light because we can recognise the role of imperialism and cultural dominance in perpetuating it. This link between Orientalism and a breakdown in morality (or the need to analyse it as ‘right’ or ‘wrong’) will be further discussed later in this chapter.

Noodle and Orientalism

Albarn and Hewlett’s choice to make Noodle female aligns with a great deal of Orientalist writing, art, and music that focuses on the feminine. Because one of the main tropes in Orientalism is the sensuality of the Orient (a trait linked to femininity), the overall concept of the Orient is overwhelmingly discussed in feminine terms. The mysterious nature of the constructed Orient was often associated with veils, so the unveiling of the Orient’s secrets became important to those exploring and conceptualising the Orient

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 60.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 73.

in popular Western culture. Women therefore become a strong presence in Orientalist discourse, from their seductive natures, to their unwelcoming but enticing harems, to those ever-frustrating veils.²⁰

Because Noodle is female, it is necessary to begin by considering some of the broadest female tropes common to Orientalism. Said discusses many of them, including the Oriental female's impressionable nature, her subservience to males, and her tendency not to speak for herself but to allow men to speak for her.²¹ She is a 'creature of a male power-fantasy'.²² She is sensual and willing, in every meaning of the word. She is beautiful, and within historic representations of the Orient in art and literature, she often needs to be rescued. She is potentially dangerous, sometimes physically so due to her wildness, and sometimes morally due to her beauty and ability to seduce. Many of these ideas apply to Noodle.

Given the gender and ethnicity of the band's creators, it is interesting to note that the folklore of the band begins with a lone Japanese female who cannot communicate with her fellow band members or the public, and must therefore allow the rest of the band to communicate on her behalf. Noodle learned some English quickly upon arriving in England; she can be heard singing backing vocals in English as early as Gorillaz' first album. But by Noodle's own account, her full fluency in English did not return until her encounter with Mr Kyuzo in Japan.

²⁰ Meyda Yeğenoğlu, *Colonial Fantasies: Towards a feminist reading of Orientalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 72–74.

²¹ Said, *Orientalism*, p. 6.

²² Ibid., p. 207.

One of the innovative features of Gorillaz is the virtual representation of the ageing process through ‘real’ time: unlike characters in many other virtual bands, the characters in Gorillaz have visibly aged as the years have passed. As such, Noodle’s physical beauty has been apparent since the beginning of the band, but it has evolved over time. This is in marked contrast to certain other virtual bands like The Archies or Alvin and the Chipmunks, whose characters exist in universes where the passing of time might be marked (through holidays or a character’s birthday), but doesn’t signal a change in the appearance of the characters. Gorillaz has evolved differently, showing changes in the characters as they have progressed through the different Phases of their folklore. Noodle’s physical changes have been quite obvious, probably because she was so young when the band formed.

As stated earlier, Noodle was between age ten to thirteen when she joined Gorillaz. At the time, her appearance was cute and stylish in a quirky way; she had a unique but appealing look. She was small and slim, but she was never sexualised in Hewlett’s artwork. Over the years, as Noodle has grown older, her shorts and dresses have become shorter, and her midriff is often exposed. She has grown taller and her facial features have matured. While Noodle is still rarely overtly sexualised in Hewlett’s artwork and videos, there is an array of fanart and fan fiction that portrays her in explicitly sexual ways.

Noodle’s exotic beauty is only one reflection of the danger and appeal associated with the character. The other is her training as a child super

soldier. Even during the time period when she had lost her memory, she was programmed as a killing machine. A code word ('Ocean Bacon') uttered at any time would have undone her brainwashing and restored all of her training, including her training in languages, the arts, and a variety of other skills. She was moulded to become a deadly geisha of sorts. Music happened to be her greatest skill, and one that eventually helped to save her life, as she was absorbed into band life in the West. (It is important to reiterate that her male, Western bandmates were integral in unknowingly rescuing her from the Japanese government envoy that would have otherwise murdered her.)

The mystery surrounding Noodle's past is the kind of mystery encountered in a wide variety of Orientalist opera, art, and literature. Representations of Oriental people in historical Orientalist works were often enigmatic. Occidentals, on the other hand, were often depicted as rescuers, as saviours, as righteous judges and executors of justice. Noodle's mysterious appearance in the Gorillaz timeline mirrors so many mystifying encounters described in Orientalist works throughout history. And her Western bandmates' reaction to her, taking her in and giving her a home, parallels the ways in which merciful Occidentals were portrayed. Of course, Noodle's extreme talents on the guitar did not hurt her cause with Murdoc, 2D, and Russel, but even her musical talent had mysterious, unclear origins.

Framework of Orientalist Theory

When reading Edward Said's seminal work *Orientalism*, it is obvious that some of the historical examples of Orientalism to which he refers were bred from essentialism and racism, and that almost all were the result of imperialism. My reason for positing Noodle as an Orientalist construction is simply an attempt to situate her ethnicity, and by extension her gender, within an academic framework. Noodle fits well into the traditional mould of Orientalism, and I believe it is revealing that so many tropes in today's popular music and culture align with historical Orientalist tropes. There is a reason why Noodle is a popular character, and her exotic, dangerous background and foreign traits contribute to her popularity.

Said organises Orientalism into several different categories throughout his book: academic, political, 'aesthetic [...] economic, sociological, historical and philological' Orientalism.²³ But perhaps Said's most useful categories when discussing Noodle's construction are latent Orientalism and manifest Orientalism. Said dedicates an entire chapter to these categories, and in it, he states,

The distinction I am making is really between an almost unconscious (and certainly an untouchable) positivity, which I shall call latent Orientalism, and the various stated views about Oriental society, languages, literatures, history, sociology, and so forth, which I shall call manifest Orientalism.²⁴

Said goes on to explain these two categories in more detail. For example, with regards to latent Orientalism, Said argues that ideas about Oriental degeneracy were founded in the concept of biological difference

²³ Said, *Orientalism*, p. 12.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 206. Original emphasis.

between Orientals and Occidentals. These ideas comply with latent Orientalism because they gave positivist reasons why ‘Orientals’ were other and lesser. Of course, modern cultural studies recognises that the evidence used to make such positivist arguments was distorted by the West’s dominant attitudes in the 18th, 19th, and early-20th centuries.

The most relatable part of Said’s definition of latent Orientalism to the case of Noodle and Gorillaz is the idea of ‘unconscious (and certainly an untouchable) positivity.’ Unconscious positivity is the notion that Orientalists were labelling what it meant to be Oriental, signposting the traits that supposedly made Orientals less developed, and that Orientalists were unconsciously using these labels as a means to justify their superior place in the world. It is true that some Orientalist researchers or artists probably understood the larger, rather insidious implications of this tactic and used it anyway, but Said recognises that a large portion of people who studied the Orient would have assigned such labels because of larger cultural norms of the time, and were therefore doing so ‘unconsciously.’ Labels associated with latent Orientalism (such as ‘the separateness of the Orient, its eccentricity, [...] its supine malleability’²⁵) are the traits we see in Noodle’s arrival and in portions of her narrative.

Said’s book is rightly heralded as one of the most important in Orientalist and colonial studies, and many scholars have used it as a guide in creating their own critiques of Orientalist writing, art, and music. But *Orientalism* has also been criticised for certain problematic assertions and

²⁵ Ibid., p. 206.

discrepancies, and these criticisms should be addressed in any study that hopes to investigate Orientalist constructions in any era.

In A. L. Macfie's *Orientalism* (2002), he provides a helpful breakdown of scholars who generally agreed or disagreed with Said's stance. Interestingly, Macfie posits that a division can be recognised between scholars based on their attitudes toward history and its relation to philosophy. He says, 'Critics committed to a traditional (realist) approach to the writing of history [...] generally condemned Said's approach, while critics committed to a modern or post-modern approach [...] generally approved of it.'²⁶ While Macfie emphasises that the division is not concrete, his recap of the far-reaching, intense scholarly reaction to Said's *Orientalism* confirms that the topic is extremely complex and has been hotly debated.

A principal complaint about *Orientalism* can be found in *The Predicament of Culture* (1988), in which James Clifford dedicates a chapter to Said's book, discussing its successful points ('It succeeds at least in isolating and discrediting an array of "oriental" stereotypes: the eternal and unchanging East, the sexually insatiable Arab, the "feminine" exotic, the teeming marketplace, corrupt despotism, mystical religiosity'²⁷) and its problems. Chief among Clifford's complaints is that Said never provides a straightforward definition of Orientalism, but instead assigns the term three 'meanings.'

²⁶ Macfie, *Orientalism*, pp. 109–110.

²⁷ James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 258.

In Said's defense, the term Orientalism has been an ambiguous one since it first appeared in literature. As early as 1755, the term was used to describe different modes of thinking or philosophy, or even as a reference to the description of dragons in English poetry.²⁸ So the absence of a clear definition in Said's work is perhaps understandable; the term has covered a variety of topics and concepts throughout history. The problem arises because Said's lack of definition eventually leaves his argument ambiguous.

According to Said's 'meanings,' Orientalism is 'what Orientalists do and have done;' or is a style of thought based around prevalent beliefs of certain Western cultures (chiefly that there is a dichotomy between East and West); or is a larger construction that allows entire people groups to 'deal' with the Orient by compartmentalising, generalising, and dominating it.²⁹ Clifford points out that these 'meanings' create trouble in Said's overall argument:

Frequently he suggests that a text or tradition distorts, dominates, or ignores some real or authentic feature of the Orient. Elsewhere, however, he denies the existence of any 'real Orient,' and in this he is more rigorously faithful to Foucault and the other radical critics of representation whom he cites.³⁰

In this way, Said contradicts himself, citing examples of ways that the Orient is misrepresented in Orientalist work (and thereby hinting that there must be a concrete, representable entity known as 'the Orient'), yet claiming that there is no definable place or trait that is essentially Oriental. In fact, Said returns repeatedly to the idea that the signifiers used in Orientalist writing,

²⁸ Macfie, *Orientalism*, pp. 19–20.

²⁹ Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, p. 259.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 260.

art, and music are misrepresentative of something that is true. But he never attempts to signpost what that something is.

Said's argument does, however, explore representation and signification as theories, using the work of philosophers from Foucault to Nietzsche. But even this is troubling to Clifford, who writes,

His critical approach is restless and mordant, repeatedly pushing its analyses to epistemological limits. [...] At various moments in his book Said is led to argue that all cultural definitions must be restrictive, that all knowledge is both powerful and fictional, that all language distorts. He suggests that 'authenticity,' 'experience,' 'reality,' 'presence' are mere rhetorical conventions. [...] While he cites Levi-Strauss and Barthes as well as Foucault, at the same time Said makes frequent appeals to an old-fashioned existential realism. In the multivocal world situation I have outlined this sort of uncertainty is crucial. Should criticism work to counter sets of culturally produced images such as those of Orientalism with more 'authentic' or more 'human' representations? Or if criticism must struggle against the procedures of representation itself, how is it to begin? How, for example, is an oppositional critique of Orientalism to avoid falling into 'Occidentalism'? These are fundamental issues – inseparably political and epistemological – raised by Said's work.³¹

In short, Said's philosophical framework seems scattered, or perhaps attempts to draw on too many ideas from too many sources. As such, it never constructs a clear position on signification or epistemology, which leaves subsequent scholars needing more. So while Said's book is an excellent starting point for this investigation of Noodle, it cannot suffice as the sole guideline for interpreting any Orientalist traits she might possess. Let us therefore consider another theorist, Meyda Yeğenoğlu, whose focus on female figures in historical Orientalism, and whose discussion of discourse

³¹ Ibid., pp. 258–259.

and representation, may shed more helpful light upon the construction of Noodle.

Signification and Intention

Yeğenoğlu's book *Colonial Fantasies* (2008) focuses mainly on the position of women in Orientalism, both as its objects and as its authors. Her perspective is helpful to a discussion of Noodle, a female character in a male-heavy universe. Yeğenoğlu draws heavily upon the work of Robert Young, especially when discussing signification in Orientalism. Young speaks extensively about the relation of capitalism to colonialism, a term that he points out is often equated to Orientalism.³² He correctly asserts that colonialism is a 'text without an author' (a quote he pulls from David Trotter), meaning that it cannot be traced to one person, or even to an isolated set of ideals.³³ Colonialism is far too broad for that. Therefore, the complex discourse that surrounds colonisation is, in actuality, what manufactures the truths of the system, and creates a signifying structure for discussing the colonisers, the colonised, and the colony. And according to Young, 'colonialism therefore becomes a kind of machine,' which operates on a much grander scale than what an individual might perceive or be able to impact.³⁴

³² Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 166.

³³ Ibid., p. 166.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 166–167.

Yeğenoğlu uses this point to expand on Young's term 'palimpsestual inscription,' which refers to the idea that a colonising culture imprints itself to varying degrees upon the colonised culture. The colonised culture is subject to the influence of the colonisers because of the colonisers' power; it is also commonplace for the colonised culture to adapt itself or mould itself into what the colonisers think the culture should be. Therefore, the colonised do not merely continue as themselves under new rule. They become a new manifestation, made up of their own history and experience, the history and experience of the colonisers, and the expectations of the colonisers.³⁵

It is possible to see this concept of 'palimpsestual inscription' in the character of Noodle. She has many influences, both Eastern and Western, thrust upon her. In her story, these influences result from her training by Mr Kyuzo.³⁶ But in reality, they are the result of brainstorming sessions by Albarn and Hewlett, who had the power to mould her in any way they wished. Both men have studied East Asian cultures (specifically Japanese and Chinese) to an extent, so there are undoubtedly realistic aspects to Noodle's Japanese heritage. But there are elements of her character that are distinctly Western, as well as elements that directly reflect the West's understanding of the East. Some elements are justified (sometimes eloquently, sometimes untidily) in her story; others simply hang unaddressed.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 166–174. And Yeğenoğlu, *Colonial Fantasies*, pp. 34–35.

³⁶ Mr Kyuzo trained Noodle and the other child soldiers in all martial arts, including *jujutsu*, *judo*, and *kendo*, which are Japanese martial arts. They were trained to use a variety of weapons, including *katanas*, traditional Japanese swords. Noodle was also instructed in all musical instruments, including traditional Japanese instruments. See Browne and Gorillaz, *Rise of the Ogre*, p. 165.

One of the realistic aspects of Noodle's construction is found in the way she is depicted in many of Hewlett's drawings. While she does not wear traditional Japanese attire (and this would not be fitting with the notion of a modern Japanese girl), her clothing often contains at least one item that fits into the Japanese *kawaii* aesthetic, an obvious nod to the 'culture of cuteness' so prevalent in today's Japanese society.³⁷ If the 'cute' element is not to be found in a particular video or picture, she might be wearing a tiny patch or badge of the Japanese flag, the Rising Sun, or a pin that reads 'I <3 Tokyo.' These elements might not be obvious to casual observers, but small nods to Japan are often visible in her attire.

Of course, Noodle embraces life in the West, learns English, and usually performs on Western instruments in Western styles; while this is true of many young Japanese people today, these characteristics, combined with her evolution in the minds of two Western males, suggests that Noodle's identity is West-centric. But she is also subject to some Western ideas of what the East is like. The most obvious example of this relates to her name. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Noodle got her name because it was the only English word that she knew: she said it to her bandmates after jumping out of her FedEx crate and doing a karate kick. This earliest portion of her story seems rather simplistic in its depiction of East Asian tropes, and reflects no attempt at subtlety. Albarn and Hewlett could as easily have named her 'Sushi' or 'Sake,' and it would have been just as (dis)respectful to

³⁷ *Kawaii* culture will be discussed at length in chapter 6, aiding in the discussion of character construction in Vocaloid.

Japanese culture as the silly (though arguably endearing) moniker of ‘Noodle.’

One of the most meticulously unpacked arguments that Yeğenoğlu makes in *Colonial Fantasies* deals with the moral issues surrounding Orientalism. She claims that to reduce Orientalism to ‘rightness’ or ‘wrongness,’ ‘positivity’ or ‘negativity’ is an incomplete analysis of the phenomenon. After all, ‘Achieving a reliable, intersubjectively intelligible translation of meaning is the core issue of all hermeneutics,’ so interpreting Orientalist texts must rely on more than the face value of the terminology or subject matter, which may appear at first glance to be abhorrent.³⁸

Rather, Yeğenoğlu agrees with Homi Bhabha, who suggests that one must instead focus on the process of subjectification to understand how and why Orientalism happens, rather than merely labelling it ‘right’ or ‘wrong.’ In this way, one can discover how Orientalism and similar modes of thought transform entire cultures into ‘objects of analysis’ and thereby create ‘a certain regime of truth.’³⁹ Yeğenoğlu summarises the concept as follows:

if we admit that the power of Orientalism does not stem from the ‘distortion’ of the ‘reality’ of the Orient, nor from the dissemination of ‘prejudiced’ or ‘negative’ images about other cultures and peoples, but from its power to construct the very object it speaks about and from its power to produce a regime of truth about the other and thereby establish the identity and the power of the subject that speaks about it, then it becomes a peripheral concern whether the images deployed to this end are ‘positive’ or ‘negative.’⁴⁰

³⁸ Bryan S. Turner, *Orientalism, Postmodernism and Globalism* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 36.

³⁹ Yeğenoğlu, *Colonial Fantasies*, p. 82.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 89–90.

This is a bold perspective, and a liberating one for researchers of Orientalism. It would be easy to paint Orientalism with the brush of racism and prejudice, but labelling it as such would not necessarily allow us to discover how such mindsets develop and become widespread. And it could not enlighten us to ways of changing essentialist mindsets so that those modes of thinking can be pre-emptively quelled. Indeed, it seems much more important to discover how and why such ways of thinking are perpetuated if we are to stop them. Yeğenoğlu argues that a more constructive approach is to focus instead on the power that Orientalism had (and has) in creating entirely new discourses of ‘truth’ about whole regions.

This idea becomes useful in considering Noodle because there is little evidence to suggest that Albarn and Hewlett are essentialists or racists. Having been unable to contact Albarn or Hewlett personally, I still believe the Orientalist aspects of Noodle’s construction were unconscious additions on their part. From the earliest months of the band’s popularity, when Albarn and Hewlett discussed the band’s origins in interviews, they emphasised that their idea was to create a highly conceptual and novel parody of the music industry that included bizarre stories and unique characters. In *Bananaz*, a documentary made about Gorillaz, Albarn states,

[Creating the band] was the most exciting thing we could do, and that’s all it’s ever been about, is really enjoying and getting genuinely excited about the possibilities, not necessarily achieving anything of our ambitions, but just, just going into it with that sort of sense of sort of wonder again, you know? About what could be if you got it right.⁴¹

⁴¹ *Bananaz*, dir. by Ceri Levy (Head Film, Ltd., 2009) [on DVD].

Albarn and Hewlett's stance on the creation of characters has always suggested that the process was organic, that there were no pre-meditated character designs to appeal to certain demographics. As such, Noodle's story does not stand alone as the only strange part of Gorillaz' folklore. The stories of her male counterparts are as bizarre as her own. In the same documentary, Hewlett elaborates on the process of designing the Gorillaz characters:

We always wanted to pick up on some sort of pop-star stereotypes and then maybe have them living the lives of real pop stars. But then it didn't end up coming out quite like that, because they just sort of took on characters of their own. I mean, people are always saying, you know, that, [sic] think that I purposely invented, like, a black character, an Asian character and an English character so we could appeal to everyone. But it just came out like that. I mean, when I was inventing Noodle, I was drawing sort of, 17-year-old girls with guitars. And Damon said, 'You're always drawing stuff like that. Why don't you do something different?' And so I just drew a ten-year-old. And it, it just seemed to work.⁴²

Taking the artists at their (publicised) word suggests, as discussed above, that theirs is a latent Orientalism, arguably benign rather than malignant.

In her book, Yeğenoğlu's ideas about a philosophical (rather than a moral) framework for Orientalism lead to a discussion of 'difference,' an important term in the discussion of signification. As a straightforward definition, she explains, 'Difference, within a signifying economy such as Orientalism, is nothing but the self's/same's own excluded but necessary negative other.'⁴³ So there is not necessarily something intentionally essentialising occurring within Orientalist constructions. Those creating the

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Yeğenoğlu, *Colonial Fantasies*, p. 84.

constructions are attempting to frame the Orient in opposition to themselves. Furthermore, Yeğenoğlu refers to the ‘rhetoric of similarity,’ a concept she borrows from Lisa Lowe, which states that ‘the self always knows and represents the other through himself.’⁴⁴

With a character like Noodle, who is entirely fictitious, and was created as a mode of artistic expression for two white men (who are, in essence, her complete opposite), the ‘rhetoric of similarity’ seems applicable. Albarn and Hewlett are expressing something about themselves through the stories and songs of Noodle, but they are also attempting to convey their love and respect of Japanese and other East Asian cultures. They do this by framing Noodle as a strong outsider, a wise warrior, a musical prodigy, and a tortured soul. In this way, the Orientalism of the character serves as a reflection of Albarn’s and Hewlett’s creativity and values, forming a construction that Yeğenoğlu might refer to as ‘an inverted mirror-image of the same.’⁴⁵

Nevertheless, the contradictions present in Noodle’s construction (and in the construction of the male Gorillaz characters) are not insignificant. The challenging nature of Noodle and her position in popular music should not be ignored. She can inform a larger investigation of trends in the industry. The discussion of representations of gender and ethnicity must therefore be larger than a discussion of Noodle. This chapter must serve as one piece of a larger investigation of the ethnic- and gender-role conflicts that still exist in popular music as a whole.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 85.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 85.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to highlight a few ways in which gender and ethnic stereotypes exist or are subverted in the construction of Noodle, specifically with regard to females in rock and in relation to Orientalism. But it can also serve as a case study and a framework for investigating other characters in virtual bands. In order to understand the elements that lend authenticity to virtual band members, and which aspects of the characters' constructions lead loyal fans to follow them, we must look at the choices that go into creating these characters.

Often, those choices reflect stereotypes in human musicians, ostensibly to make the virtual characters more believable. This raises troubling questions about why societies paint and accept such stereotypes. Will women ever truly be able to break down barriers in songwriting or performance in rock? Can non-white performers achieve a prominent role in heavy metal? Can we erase decades of the music industry's suggestion that genres are gendered, and that 'male' genres are meaningful while 'female' genres lack significance?⁴⁶ These questions have been raised time and again in popular musicology, but their relevance to virtual bands (musical groups even more manufactured than most) points out just how glaring the problems remain, and how prominent they are throughout popular music.

⁴⁶ Biddle and Jarman-Ivens, 'Introduction: Oh Boy!', pp. 3, 9–10.

Whether the character choices made by virtual band creators are carefully crafted or are simply manufactured because they seem to be the most logical, they point to tropes in popular music and culture that are extremely real. Do virtual band creators adhere to these tropes because they are obvious, because creators feel that they are powerless to subvert them, or because fans demand innovations that only innovate up to a point? Future work in this area could potentially discuss the value in using virtual band characters to overthrow such tropes and stereotypes. Such studies might even work with artists to explore ways in which virtual bands might create pathways to different types of performers and performances, or reduce stereotypes found in a wide array of genres. What would such characters look like and how would they behave? How could they be made marketable, and would this affect the marketability of human performers? The potential of virtual band characters to break popular culture boundaries and stereotypes is as unlimited as the creative process itself, and could be harnessed in unprecedented ways through discussions such as these.

In the next two chapters, I discuss a construction that is entirely virtual, and therefore potentially has the power to accomplish all of these things. Through the technologies of Vocaloid, creativity and unlimited possibility could see all of these questions answered, introducing us to characters who do not need to abide by cultural or societal norms of ethnicity and gender. Is Vocaloid a vehicle through which these tropes could be deconstructed, given its democratic nature and its heavy fan involvement?

Chapter 6

‘Transient Future:’ The Rise of Vocaloid

In the past few years, there has been a massive influx of anime and manga culture from Japan to countries in the West. And as discussed in chapter 1, there have been technological advancements that have rocked the world of popular music. From holograms to voice modification techniques, technology has created new types of performance and recording opportunities for artists. These areas and concepts have aligned in the creation of a new genre of performer: the Vocaloid.

Vocaloid is the term used for a computer-generated singer created using specific software platforms. The term comes from Crypton Future Media’s original VOCALOID™ software, developed in 2003 and released in 2004.¹ Crypton Future Media was subsequently purchased by Yamaha, and the corporation has used its widespread reach to spread the popularity of the VOCALOID software. The term Vocaloid now refers to any simulated singer whose voice is created in similar editing programmes, including UTAU, a free Vocaloid software available online. The term may also be used to refer to the genre as a whole.²

The creation of virtual pop stars raises many interesting questions. How is the software designed and to whom is it available? How does the use of the technology reflect current music trends, and are there any ethical

¹ VOCALOID is a trademarked product, and all subsequent references to the software acknowledge this trademark.

² Within this chapter, VOCALOID will be used to denote mentions of the official software, while Vocaloid will refer to the characters, other softwares, and the genre.

questions related to the simulation of a singer? How are the Vocaloids depicted? Do their images reinforce gender and ethnic stereotypes or subvert them? I would like to explore these questions in this chapter.

The Purpose of VOCALOID

Perhaps it is best to begin by exploring the motivations of the creators of VOCALOID. In ‘Hatsune Miku: From Software to Cultural Phenomenon,’ a lecture hosted by the Japan Foundation in London in 2015, Crypton Future Media CEO Hiroyuki Itoh spoke at length about the process of inventing the software, as well as the intention behind it.³ He said that while voice synthesis already existed, as did the technology to create music through entirely digital means, the combination of those two elements was a relatively novel idea at the time, and that no one had tried assigning characters to these synthesised voices.

Itoh espoused that VOCALOID was created in order to give a creative outlet to its users. VOCALOID was intended to be experienced and shared digitally, and as such, users and fans most often connect on websites. For example, on Piapro.net, members can post all of their Vocaloid-related creations, from songs to fanart to music videos. To use sites like Piapro, uploaders must agree that as long as no one else makes money from their original work, the artist is allowing all other members of Piapro to use and manipulate his/her work for their own creative purposes. In return,

³ Hiroyuki Itoh, ‘Hatsune Miku: From Software to Cultural Phenomenon’ (lecture at Japan Foundation London Office Event, 24 October 2015).

thousands of people will potentially see or hear the original work because of the easy sharing methods and vast reach of the website. The system is at once socialistic and democratic, as all Piapro members use unfettered access to choose their favourite creative works and share them.

During the questions that followed his lecture, Itoh commented that Crypton Future Media does not have a specific goal in developing their VOCALOID software; they are not hoping to craft the perfect recreation of the human voice, or to change the music industry into a more democratic system, or to see if a digital pop star can eclipse human pop stars. Itoh emphasised that there will be no finished product for VOCALOID, and that the company will always be looking for ways to improve the software or to break new boundaries, but that they do not themselves know what those boundaries will look like in the next ten, twenty, or fifty years. The trajectory of VOCALOID is unknown, but for Itoh and the other members of Crypton Future Media, this is the way it should be. The software represents any possibility, so they feel strongly that they should not restrict its potential by focussing too narrowly on a given goal.

The Origins of VOCALOID and Vocaloid

Vocaloid voices are created by recording a human artist's voice singing every consonant and every vowel sound in a given language, on all pitches

in the artist's range, and then digitising the sounds, which slightly manipulates them.⁴ Sarah A. Bell notes that,

A singer library (database) is created to capture all the elements of a human singer's sonic space, including multiple dimensions of pitch, tempo, loudness, attack, and vibrato. Modeling sonic space in this way places less emphasis on emulating the mechanics of the human vocal tract and more on the analysis of sound waves in performance.⁵

In other words, the sounds produced by a Vocaloid voice exist not on a two-dimensional spectrum of pitch highness or lowness, but in a three-dimensional space where many factors can be controlled and modified to varying degrees in order to create the exact voice desired by the user.

Bell also goes into great detail about the nuances of Vocaloid that have allowed its voices to be more humanlike than previous technologies; for example, Vocaloid 'include[s] sinusoid models in the database that are used to connect the waves of sampled phonemes in a way that effectively imitates the singer's natural articulation.'⁶ The links between sounds in the database are created using replications of human physiological processes, making the voice much smoother and less robotic than other voice technologies.

The result is a highly malleable singing voice, capable of singing any word of the five available languages on any variety of pitches. There are only six official VOCALOID characters created by Crypton Future Media, but there are a variety of others made by different companies. Currently, there

⁴ For a detailed account of this process and of other technical aspects of VOCALOID and Vocaloid software, see Bell, 'The dB in the .db' pp. 225–228.

⁵ Ibid., p. 225.

⁶ Ibid., p. 226.

are Vocaloids that can sing in Japanese, English, Korean, Chinese, Spanish, and French.⁷

The voices produced in all of these software platforms are distinctly electronic, even though they have human origins; however, with advancements in software, it has become possible to edit a surprising amount of nuance into a Vocaloid vocal line. For example, the Vocaloid Producer (or VocaloidP – the term for the everyday users who create Vocaloid music on their home computers) can control the amount of vibrato, the brightness, the dynamics, and even breath placement and quality in a Vocaloid performance.⁸ Importantly, there is also a control labeled ‘gender factor.’ This allows the user to apply

a combination of filters that affect pitch transposition, timbre mapping, and spectral shape. These filters are based on physiological models of the human vocal tract. Timbre mapping applies an algorithm to adjust for the influence on sound frequencies due to the size of vocal tract organs. Spectral shape compression involves a theoretical abstraction of the length between formants (the amplitude peak in the frequency spectrum of the sound), which impacts the perception of pitch. Rather than requiring users to apply the gender factor filters to each individual phoneme in order to adjust the gender of a singer wholesale, most Vocaloids have separate singer libraries for a ‘genderbend’ version. [...] It is interesting to note though that many genderbend duos are sampled from the same voice actor. Vocaloid twins Kagamine Rin and Len, the second product released by Crypton Future Media in 2007, were recorded by the same female voice actress, Shimoda Asami, who explained that Len’s ‘male’ voice is achieved by speaking from her belly, while Rin’s ‘female’ voice is achieved by speaking at the top of her head. ‘I imagine Rin’s cute and punchy voice springing out from the whorl of my hair. You know, this kind

⁷ Yamaha Corporation, *Interviews with Developers* <<http://www.vocaloid.com/en/about/interview.html>>. Voxwave Press Release, 16 October 2013 <<http://twilight.mahoro-net.org/~tbk/Press%20release%20VoxWave.pdf>> [accessed 12 November 2013]. ‘Who is ALYS?’ <<http://en.voxwave.fr/>> [accessed 25 January 2016].

⁸ Yamaha Corporation, *Technical Description: “What is VOCALOID technology?”* <<http://www.vocaloid.com/en/about/technology.html>> [accessed 29 April 2013].

of high voice you do with your eyes wide open, it really comes from there. On the contrary, Len's low voice can't come out properly if you don't use the power of your belly.⁹

Within the VOCALOID platform, therefore, the gender of the voice is something that can be manipulated by degrees; it is a construct that simultaneously recognizes the biological, but also grants users leave to move the voice along a spectrum of gender as they see fit. This is a significant aspect of the software, and signals an acknowledgement that the manufacturing of the characters' gender is complex, a paradigm with which VocaloidPs are invited to engage.

Importantly, Bell notes that it is the timbre of the voice in VOCALOID that positions it within a specific ethnicity or gender. However, as she observes, Nina Eidsheim argues that timbre can be performed in the human and the digital voice, which illustrates why positioning a voice as a specific ethnicity or gender is problematic from the outset.¹⁰ There is nothing feminine or masculine when a musical computer programme emits a B flat. Rather, it is when certain timbre effects are present in the note that listeners might identify it as male or female, or might believe they have determined the race of the voice. Unlike a human voice, which is housed in a body that bears biological (and cultural) signifiers of male/female or of ethnicity, the individual notes, syllables, and consonant/vowel sounds that are recorded for VOCALOID voices are impossible to place within a cultural or ethnic context,

⁹ Bell, 'The dB in the .db,' p. 231.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 229-230.

making the ethnicity of the voice more difficult to determine and further complicating the identification of the voice as male or female.¹¹

If Bell's point is true, then VOCALOID has the potential to inhabit a democratic space in voice technology and reproduction, without ethnic or gender labels. However, the voices produced in VOCALOID software are all closely associated with a specific character, and the assignment of that character gives context to the voice. As will be discussed shortly, VOCALOID's commercial success has risen dramatically since the introduction of characters to 'match' the voices. It is therefore the act of assigning the characters, thus giving the listener a visual association of what the voice 'should' sound like, that creates problems of gender and ethnic representation within VOCALOID.

In the case of VOCALOID, the software's design means that a VocaloidP does not need extensive musical knowledge in order to create songs. Pitches are made higher or lower simply by clicking and dragging notes (depicted as bubbles) vertically on the screen. Note duration is similarly controlled by stretching note bubbles; there is no need for counting. The markings on the dynamics control panel are musically correct (*p*, *mp*, *mf*, *f*, and so on), but these symbols can be quickly learned by any user, regardless of musical training.

To use the official VOCALOID software, the VocaloidP must own a copy of the editing platform and must purchase separate software packages programmed with the different character voices in order to begin composing.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 229–230.

The editing software costs around £200, while each vocal software package costs between £80 and £120. The prices are similar to or less expensive than other types of music software, which makes it accessible to a wide audience.¹² The combination of the software's reasonable price and simple controls mean that VOCALOID is a straightforward way for people of varying skill levels to become composers, arrangers, or producers in their own homes.

In the first two editions of VOCALOID, the editing platform did not include the option to create the backing track within the software. The backing track had to be created in another programme then uploaded to the VOCALOID software in order that the voice could be edited over it. In October 2011, VOCALOID 3 was released, which allows VocaloidPs to create and edit backing tracks along with the voice. It has therefore become possible to create entire songs using the VOCALOID 3 editing platform alone. VOCALOID 3 also allows the VocaloidP to upload a purchased karaoke track from another source and edit the voice to sing along.¹³ VOCALOID 4 was released in 2015, featuring further advancements in performance nuance and improvements to the user interface.

¹² Some music production software is similarly priced to the VOCALOID software package. For example, Apple's *Logic Pro X* retails for approximately £200, and *Adobe Premiere Pro* is subscription based at £20 per month (this price could obviously rise quite high if a user carried on the subscription for an extended period). PG Music's *Band-in-a-Box* is marketed with a variety of purchasing options, but to buy the software, users will pay between £300–450. For more traditional music composition software, Avid's *Sibelius* is available by subscription (£14.75 per month), or to own starting at just over £440.

¹³ Yamaha Corporation, *Interviews with Developers* <<http://www.vocaloid.com/en/about/interview.html>>.

Originally, VOCALOID software was marketed simply as a digital voice editor in a user-friendly format. While the early voices had names and some depictions of the characters, the release of VOCALOIDs Meiko (2004) and Kaito (2006) found only moderate success. But in 2007, Yamaha developed a new marketing scheme that focussed the software much more intently around character culture, and released Hatsune Miku, the first in their Character Vocal Series. Financially, Miku was a huge success, and subsequent VOCALOID characters have followed in a similar vein. Miku and the other characters in the Character Vocal Series are easily recognisable and have precise backstories, as we have seen is common with many virtual bands. The decision to focus on the characters for each voice in the VOCALOID catalogue has helped to create a character-based fan culture around Vocaloids, making the characters, as Itoh phrased it, ‘hub[s] for creativity.’¹⁴

Advancements in Vocaloid software since 2011 have come in the form of new and better character software, including tweaks for existing characters and new vocal libraries with voices singing in new languages. VocaloidPs and fans have become fiercely loyal to their favourite characters, and the most popular Vocaloids have even sold out ‘live’ tours in stadiums across Japan and the United States. Miku’s popularity has grown to such an extent that she was featured as the opening act on one leg of Lady Gaga’s

¹⁴ Itoh, ‘Hatsune Miku: From Software to Cultural Phenomenon.’

2014 artRave: The Artpop Ball Tour,¹⁵ and on *The Late Show with David Letterman*.¹⁶

Since the boom in Vocaloid popularity following Miku's creation in 2007, there has been a string of characters designed by fans themselves. These range from brand new characters to variations on existing characters, like Miku's brother Hatsune Mikuo. Mikuo was created by fans who used Miku's software to pitch her voice extremely low, and then followed that with designs for a male Miku-lookalike. Whether they are official releases by Crypton Future Media and Yamaha or new creations from fans, most Vocaloid characters share similar traits that are reflections of anime and manga artwork.

Anime, Manga, and Japanese Influence

Anime (an adaptation of the English word 'animation') is a distinct style of drawing and animation that was developed in Japan; although there are several anime studios throughout the world now, the bulk of anime is still produced in Japan. The anime style is distinct and easily recognisable. Human characters in anime often have exaggerated features (big eyes, very long legs), while animal characters are often cute and anthropomorphised. Because of the intense and widespread popularity of anime in Japan and its growing popularity in other parts of the world, it is unsurprising that Vocaloid

¹⁵ Keith Wagstaff, 'Lady Gaga Is Going on Tour with a Hologram,' *NBC*, 17 April 2014 <<http://www.nbcnews.com/tech/innovation/lady-gaga-going-tour-hologram-n83406>> [accessed 31 October 2014].

¹⁶ Jeremy Gordon, 'Holographic Pop Star Hatsune Miku Performs on "Letterman",' *Pitchfork* (online), 19 October 2014 <<http://pitchfork.com/news/57031-holographic-pop-star-hatsune-miku-performs-on-letterman/>> [accessed 31 October 2014].

characters are drawn in an anime style. The characters are much more likely to resonate with anime fans.

While there are a few male Vocaloids available, the vast majority of the characters are female. Further work on Vocaloid can and should investigate male characters, but for the sake of scope, this study will focus on female characters. In her groundbreaking 2001 study on anime, Susan J. Napier discusses the female in anime and manga.¹⁷ Females are often depicted as young and beautiful, but they are also often depicted as fierce and in charge, much like the construction of Noodle discussed in chapter 5. They are frequently the heroes, sometimes even rescuing men. Napier states that this trait of anime and manga possibly relates to the period in Japanese culture when these art forms were on the rise, a time when attitudes were drastically changing towards women.

In the 1950s, when manga was first becoming popular, women in Japan were expected to be wives and homemakers. But the roles of Japanese women have changed drastically in the past few decades. For years, Japanese men have been expected to invest most of their time at work, including after-work socialising, which happens almost every night; it is considered extremely rude not to go to a bar with colleagues after work. While this is still typical for men, Japanese women have in recent years become increasingly likely to obtain higher education and to have life-long careers, even after marrying and having children. Napier says, ‘Perhaps many of anime’s most important characters are females because it is so

¹⁷ Susan J. Napier, *Anime: from Akira to Princess Mononoke* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

often the female subject who most clearly emblematises the dizzying changes occurring in modern society.¹⁸ Female characters in anime are meant to represent the more empowered women emerging in today's societies, and, in the same way that Noodle's backstory moves away from her 'rescue' by the male members of Gorillaz to a more self-directed musical artist, Miku and her cohorts carry this representation forward in certain ways. They are depicted as autonomous and intelligent musicians. In live performance, they are placed in a position of control over the musical event, but more on this later.

In order to understand why anime and the rise in popularity of Vocaloid are related, one must understand the importance of virtual culture in Japan. Japanese society approaches virtuality, animation, cuteness, and fandom in very different ways than Western societies. And yet more and more, we can find examples of Japan's love of the virtual in Western culture. The rise of Vocaloid around the world is a result of several major aspects of modern culture, and is specifically linked to several important historical movements in Japan.

Japan was the first East Asian country to fully modernise and mechanise; they were the first to embrace technology and integrate it into their everyday lives, and did so long before other countries geographically close to them attempted it. Part of this may be due to the devastation Japan faced after WWII, when two atomic bombs destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the country was financially and emotionally ruined. As Japan

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 11–12.

began to rebuild, they faced forward, remembering their long heritage (indeed, a heritage that stretched back further than most Western societies) but knowing they would need to take a modern approach in order to see their nation restored. They realised that controlling territory was no longer the means to greatness. A strong position in global trade would move Japan forward.¹⁹

This trajectory was further encouraged by the Technical Assistance Program (TAP) that the United States introduced into Japan in 1955. TAP gave economic and consultation support, aiming to increase know-how in Japanese manufacturing and technology production; the programme succeeded in seeing substantial productivity increases within many companies (for example, Mitsubishi increased productivity by 40% after receiving assistance through TAP).²⁰ Thus, Japan began working to become a leader in technologies, goods, and services that the entire world could embrace.

The increase in technology and the related societal and industrial shifts in Japan have had a significant effect on Japanese culture. Technology is a part of everyday life, and the Japanese have experienced an integration of virtuality into many aspects of their lives. And they have also seen manga integrated into their society in overwhelming amounts.

¹⁹ Richard Rosecrance, 'The Rise of the Virtual State' <<http://wirtlandinstitute.blogspot.co.uk/2010/09/rise-of-virtual-state.html>> [accessed 31 October 2014].

²⁰ Diego Comin and Bart Hobijn, 'Technology Diffusion and Postwar Growth,' in *NBER Macroeconomics Manual 2010, Volume 25*, eds. Daron Acemoglu and Michael Woodford (Chicago: University of Chicago Press: 2010), pp. 209–246, (pp. 217–218) [accessed via <<http://www.nber.org/chapters/c12030.pdf>>, 4 March 2016].

Manga is the term for the printed comic books, graphic novels, and magazines that spawned anime's distinctive visual style. The books are extremely popular and can be found everywhere in Japan, from a child's bedroom to a commuter's briefcase. Manga are written and targeted towards different age groups, which means that in Japan, most people read manga their entire lives.²¹ Popular characters for children breed loyalty amongst boys and girls, while adult manga often feature more violent or sexual material (including an entire genre of erotic manga marketed for women called *josei* or *redikomi*).²²

Manga is popular even amongst adults because most volumes are episodic, and with many adults travelling in excess of an hour on each leg of their commute every day, the piecemeal nature of manga provides appropriately-sized chunks of entertainment to suit such travel. Stories are crafted with intrigue, drama, romance, action, and sometimes spin into series that have dozens of volumes. The books and magazines are cinematic, and, 'In many ways, readers turn to manga for the sorts of vicarious experiences and solid visual storytelling that people in the West expect from the movies.'²³ The growth of manga for adults in the late 1980s was exponential; in 1983, the print run of manga magazines for adults was just over half of the print run for children's magazines, but by 1991, adult manga exceeded

²¹ Napier, *Anime*, pp. 19–20. Napier states, 'Some estimates go so far as to suggest that 40 percent of material published in Japan is in manga form.'

²² For an overview of manga readership categories and genre breakdown, see Sharon Kinsella, *Adult Manga: Culture and Power in Contemporary Japanese Society* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 19–49.

²³ Paul Gravett, *Manga: Sixty Years of Japanese Comics* (New York: Collins Design, 2004), p. 98.

children's manga circulation by over 100 million copies.²⁴ In the 1990s, manga generated three times as much profit as Japanese cinemas, establishing it as one of Japan's greatest sources of entertainment.²⁵

This explosion in manga's popularity amongst adults is extremely important to understanding the sustained popularity of manga and anime over the past six decades (and explains how characters like Vocaloids that are designed in manga style can be so easily embraced). For example, the highly publicised Japanese work ethic and dedication to education does not actually mean that all Japanese students strive from a young age to be high achievers and go on to the best institutions of higher education. The majority of young people grows up in lower income families and remain in this bracket, choosing low-ranking universities or to forego higher education after school.²⁶ It is this demographic that make up the crowds at large manga conventions in Japan, and convention attendance is a reliable indicator that the adult audiences for large percentages of manga are made up of 'everyday' individuals.

The working class manga audience has been the catalyst for an important development in manga: the amateur manga movement. Amateur manga began to appear in the 1960s, when artists who had been rejected for jobs in manga publishing houses started to publish their work independently. It quickly became a vast market, with amateur manga appearing in shops and at conventions. As with many similar cultural artefacts, the best amateur

²⁴ Ibid., p 101.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 98.

²⁶ Kinsella, *Adult Manga*, p. 110.

artists exhibited insider or specialised knowledge of manga, reflecting their expertise and passion for the material. Manga readers began to collect amateur manga extensively, expanding their knowledge, which could then be shared amongst friends and at conventions in order to gain cultural capital.

And because this cultural capital was growing due to unlicensed, amateur work, it aligns with John Fiske's terminology (which he developed in relation to Anglo-American fanzines) of 'shadow cultural economies.' These economies provide cultural capital to people who would not otherwise have any due to a lack of education or social status. It is easy to see why the disenfranchised embrace the opportunity to be part of a community that provides them some degree of social prestige; when a particular cultural movement like amateur manga appeals to a large number of the disenfranchised (the working classes of Japan), it is only logical that the cultural movement should become and remain popular for decades.²⁷

Given all these factors, it is perhaps no surprise that technology and manga have collided in Japan. Consider, for example, the popularity of LovePlus (first released in September 2009), a series of video games for Nintendo DS, available only in Japan, that allows users to create a virtual girlfriend (not a boyfriend). The player chooses between three pre-programmed girlfriends (the instruction is to select the one that is closest to your ideal girl), and then she must be courted and the relationship nurtured as in real life. For example, if you schedule a date with your virtual girlfriend for a specific time and day, you must start up the game and interact with your

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 110–111.

girlfriend at the scheduled time. Otherwise, you ‘risk being chastised for standing her up.’²⁸ All of the characters in LovePlus are designed in traditional manga style (more on this later). LovePlus is extremely popular in Japan, and there is no stigma attached to its players. This is only one example of the pervasiveness of both virtuality and manga in Japan.

Indeed, for a gamer or fan to be viewed as strange in Japanese society, they must harbour an enormous obsession. In December 2009, a Japanese university student (known only to the media as SAL9000, yet another nod to virtual culture) married his virtual girlfriend from LovePlus. In an interview with CNN, Hiroshi Ashizaki, an author who specialises in writing about video games and virtual culture, commented that SAL9000 is healthy and normal because he has a grasp on the fact that his marriage was not a real, legal ceremony. Ashizaki said that the people who do not realise the difference between real and virtual are of more concern.²⁹ These people often comprise fringe groups in Japanese culture, like *hikikomori* (the name assigned to young people who have completely submerged themselves in virtual culture, living only their online identities and refusing to leave their bedrooms)³⁰ and *otaku*.³¹

²⁸ Francesco Fondi, ‘A day-trip date with the virtual romantics of “New LovePlus+”,’ *The Japan Times* (online), 7 April 2014 <<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/life/2014/04/07/digital/a-day-trip-date-with-the-virtual-romantics-of-new-loveplus/>> [accessed 31 October 2014].

²⁹ Kyung Lah, ‘Tokyo Man Marries Video Game Character,’ *CNN*, 17 December 2009 <<http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/asiapcf/12/16/japan.virtual.wedding/>> [accessed 31 October 2014].

³⁰ Phil Rees, ‘Japan: The Missing Million,’ *BBC*, 20 October 2002 <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/correspondent/2334893.stm>> [accessed 31 October 2014].

³¹ In the Oxford English dictionary, *otaku* is defined as ‘(In Japan) a young person who is obsessed with computers or particular aspects of popular culture to the detriment of their social skills,’ although the term is often associated with people who have developed extreme

As mentioned before, anime is also a huge part of Japan's modern culture. It has become one of the primary styles of filmmaking in the most commercially powerful Japanese studios. The numbers are staggering: 'In 1988 roughly 40 percent of Japanese studio releases were animated. By 1999, [...] at least half of all releases from Japanese studios were animated.'³² By the early 2000s anime accounted for more than half of the Japanese film business's annual revenue.³³

This proliferation of anime can be explained in a number of ways. First, Japan is an extremely visual culture and has been for centuries, with 'comics' dating back to the Edo period (1600–1868), and carved or painted wood blocks dating even farther back.³⁴ To put it plainly, Japan is 'traditionally more pictocentric than the cultures of the West.'³⁵ Japanese culture appreciates and celebrates the visual and the graphic, which explains their love of anime.

Another reason why anime has grown and flourished in Japan is simultaneously financial and cultural. With so many studios producing so much anime, the genre has become important to sustaining Japanese

(sometimes romantic) affection for anime characters. Men in *otaku* culture have been assigned a slang term called *moe*, which in Japanese means 'burning' or 'budding/blossoming' depending on the context. *Moes* are not a small part of the population, as is evidenced, among other things, by the prevalence of marketplaces, cafes, and online shops based in Japan which specialise in *otaku* merchandise. For more, see Lisa Katayama, 'Love in 2-D,' *The New York Times* (online), 21 July 2009 <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/26/magazine/26FOB-2DLove-t.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0> [accessed 16 September 2014]. See also, Ian Condry, *The Soul of Anime* (Durham: Duke University, 2013), pp. 185–203.

³² Napier, *Anime*, p. 15. Napier's opening chapter is an enlightening guide to the history of anime and possible reasons for its massive appeal.

³³ Gravett, *Manga*, p. 98.

³⁴ Napier, *Anime*, p. 21.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 7.

cinema, which might otherwise have been overrun by Western cinematic imports in its own country, and which might otherwise not have a presence in worldwide markets. Within Japan, Japanese studios have repeatedly utilised anime as a unique type of cinema that they produce to high standards and that appeals to their home audience, instead of attempting to compete with Western studios by producing films that are typical of Western cinema.³⁶ And the more anime floods into everyday Japanese culture, the more it appeals to a home audience. It is a self-perpetuating phenomenon of popularity.

There is another clue to the popularity of anime in Japan that also links to its rising popularity in the rest of the world - the universality of its themes and the ambiguity of its settings. Japanese culture has long been based on tradition, respect, and honour, from *seppuku* traditions amongst samurai,³⁷ to specific bowing etiquette;³⁸ one wins honour by following through with duties to family, to work, and to country. While these are

³⁶ Ibid., p. 19.

³⁷ *Seppuku* (sometimes known as *harakiri*) was a ritual in which a samurai would eviscerate himself; it was performed if the samurai was captured by an enemy so that he could die with honour, or if he had done something to disgrace himself, or committed a serious offense. *Seppuku* was abolished as a legal form of punishment in 1873, but instances of *seppuku* are still reported amongst military members and civilians in Japan today. See Fumon Tanaka, *Samurai Fighting Arts: The Spirit and the Practice* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 2003), p. 48.

³⁸ The website for the Japanese National Tourism Organization gives detailed instructions on when and how to bow, including a diagram that illustrates how deep a bow should be in certain situations. See 'Greetings, etiquette, etc.,' Japan: The Official Guide <<http://www.jnto.go.jp/eng/indepth/exotic/lifestyle/bow.html>> [accessed 10 August 2016]. Even Honda's Asimo robot, marketed as 'The World's Most Advanced Humanoid Robot,' is programmed to bow and to recognise when others bow. Asimo bowed to welcome President Barack Obama to a press event in Tokyo in April 2014, and the President bowed back. There is footage of many Japanese people bowing to the robot, showing that the tradition of respect, even of respecting an inanimate object, is common practice. The same levels of respect are given to other inanimate objects, including holograms. See <<http://asimo.honda.com/default.aspx>> [accessed 10 August 2016].

admirable ideas, Japanese society has sometimes been labelled by its own people as constricting or conformative.³⁹ Anime does contain some references to Japanese culture (for example, comedies often take place in schools, ‘since education is one of the major pivots around which Japanese society revolves’),⁴⁰ but by and large, anime focuses on characters that do not appear to be Japanese. Indeed, most anime characters are extremely Western looking, with round eyes and a variety of skin tones. Obscurity of setting proves to be important to anime and manga artists as well, who place their characters into ambiguous worlds where almost anything can happen. Sci-fi is one of the most popular anime genres, and these stories take place on other planets or in other dimensions. With its non-Japanese characters and settings, anime becomes a form of escapism, a form of otherworldliness, which appeals to the Japanese. However, it also appeals to many other people in various countries. It is no surprise then, that anime should be popular in Japan and increasing in popularity around the world.⁴¹

It is essential to pause here momentarily to reflect on an important question. Because the bulk of the last chapter was dedicated to discovering whether or not Noodle is an Orientalist construction, is it not possible to argue that the Western-looking characters in anime and manga are products of Occidentalism? Occidentalism would appear to be, on first inspection, simply an inversion of Orientalism: the East writes about and represents the

³⁹ Napier, *Anime*, p. 26. Napier cites animator Oshii Mamoru who says that the ‘flexibility, creativity, and freedom in the medium [anime] itself [is] a site of resistance to the conformity of Japanese society.’

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 24–27.

West based on their understanding of what the West is. Occidentalism has seen a surge in scholarly discourse over the past few decades, but perhaps the most useful definition to use here comes from the work of Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit, who describe Occidentalism as, ‘The dehumanizing picture of the West painted by its enemies.’⁴² Derek Scott employs this particular definition to insist that Occidentalism,

means hatred of the West, so it is not an antonym of Said’s Orientalism. Orientalism may dehumanize the Orient, but it does not necessarily entail hating the Orient. It is a means of representing the Orient *for* the Occident, staging the East for the West. Occidentalism in Buruma and Margalit’s formulation *attacks* the West as an enemy, and the attacks are direct rather than operating as sometimes unwitting prejudice. Orientalism is a heady mix of fear of the Other and desire of the Other (not simply hatred of the Other).⁴³

Occidentalism then exists as a reaction to Orientalism, and is therefore rooted in an anger or resentment of the East toward the West.⁴⁴ But this does not seem to be the case in anime and manga’s representations of the West. These representations of Westernness, by and large, only appear in the facial and body features of the characters. While the themes of anime and manga are often universal (love, loyalty, death, and so on), the themes are not necessarily explored in an overtly Western way; and as

⁴² Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit, *Occidentalism: The West in the Eyes of Its Enemies* (New York: Penguin, 2004), p. 5.

⁴³ Derek B. Scott, “I Changed My Olga for the Britney”: Occidentalism, Auto-Orientalism, and Global Fusion in Music,’ in *Critical Music Historiography: Probing Canons, Ideologies and Institutions*, eds. Vesa Kurkela and Markus Mantere (Surrey: Ashgate, 2015), pp. 141–158 (p. 148). Original emphasis.

⁴⁴ In Scott’s chapter, he discusses various other definitions of Occidentalism, but all of them relate to the creation of Occidentalism by Westerners, for example, how the West shapes ideas of itself or reflects on itself (sometimes referred to as auto-Occidentalism). Because I am dealing with anime and manga as products of Japan, only definitions of Occidentalism that deal with creators from the East are germane to this point.

mentioned before, the settings of anime and manga are often left unnamed, are fabricated, or are purposefully ambiguous. The Western look of the characters in anime and manga does not seem to stem from a particular desire to represent the West in any way; what it rather appears to reflect is an aesthetic ideal which says that Western eyes, face shapes, and skin tones are more attractive or more desirable. The presence of this aesthetic ideal is interesting, revealing, and problematic in and of itself, but it does not reflect Occidentalism. The ambiguous settings and universal themes of anime and manga prove that its agenda is not centred on Western cultural commentary. While anime and manga characters may appear Western in design, their look is the only strong link to Westernness that they possess. Other aspects of their character traits, their motivations, their storylines, and the worlds they exist in are a mixture of ideas and ideals compiled and formulated without a clear West-centric agenda.

The ambiguity and escapism that anime provides is particularly appealing to youth culture. In Japan, as mentioned above, some young people have slipped entirely into a cyberworld of their own creation. But even those who have not abandoned reality are ever more engaged with technology. Online they can – with certain limits – be whoever they want to be; gender and ethnicity are playthings to be manipulated as the user wishes. Hybridity is king. And as Napier points out,

Contrary to Homi Bhabha's vision of 'hybridity' in terms of a colonial (or postcolonial) exercise of power and discrimination, this vision of hybridity is an equalizing one. Safe within the stateless fantasy space that anime provides, both Japanese and non-Japanese can

participate in trying on a variety of what might be called ‘postethnic’ identities.⁴⁵

They interact with each other and with people around the world in increasingly rapid ways, and with increasing fluidity to their own representation.

Female Vocaloids and Image Construction: Creating Virtual Pop Princesses

With their anime-influenced designs, there are obvious questions about gender and image construction that arise when examining the appearance of Vocaloids. For example, consider Miku, the first VOCALOID character to achieve extreme popularity. Miku is designed to appeal to a certain ideal of beauty: she has the look of a young girl, dressed in cyberpunk schoolgirl attire. She wears blue pigtails that extend almost to her feet, and she is always depicted (in official VOCALOID marketing) in a short skirt. In Japan, this look is commonly found in *kawaii* culture, or the ‘culture of cuteness,’ an aesthetic movement that began in the 1970s and that has remained a cultural phenomenon in Japan today.

Like much of Europe and other parts of the world, Japan experienced social and political strife in the 1960s, which was reflected in the anime and manga of the time. With student protests against American occupation and uprisings in blue-collar workforces, the turmoil of the time was reflected in artistic output, including an increasingly left-wing body of manga

⁴⁵ Napier, *Anime*, pp. 26–27.

magazines.⁴⁶ However, this period of turmoil was followed by the more peaceful and idealistic 1970s, when the hippie movement gained popularity in Japan, and the resulting ‘cute’ style of manga, ‘incorporating characters with large eyes and cute faces, drawn in fragmented compositions lacking perspective, [was] linked to the themes of romance and the inner or spiritual world.’⁴⁷

This ‘cute’ style has remained prominent in anime and manga, and has become one of its characteristic features. The popularity of the *kawaii* aesthetic means that the ‘cute’ ideal does not bear the same stigmas as it does in other countries. In Japan, the connection between *kawaii* and sexuality is more complicated than a Western perspective would at first perceive. Western observers often jump to the conclusion that *kawaii* is entirely sexually motivated, erotically glorifying the objectification of youth and innocence, and is therefore perverse. A deeper understanding of aesthetic philosophy’s dissection of ‘cuteness’ and of *kawaii*’s historical context within Japan is important to framing a viewpoint on this matter.

In *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (2012), Sianne Ngai analyses the discussion of cuteness outlined by a few prominent aesthetic philosophers. She reminds the reader that aesthetic categories are often linked (sometimes tenuously) to ideas of morality. For example, ‘beauty’ is often associated with ‘fairness, symmetry, or proportion’;⁴⁸ even

⁴⁶ Kinsella, *Adult Manga*, p. 32.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 37.

⁴⁸ Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Cute, Zany, Interesting* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), p. 54.

Kant writes about ‘the analogy between the aesthetic judgment of beauty and the moral judgment of the good.’⁴⁹ Likewise, the aesthetic category of the ‘sublime’ is admired by so many because ‘it has power over us’ and points to something – however ultimately unknowable – bigger than us.⁵⁰

Ngai goes on to describe the emergence of cuteness as a ‘minor’ aesthetic judgment, given much less attention than the larger categories of beauty or the sublime. Cuteness is linked to commodity culture and does not reflect an otherworldly experience. In short,

what [minor categories like cuteness] based on milder or equivocal feelings make explicit, in a way in which categories [like beauty or the sublime] based on the powerful feelings evoked by rare experiences of art or nature cannot, is the continuousness and everydayness of our aesthetic relation to the often artfully designed, packaged, and advertised merchandise that surrounds us in our homes, in our workplaces, and on the street.⁵¹

Cuteness as an aesthetic descriptor specifically relates to commodities that are viewed as simplistic, as young or infantile, or as feminine. There is an implication that objects or persons described as ‘cute’ are in need of nurturing or protection. Lori Merish says that cuteness is a ‘realm of erotic regulation (the containment of child sexuality) that offers “protection” from violence and exploitation.’⁵² But Ngai immediately argues that if this view of cuteness is valid, then cuteness is also a way of bringing child sexuality out. Ngai points to the writings of Marx, which describe commodities as feminine or childlike because they have no power or agency.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 55.

⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 55.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 58.

⁵² Ibid., p. 60.

Marx claims that because commodities cannot make their own living and cannot resist men, men can take them by force. It is the fact that Marx paints the commodities as feminine and youthful that Ngai claims, ‘suggests that Marx may be presenting the commodity in what he pointedly wants the reader to recognize as an almost cutely or preciously anthropomorphizing [...] way.’⁵³

So the aesthetic category of cuteness bears some troubling connotations, specifically in the way it is linked to implied feminine weakness and childish vulnerability, and in the need to protect or the ability to dominate things or people that bear the label ‘cute.’ Ngai takes this troublesome lens and employs it to look deeper into the notion of cuteness within a few cultures, including Germany, the United States, and Japan. She interestingly compares the notion of cuteness in the latter two countries in a post-World War II context. After the war, the United States was ‘invested in images of its own bigness, virility, health, and strength.’⁵⁴ Conversely, Japan had just lost a conflict that made it aware of its diminished power, from a military and an economic standpoint. As such, Ngai says,

There are historical reasons [...] for why an aesthetic organized around a small, helpless, or deformed object *that foregrounds the violence in its production as such* might seem more ideologically meaningful, and therefore more widely prevalent, in the culture of one nation than in that of another.⁵⁵

⁵³ Ibid., p. 61.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 78.

⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 78. Original emphasis.

Japanese culture and the overall Japanese mindset were shaped by the war in such a way that the *kawaii* aesthetic could gain a strong foothold and become a cultural staple.

And yet, it is important to understand that in Japan, even though the *kawaii* movement is sometimes sexualised, for a Japanese audience, this does not automatically mean that it is wrong. The idea of being sexually attracted to someone with a ‘schoolgirl’ appearance and of schoolgirl age does not carry the same stigma that it does in the West; it is not a deplorable fetish or a taboo, but an aesthetic closely tied to prominent forms of art. This can be hard to grasp or justify, especially when Western philosophy’s views on aesthetics and cuteness contain threads of dominance over youth or femininity.

In addition to the *kawaii* movement, certain developments in manga itself have influenced the way Japanese society reacts to images of young girls. Parody manga became incredibly popular in the 1980s; in parody manga, well-known characters from famous manga series are reimagined. Their characteristics are changed or exaggerated, and the stories of parody manga often question the morals and themes of popular manga series. The emergence and popularity of parody manga has caused Japanese audiences to view manga characters in new ways. For example, the overtly masculine male characters in many *gegika* (dramatic, realistic manga) stories are parodied to the point that their masculinity seems ridiculous. Themes of homosexuality are prevalent in the *yaoi* (‘no build up, no foreclosure, no meaning’) genre of parody manga. These themes are

popular with female readers because many young Japanese women do not feel a connection to the stereotypical Japanese male who is meant to be constantly working. According to their traditional roles, Japanese men are not forward-thinking and free, but the homosexual characters in *yaoi* are.⁵⁶

I use these examples to establish that manga has long played a role in the renegotiation of gender norms in Japan. Sometimes these renegotiations are extreme, or reflect uncomfortable truths about the way the sexes relate to each other. In the case of *Lolicom* manga, for example, the stories revolve around young, attractive female characters.⁵⁷ Sharon Kinsella argues that there are two main categories of reactions to *Lolicom* amongst most of its male fans. The first is that many men enjoy *Lolicom* stories because their strong heroines acknowledge that women's roles in Japan are changing, and that women can be strong and courageous; however, the stories also allow the men to keep the female characters 'infantilized, undressed and subordinate.'⁵⁸ They can engage with female strength and power, but they can do it on their own terms. Kinsella's second category includes men who project their own self-image of sexuality onto the female characters. These desires are reflected in only certain *Lolicom* series; one series features attractive Lolita-like figures who 'sprout penises to reveal their hidden masculinity;' in another series, the main male character takes on the 'infantile

⁵⁶ Kinsella, *Adult Manga*, pp. 113–21.

⁵⁷ The term *Lolicom* is indeed derived from Vladimir Nabakov's novel *Lolita* (1955).

⁵⁸ Kinsella, *Adult Manga*, p. 122.

affections' of a circle of young female friends, and thereby ingratiates himself into their group so that he can be close to them.⁵⁹

Overall, parody, *yaoi*, and *Lolicon* manga (as well as other forms of amateur manga) often wrestle with themes and unique representations of gender and sexuality.⁶⁰ Kinsella beautifully sums up this reality in the following extended quotation from *Adult Manga* (2000), when she writes that these genres,

express the frustration experienced by young people who have found themselves unable to relate to the opposite sex, as they are constituted within the contemporary cultural and political environment. There is, in short, a profound disjuncture between the expectations of men and the expectations of women in contemporary Japan. Young women have become increasingly dissatisfied with the prospect of marriage to men who can not [*sic*] treat them as anything other than women, mothers, and subordinates. Men who persist in macho sexist behaviour – like that often depicted in boys and adults [*sic*] manga magazines, [*sic*] – are gently ridiculed and rejected by the teenage girls involved in writing *parody* [*sic*] manga, or reading gay love stories. Young men who also find masculine behaviour and networking [...] restricting and uncomfortable, [*sic*] have also been attracted to amateur girls' manga.

Both the obsession with girls relieved through the different types of *Lolicon* manga, and the increasing interest amongst young men in (girls' own) girls' [*sic*] manga, reflect the growing tendency amongst young Japanese men to be fixated with the figure of the young girl and to orientate themselves around girls' culture [*sic*]. The increasingly intense gaze with which young men examine girls and

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 122.

⁶⁰ It is important to note that these genres have come under heavy fire within Japan in recent history. For example, in 1989, a printers' assistant named Miyazaki Tsutomu was arrested for the kidnapping, mutilation, and murder of four very young girls. Upon his capture, the police found a large collection of girls' manga and *Lolicon* manga in his home. This discovery began what was called the 'otaku scare,' a four-year period when conservative activists from around Japan spoke out against what they viewed to be dangerous material in manga. Concentrated efforts by self-proclaimed *otaku* groups aimed to restore the good name of the fans, and to disassociate themselves with the murders of 1989. See Kinsella, *Adult Manga*, pp. 126–31. Repercussions of the 'otaku scare' still linger, but as mentioned previously, only the most extreme *otaku* are viewed as questionable today.

girls' manga is, to use the words of Anne Allison, 'both passive and aggressive.' [...] It is a gaze of both fear and desire, stimulated not least by the perception of lost privileges over women, which accumulated during the 1980s.⁶¹

The relationship between manga and Japanese cultural expectations of sexuality are obviously complex. The multitude of styles and genres of manga reflect a diverse array of representations, desires, and understanding. The multifaceted changes of attitude about sexuality in Japan do not exist in a vacuum, however; they are paralleled globally. Many Western cultures over the past sixty to seventy years have faced similar shifts, and Western art, culture, and even fandom have reflected these changes. Kinsella compares amateur manga to fan fiction in the West. Specifically with regards to slash fan fiction (defined in chapter 4), the problems seem similar.⁶² When we consider that the West already has an abundance of its own amateur output that features complicated sexual representations, it becomes less surprising that manga and anime should also be popular in the West, even if it contains representations of young girls that Western propriety deems troubling.

The young, innocent look of many female manga characters is typical of depictions of female Vocaloids, with the majority of the characters depicted in *kawaii* style. Certain female Vocaloids, while designed in an anime-style, depart from the *kawaii* aesthetic, though they are still sexualised. For example, Megurine Luka's clothing was designed to resemble the appearance of the Yamaha VL1 keyboard. Her dress also

⁶¹ Kinsella, *Adult Manga*, p. 124.

⁶² Ibid., pp. 124–126.

includes elements reminiscent of woodwind and brass instruments, such as the buckle under her chin that resembles intertwined horns. Despite its musical influences, Luka's clothing is revealing in a similar manner to Miku's schoolgirl attire. Luka has an exposed midriff and high slit in her skirt. In fanart, her costume is sometimes changed to that of a schoolgirl like Miku's; the two are often depicted together as being best friends.

As with many products of popular culture, fans of Vocaloid engage with their fandom by creating fanart and fan fiction. It is not uncommon for fans to create objects that are erotic in nature, and Vocaloid is no exception, with a wide range of pornographic material created by fans easily available on the Internet. This content is created by fans from all over the world, not just from isolated geographic regions. Erotic imagery abounds, and stories featuring Vocaloid characters performing various types of sexual acts are also prevalent. A large majority of this material focuses on the female Vocaloids, although this is arguably because female characters far outnumber male characters in the Vocaloid universe. But there are certain Vocaloid fans who feel that this type of expression is inappropriate, and they adopt an almost paternal/maternal attitude toward the Vocaloid characters. For example, in the group rules for FBGroupA (a Facebook group for Vocaloid fans, which will be discussed extensively in chapter 7 and which is moderated by an American male), rule three states: 'DECENCY: "Keep it clean, safe and beautiful." [FBGroupA] DOES NOT allow, for any reason, any

pictures containing anything overly *ecchi*⁶³ or fanservice.⁶⁴ Ok, yes, Miku has a short skirt, and yes, Luka is quite well endowed, but lets not be perverts here. [sic]⁶⁵ This rule (although problematic in and of itself because it fails to establish clear parameters for what is and is not decent, while drawing attention to traits of the characters that can be easily sexualised) is representative of the protective feelings that certain fans develop for Vocaloids. The age of the characters and their presumed innocence fuel the drive to keep Vocaloids pure.

Beyond their appearance, the musicianship of the Vocaloids is an interesting aspect of their construction. It is commonly accepted amongst fans that Vocaloids are the singers of Vocaloid music. But they are never credited as playing any of the instruments (which is a distinction from many virtual bands where the characters are depicted as playing instruments on various tracks, or are credited in liner notes.) When the hologram characters perform live, they are not depicted as playing instruments; they sing at the front of the stage. It seems that Vocaloids are only meant to be providing the voices for tracks, which is logical considering the cutting edge aspects of the technology that allows users to manipulate their voices. Their purpose is providing vocals.

⁶³ *Ecchi* is a Japanese term for lewd material that is not explicitly sexual. It is considered to be titillating and ‘naughty,’ but never goes so far as to be pornographic.

⁶⁴ Fanservice is a term for any element of anime or manga that is intentionally added to please the fans. In some cases, this is erotic or pornographic material, but the term can also be applied to gratuitous violence or even intertextual references from other anime or manga sources.

⁶⁵ Rules of FBGroupA as relayed in email conversation with group creator, 10 October 2014.

In this way, Vocaloids recreate the role of human pop princesses in a virtual context. Female Vocaloids fall directly in line with the roles of young women (particularly teenagers) in popular music. They are singers first and foremost; if they are instrumentalists, that talent is an exception rather than the rule. Their diva tendencies are part of their appeal. Fans love to follow the stories of what female pop stars are doing, and fans of Vocaloids are no exception. With regards to human pop stars, their everyday activities are extremely important to fans. Who they get along with, who they are fighting with, and what they are wearing are arguably considered to be as important to their public image as the content of their music. Many of these factors are also vital to Vocaloid image construction, and as will be seen in chapter 7, fans spend enormous amounts of time crafting stories and imagery to expand the folklore of their favourite Vocaloids.

Comparing Vocaloids to pop princesses is a complicated endeavour. Discourse about pop princesses, their construction, their authenticity, and their social and cultural impact often includes extensive discussion about the influence of major labels or corporate influence, and the ethics and authenticity that result from such influence. Vocaloids are different because not only do they not receive the same kind of influence from professional record producers (the majority of the manner in which they are depicted is decided by the fans who create the depictions), they are also not human, so the ethics of manipulating their images or using them for commercial gain are different.

Consider the recent history of the female pop star outlined in the final chapter of Lucy O'Brien's *She Bop II* (2002). In 'Girlpower!', O'Brien outlines the types of girl groups that rose to prominence in the 1990s and early 2000s, including the Spice Girls, 'organic pop' (Alanis Morissette, Liz Phair), divas (Celine Dion, Mariah Carey, Britney Spears), and the artists of Ladyfest (Le Tigre, Bratmobile). Throughout her discussion of such a broad range of female performers, O'Brien posits several interpretations of female authenticity, both from an audience perspective and from that of the artists themselves. For example, the Spice Girls were lauded by many fans as feminist symbols for young girls, powerful and dynamic and in control of their careers; but their fellow female popular musicians thought they bordered on the ridiculous. O'Brien quotes Shirley Manson, lead singer of Garbage, saying, 'I don't see how wearing a push-up bra and knickers on the front cover of a magazine has anything to do with moving forward the cause of female equality.'⁶⁶ Singers like Morissette, however, were praised for the raw nature of their music. Because of songwriters like her, 'Suddenly women's anger became marketable.'⁶⁷ The emergence of more female singers like Morissette throughout the 1990s helped to turn female rock into a commodity, and the role of women in popular music was more prominent than it had ever been (especially when one considers singers like Bessie Smith, whose music was just as heartfelt, but who were marginalised for a variety of reasons). O'Brien continues with discussions of popular music

⁶⁶ O'Brien, *She Bop II*, p. 463.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 468.

divas and of female punk and grunge acts, all of which further illustrate the wide array of meanings and attributes of ‘female popular music’ during the era just before the invention of VOCALOID.

The multitude of groupings and ideas of femininity and feminism found in *She Bop II* are just one person’s concept of ways to define the female in popular music. Even using O’Brien’s classifications, it is hard to know where she would categorise Vocaloids. Britney Spears (who O’Brien classifies as a rising diva, given the book’s release in 2002) is perhaps a close parallel to Hatsune Miku, due to their similar ages and images (Spears was sixteen years old when her first single debuted, Miku is perpetually sixteen years old; Spears’s iconic schoolgirl attire in the ‘...Baby One More Time’ (1998) video is similar to Miku’s costume). O’Brien suggests that Spears’s infectious dancing, her ‘Barbie-doll looks,’ and her carefully constructed image that blended innocence with sexuality were all important elements in her rise to popularity.⁶⁸ Miku has these elements as well, including dancing programmed for her by fans on MikuMikuDance (see the final section on fandom in this chapter) and other programmes, adorable good looks that fit into the *kawaii* aesthetic, and fanart and hologram performances where she is both painted as an innocent and as a sexual being. So perhaps Miku is a diva on the rise, and therein lies her feminine appeal and impact.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 483–485.

⁶⁹ It is interesting to note here that a series of spinoff video games called Hatsune Miku: Project DIVA was released by Sega and Crypton Future Media starting in 2009. The games are rhythm-based, meaning the user must press the correct sequence of buttons that correspond to a series of symbols on the screen; the symbols scrolling past are synched to Vocaloid tracks.

But for all of the many categories of female popular musicians and all the ways that they embody ‘Girlpower!’, female empowerment is not necessarily a hallmark of Vocaloid music. It is certainly no more of a theme than in any other genre of music. Other themes (like love and loss) are just as prevalent, if not more so. Many of the VocaloidPs I spoke to (including three prominent female VocaloidPs) mentioned that Vocaloid gives them a voice, a way to express themselves musically that they might not otherwise have. But none of the female VocaloidPs mentioned their gender as creating a need for that voice, nor did they mention that they explore themes of female empowerment or feminism in their music. This, of course, does not mean that they do not engage with such issues. The fact that none of the female VocaloidPs felt the need to mention their gender or feminism is perhaps indicative of the fact that such statements are not needed in Vocaloid, that women musicians are accepted without having to qualify or prove themselves. The anonymity offered to VocaloidPs (who compose from a computer and can share their music using avatars and usernames) helps to level the playing field for women musicians trying to impact the genre. This is no small consideration for the potential of Vocaloid and similar technologies to revolutionise popular music. Its anonymity is its democracy, and true democracy is something we have not yet experienced in the music industry.

Vocaloids in Performance: Technology Leads Humanity

Although female empowerment is not a common thread in Vocaloid music or fanart, the characters are still given a certain amount of agency and authority, especially in their ‘live’ performances. In ‘live’ performances of the most prominent Vocaloids (such as Miku, Luka, Kagamine Rin and Kagamine Len), holograms are most commonly used. The holograms are often seen on stage with human musicians who are accompanying the Vocaloids. As is often the case in pop concerts, the band is placed toward the back of the stage, or in a less prominent position than the leading performer (in this case, the hologram). Positioning the human band behind the Vocaloid is a technological necessity (see the discussion in chapter 1 of the way that most holograms are created using the Pepper’s Ghost effect; the presence of a thin screen to project the hologram onto is the crux of the illusion). But the location of the band also deemphasizes the human element of the performance. In fact, the use of a human band and the holograms’ placement in 3D space in front of them are extremely important aspects of Vocaloid live performance. This instantly equates them to human pop stars who ‘front’ a band. The musicians are often dimly lit, no doubt to keep the holograms looking sharp, but placing musicians in a darker area of the stage or a place of less prominence is common practice in many pop acts. The layout of the stage lends authenticity to the hologram performers by giving them the same position of control over the musical event that a living performer would have. That control, in this case, is all part of the illusion.

In the case of female Vocaloids, the position at the front of the stage also empowers them in an important way, even though they are holograms.

They are the main attraction on stage, the reason the fans have come. Like the most successful human female pop stars, they hold power over the event, and what they do on stage is much more important than their (often male) musician accompanists. The holograms are often programmed to interact with the audience, casting their gaze downward where the audience stands. At Miku's 39's Giving Day Concert in 2010, her hologram rose out of the stage at the beginning of one of her most popular singles ('World is Mine'). The crowd cheered raucously, receiving her the way human female pop stars like Madonna, Katy Perry, and Beyoncé have been received during similar entrances.

Louise H. Jackson and Mike Dines's chapter 'Vocaloids and Japanese Virtual Vocal Performance,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Virtuality*, is applicable when discussing Vocaloid hologram performances.⁷⁰ The authors argue that Vocaloid mirrors the historic Japanese tradition of Bunraku puppetry because it creates a knowing illusion. The audience is aware that the hologram is not real, and they must deal with that knowledge in some way (whether consciously or subconsciously). In Bunraku puppetry, three puppeteers control each puppet, and the lead puppeteer's face is exposed so that the audience can watch the puppet and the puppeteer as one.⁷¹ The puppeteering is exquisite and nuanced, but part of the overall experience is to be able to watch the lead puppeteer who is creating the exquisite, nuanced movement. Jackson and Dines argue that Vocaloid

⁷⁰ Jackson and Dines, 'Vocaloids and Japanese Virtual Vocal Performance,' pp. 101–110.

⁷¹ Donald Keene, *Bunraku: The Art of the Japanese Puppet Theatre* (New York: Kodansha America, Inc., 1974).

parallels this tradition because when a Vocaloid sings, the audience recognises and knows that there is a human controlling the Vocaloid.

The parallel is not direct, however, because VocaloidPs do not perform on stage with Vocaloids. Importantly, the audience often interacts with the Vocaloid hologram in a way that shows they are actively trying to forget that the construction is not real (cheering, singing along, dancing, and exhibiting the same behaviours that audiences at human concerts do). This behaviour suggests that they are aware of the difference, and are putting it aside for the sake of the experience. Unlike Bunraku, therefore, the audience seems to wish to remove the puppeteer from the experience.

This does not mean, however, that VocaloidPs are not respected or valued for their work. Especially in Japan, VocaloidPs are greatly revered for their work (as will be discussed later in this chapter in the interview with EmpathP, and in the full interview text in Appendix C). This reverence is not equaled in the West, where characters still have more prowess than VocaloidPs (although VocaloidPs are gaining greater respect in the West all the time). The parallel between Vocaloid and Bunraku is strongest when comparing the adoration of fans for VocaloidPs in Japan itself with the respect that Bunraku puppeteers have long garnered in Japanese culture.

Jackson and Dines's comparison is also complicated by the fact that many cultures around the world – including many in East Asia – have puppeteering traditions (for example, the Nang Yai shadow puppet plays of Thailand, the Kathputli marionettes of India, and the Wayang Golek rod puppets of Indonesia). It is true that Japan's economy and culture are

technologically driven, and the prevalence of technology in Japanese society may have bolstered Jackson and Dines's reasoning that Japan is the culture most likely to carry longstanding puppeteering traditions into a new technological era. But that connection is arguably coincidental since technological advancements have developed in and been influential to a multitude of cultures around the world, many of which include puppeteering in their cultural histories.

When examining the level of power that a Vocaloid hologram holds over a live event, one can employ Stanyek and Piekut's concepts of agency. As discussed in chapter 2, holograms (and indeed Vocaloids) are examples of the intermundane – elements that affect the music but that are not alive (and in this case, were never alive). These elements change not only the means of musical production, but also audience reception, because the audience is constantly negotiating and reaffirming their understanding of the elements' effectivity. Even though they may not be consciously aware, the audience members are not passive, because they use the visuals and the music (as well as the human musicians, the venue, and the other fans) to frame a larger personal understanding of what is occurring. The hologram and the manufactured voice are key to this process, for if they were absent or even different, the audience's experience would be changed.

Rogers's work on music video in *Visualising Music* is also applicable to understanding live Vocaloid performance, because these performances instantly double as a concert and a music video. The video projected onto

the screens establishes a source for the music.⁷² Rogers argues that source is important for consumers to feel that the performance is authentic. Seeing the Vocaloid sing and dance on the stage reinforces to the audience that this is an authentic event, in the same way that seeing musicians in a music video ‘perform’ their music reinforces to the viewer that the music is legitimate. In live performance, the Vocaloid is painted as an autonomous figure who can sing and move for herself, even though the audience knows better. Pair her with a band of human musicians, and the illusion becomes even more elaborate.

Auslander’s ideas on the prevalence of the televisual are also helpful in this context. As detailed earlier in this chapter, Japan is a culture that embraces technology and integrates it into many aspects of day-to-day life. What occurs in Vocaloid performance is the same kind of integration, but it is happening at performances across the world. The level of acceptance asked of the audience, the suspension of disbelief that allows them to watch a hologram sing and dance to her latest single, is bred from larger cultural phenomena. The prevalence of this technology and its increasingly seamless bond with reality have developed through time. Certain segments of societies in both the East and West view this bond as a positive development, as evidenced by the commercial success and roaring crowds at hologram performances worldwide in recent years. Fans cheer for this technology, they sing along with it, and they film and share it across multiple social media platforms. They participate in this way because of the

⁷² Rogers, *Visualising Music*.

overwhelming presence of the televisual and other technologies in modern-day life.

But for all the means of establishing authenticity that are carefully constructed around Vocaloids, their voices are still distinguishable from human voices. No one would mistake a Vocaloid voice for a human singer, and digital characteristics are celebrated in some Vocaloid fan circles. However, with voice reproduction technology advancing at a quick pace, it is not clear how soon it will be before we can no longer distinguish between real voices and manufactured voices. While Itoh himself mentioned that the intention of VOCALOID was not to create a perfect reproduction of the human voice, he also emphasised that there is no mapped progression for what VOCALOID will become, so crafting a flawless voice recreation could eventually be something that Crypton Future Media aims to do. The point is that this technology has potential that is as yet unknown, and that creates as many ethical dilemmas as fascinating opportunities. In the short span of time since its creation, Vocaloid has already seen enormous progression in its technology and in the way the technology is utilised and manipulated.

For example, in 2012, Hatsune Miku starred in her own opera, *The End*, which debuted in Yamaguchi City. The opera was meant to be performed using computers – no human elements were used on stage. Elaborate video and computer-created music were woven together as Miku

sang about the show's central theme: 'What is death?' Such an enormous undertaking would not have been possible only a few years ago.⁷³

Miku also sang backing vocals for Japanese band Bump of Chicken in 2014; for the song 'ray [sic],' she was featured in the music video as a live projection, performing with the band instead of being inserted into the video in post-production. This allowed the band to interact with her in unprecedented ways. Crypton Future Media created a new virtual model of Miku for the music video, and had extensive control over her movements. During filming, technicians controlled all the aspects of her performance and synched the movement with the music in real time; this included some pre-programmed dance moves as well as improvisatory movement. This was achieved by creating a model of Miku that could follow the movement of the camera, responding to the camera like a human performer would. The model was transmitted wirelessly into a rendering programme called 'Unity,' which allowed Miku to be moved 360 degrees at any time.⁷⁴ The hologram technology used to create the image of Miku was standard, but the means of moving her and the ability to control her interaction with the camera and the members of Bump of Chicken were new. Because new effects and improvements such as these are constantly developing, the creative and

⁷³ *The End* was written by Keiichiro Shibuya (music) and Toshiki Okada (libretto), and set design was by YKBX (Masaki Yokobe), all of whom are successful and well-known in their fields. This makes the opera a good example of Vocaloid material produced by fans who are also professionals, making the scope and marketing of the project much more prominent than with most Vocaloid projects.

⁷⁴ 39ch 特別編 BUMP OF CHICKEN feat. HATSUNE MIKU' <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=43hxjf5RFCk>> [accessed 28 October 2014].

innovative ways that Miku performs will continue to grow and change over time.

Vocaloid Fans: Unprecedented Interaction with Celebrity

With live performances, blogs, conventions, and multiple other outlets and artefacts, Vocaloid offers a variety of ways to engage with the music and the fabricated pop stars themselves; the medium allows an enormous amount of control to be given to the fans.

Songs that are created by VocaloidPs are uploaded to various fan forums. There can be hundreds of new songs or variations on songs uploaded each day. Fans learn the forums that their favourite VocaloidP usually uploads to, including YouTube, VocaloidOtaku.net, Nicovideo, and the Vocaloid Wikia. Of course, anyone can upload their songs, so wading through to find high-quality music is a task that requires dedication. But wade the fans do, and certain uploaded songs become increasingly popular. Some fans show their appreciation for certain tracks by creating music videos, dances, or illustrations to accompany the music. Music videos in particular are so prevalent that in 2008, a fan named Yu Higuchi developed a freeware programme to create music videos for Hatsune Miku. Called MikuMikuDance, the programme can actually create a music video for any Vocaloid, as long as a 3D virtual model of the character already exists. The programme allows the user to choreograph the movements of the Vocaloid, down to synching the lips. Users can also add backgrounds, lens flares, and other elements to make the videos seem more realistic. Media materials like

the music videos created on MikuMikuDance are passed around the Vocaloid community. If a song or the media materials attached to it become popular enough, they are sometimes purchased by a larger company (these are the songs that are eventually used for Vocaloid performances).

Who gets the money from a Vocaloid song or album? There is obviously no cut for the singer, but the profits go to the VocaloidP. If a major label wishes to produce a Vocaloid album, they must contact the VocaloidPs who created the music and negotiate to buy it. Any Vocaloid album produced by a major label is a compilation of that character's most popular online songs. Conversely, if a VocaloidP decides to release an album independently (and many do), they will keep all the profits. Vocaloid albums are most often available as digital downloads, so the potential for profit is great. Some Vocaloid producers become famous due to the fanbases that grow around their work. For example, Aki Glancy, who is known online as EmpathP, writes music for several Vocaloids and has designed a Vocaloid of her own. Katie Forgy (known as Myst) is known for work done almost entirely in UTAU.

EmpathP agreed to an email interview with me in September 2014. When asked about her distribution and selling practices, she responded,

I have 2 stores where I sell my music online. I sell my music on Storenvy and Bandcamp primarily. All of my digital albums have physical copies which I sell both online and at conventions. Every once in a while I make a convention-exclusive CD which I will sell. That's always a lot of fun because it makes the CD that much more special.

I sell my artwork and music all the time... Not only that, but I am also available for commissions. If someone wants me to draw them something, they can pay me a small fee and I will draw them

something original. My biggest commission was from Zero-G when I designed the English Language vocaloid AVANNA. [sic]⁷⁵

EmpathP's response to the question, 'How would you describe the way the online Vocaloid community treats VocaloidPs?' was also enlightening. She said,

[This question] must be answered by pointing out something very important. Every single thing that fans of Vocaloid have come to associate with the community would not be possible and in fact would not exist without VocaloidP's. Without VocaloidP's, you would have no concerts, no CDs, no DVDs, and probably not anything else. People tend to forget when they see Miku singing and dancing on stage that were was a musician and producer behind every single song she sings. On one hand, within the Japanese community, I think Vocaloid Producers are respected. In the American community however, while there are several who are indeed respected, for the most part, we're usually forgotten. I think this is a shame. [sic]⁷⁶

EmpathP emphasises here that VocaloidPs are the key to the Vocaloid genre, which is well known, especially by major labels that might be interested in distributing Vocaloid albums. And EmpathP's comments also reflect a current truth of Vocaloid: the genre is on the rise in America but has not reached the status that it has in Japan, where VocaloidPs are respected. EmpathP later commented that, 'Japan is a culture very much moved by the idea of "idol" singers. These are cute and often times teenage girls with perfect bodies. And often times in Japan, when it comes to their real human idols, they are heavily exploited.'⁷⁷ This observation might sound like the Western popular music industry as well, but the distinction of 'cuteness' as a trait of the 'idol' might be part of the equation that has caused Vocaloid to

⁷⁵ Email interview with Aki Glancy, 29 September 2014.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

explode in popularity in Japan, while its rise in the West has been more laboured.

Prominent VocaloidPs like EmpathP and Myst are often involved in the organisation of *dojin* events. *Dojin* is the Japanese word for a clique or society, so these events are small conventions or concerts organised locally. They feature cosplay (or ‘costume play,’ the trend of dressing up like specific characters); they also feature live performances by VocaloidPs and sales of CDs released by independent VocaloidPs or labels. When a *dojin* event is particularly successful, major record labels take notice.⁷⁸ Commercial labels follow trends at *dojin* events and online, and then buy in to market those trends on larger scales.

As mentioned above, if an album is released by a more commercial label, the VocaloidPs involved must negotiate their fee with the record company. In Hatsune Miku’s case, Crypton Future Media has retained all of her marketing rights, and they release her albums on their own label called KarenT. At KarenT records, the VocaloidPs whose music is purchased are all signed to the label and have negotiated contracts for their percentage of the profits. According to Itoh’s description of the process, it seems that Crypton Future Media values the work of individual fans and is careful to conduct their business in such a way that VocaloidPs see the profits for their work.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ <<http://www.vocaloid.com/en/about/introduction.html>> [accessed 29 April 2013].

⁷⁹ Itoh, ‘Hatsune Miku: From Software to Cultural Phenomenon.’

Conclusion

This chapter has introduced a great deal of background information about Vocaloid, and has given insight into its influences, its history, its character construction, and its rise in popularity. Vocaloid culture thrives in the virtual world. It is a virtual art form, and some of its greatest innovations have arisen from the virtual community that engages with it. Online forums are a hugely appropriate outlet for Vocaloid fans, who interact with one another in an entirely virtual setting, discussing entirely virtual musicians.

The most avid Vocaloid fans contribute daily to one or more of the dozens of online Vocaloid fan forums, commenting on posts or beginning discussions of their own. These forums also allow fans to feel extremely connected not only to their favourite Vocaloid characters, but to their favourite VocaloidPs as well. As Andrea MacDonald points out in ‘Uncertain Utopia,’ computer-based fan groups are considered to be an extremely democratic community as they deal in worlds of selective anonymity, where even their race or gender do not have to be factors in their interactions with other fans. Studies have also indicated that online fans are much more active in their involvement than other fans; they ‘reread and rewrite’ what is known about their subjects on a regular basis.⁸⁰

The anonymity and the freedom from gender and ethnic expectations in the fan community are not mirrored in the characters, who are still modeled around stereotypes commonly found in pop music. Yet, the fans’ reaction to and acceptance of ethnic and gender tropes are intermingled with

⁸⁰ MacDonald, ‘Uncertain Utopia,’ pp. 131–132.

multiple other issues, including fan hierarchy, interpretive practices, and methods of fan artefact creation. These and other aspects of fan studies will be utilised in the next chapter to explore the complex dynamics of Vocaloid fandoms; these dynamics link subtly to the fans' gender and ethnic expectations of the characters, which will be elucidated through extensive analysis of interviews and fan artefacts.

Chapter 7

‘Perpetual Devotion:’ Vocaloid fan communities

Though the Web has certainly commercialized fandom, the community offered to Internet fans is equally real. In fact, the Web has encouraged not only friendship between fans otherwise separated by race, class, sexual orientation and geography, but also real-world action.¹

Vocaloid fans form an interesting community that is unlike many other fan communities in that Vocaloid fans solely create the original artefacts of their fandom.² When engaging with the software, VocaloidPs are presented with packaged, digital voices and an associated character, and then they have free reign to create whatever appeals to them. Other fans create the bulk of the imagery associated with Vocaloids; the original character press release might include a variety of drawings, but the fans soon take hold and create a wide array of images, often designing new clothes, new scenarios, or new drawing styles in order to present different representations of the Vocaloid. There are few other fandoms where the fans have such authority in creating original objects.

The community, as will be discussed in this chapter, is an enormously supportive one. While there is hierarchy and some friction amongst Vocaloid fans, the majority of fans encountered in this study were encouraging and

¹ Pullen, ‘Everybody’s Gotta Love Somebody, Sometime,’ p. 89.

² Throughout this chapter, the term ‘fandom’ will be used interchangeably in its two most common meanings: the state or condition of being a fan, and a group of fans which functions as a unit.

inclusive.³ There was very little of the outwardly competitive nature present in other music fandoms (for example, in the club music communities investigated in Sarah Thornton's *Club Cultures* [1995], discussed later in this chapter). The Vocaloid fans I interacted with were welcoming to me, and I did not have any first-hand experiences of scepticism from them. They did not see my initial lack of knowledge about Vocaloid music as a negative, but rather as an opportunity for me to learn what makes the genre such a powerful form of expression for them. Many fans emphasised to me that Vocaloid provides a voice for many who would otherwise have no means of expressing themselves, musically, artistically, or otherwise. This idea of Vocaloid as an outlet is one of the reasons why Vocaloid fandom centres on inclusivity. Other reasons include its virtual nature, and the tendency of fan communities to provide a safe haven, in which anonymity paradoxically allows people to be themselves.

This chapter will describe several interactions I have had with Vocaloid fan groups and with individual fans. It includes data gathered from an online survey that I posted in a Vocaloid fan group, as well as a few of my specific experiences in online fan forums. The chapter will dissect the ways in which the Vocaloid fan community is similar to other fanbases and the ways in which it departs from the types of fan activity that have been examined in prominent fan studies projects. It will also suggest possible

³ My study included English-speaking fans only, most of whom were from Western countries. The fans from non-Western countries that aided in this research corresponded in or spoke English with me.

reasons for how and why the Vocaloid community has developed in the manner that it has.

Fan Survey Results

As mentioned in the Methodology section of the Introduction, I conducted a survey on FBGroupA in order to garner information about the fans who participate on that Facebook page. The survey included demographic questions that were optional to participants. When asked about their gender, 41 out of 47 respondents (87.2%) answered the question; of those 41 respondents, 33 were male (80.49%) and eight were female (19.51%). When asked about their age, 40 out of 47 respondents (85.1%) answered the question. Within those 40 respondents, 3 were between age 0-16 (7.5%); 23 were between age 17-25 (57.5%); 3 were between age 26-35 (7.5%); 3 were between age 36-40 (7.5%); and 8 were 41 or older (20%). Respondents were also asked about their nationality, and given a blank to answer the question, rather than a selection of multiple-choice options. 33 out of 47 respondents (70.21%) answered; 18 of those identified as being from North America; 15 identified as being from European, South American, or Asian countries.

Respondents were given a multiple-choice question about the frequency with which they visit FBGroupA. All 47 respondents answered the question. 31 (65.96%) said they visit the site ‘More than 2 times a day.’ 11 (23.4%) said they visit ‘1-2 times a day.’ 2 (4.26%) said they visit ‘Once a

week,' while 1 (2.13%) said they visit 'Once a month.' 2 (4.26%) chose the response stating 'I don't visit [FBGroupA], but it appears in my Newsfeed, and I click on posts that interest me.' The high numbers of those who visit the group daily reinforces what might already be an obvious observation: those taking the survey are amongst the most engaged members of FBGroupA.

44 out of 47 respondents (93.6%) said they used FBGroupA for a variety of reasons: to share fanart and music created by others, to pass along news about concerts and software releases, and to browse and comment on other people's posts. Of note, 9 respondents (20.45%) said that they use FBGroupA to post fanart that they created themselves, and 4 (9.09%) said they use FBGroupA to post music that they created themselves. This suggests that even in the participatory culture of Vocaloid fandom, the segment that actually produces music and fanart is relatively small, and that sharing someone else's work is more common practice amongst Vocaloid fans.

Respondents provided a variety of answers when asked which online outlet was their main source for Vocaloid information. 41 out of 47 respondents (87.2%) answered, and 22 (46.8%) said that FBGroupA was their main source of information. Some respondents left long lists of blogs and websites, indicating an expansive knowledge of online Vocaloid resources, and a desire to place themselves in positions of authority in Vocaloid fandom hierarchy.

A multiple-choice question was posed to assess how important online resources are to the respondents as Vocaloid fans. 45 out of 47 respondents (95.74%) answered the question. While the possible answers ranged from very important to not at all important, all 45 respondents selected ‘very important’ or ‘somewhat important’ answers. No respondents selected ‘not important,’ indicating that while their level of engagement with online resources might differ, all of the fans recognised that the online elements are a vital part of Vocaloid fandom.

Respondents were also given a blank box to respond to the prompt, ‘Something I would like the world to know about Vocaloid is....’ 33 out of 47 respondents (70.21%) answered. Many of the responses were long and full of passionate language, including several responses that said others should stop judging Vocaloid fans. 7 out of the 33 respondents also made specific reference to the Vocaloid community, indicating in a variety of ways that it is a safe place, or a place where creativity is encouraged.⁴

Cultural Capital

The current cultural environment (which has evolved due to the prominence of the televisual, a concept discussed thoroughly in chapter 2) has proven to be fertile soil for the growth of virtual bands and creations like Vocaloid. This environment also reflects trends in the changes of cultural capital, a concept that can no longer simply be applied as Pierre Bourdieu originally conceived

⁴ For a list of responses to this question, see Appendix D.

of it. Bourdieu's definition of cultural capital has been enormously influential in shaping cultural studies and sociology, but it needs to be reexamined in the face of popular culture fandom as it exists today.

Bourdieu explains cultural capital as the elements of culture that help to define the classes. The upper classes determine what is valuable or 'high' art based on their investments of time and money. Cultural capital requires, work on oneself (self-improvement), an effort that presupposes a personal cost (*on paie de sa personne*, as we say in French), an investment, above all of time, but also of that socially constituted form of libido, *libido sciendi*, with all the privation, renunciation, and sacrifice that it may entail.⁵

Cultural capital may be inherited to a certain extent (for example, through art collections passed down through families or parental involvement in discussing or experiencing art), but it must largely be acquired. Bourdieu also introduces the concept of the habitus, or the habitat and the habitants where culture exists, and the habitual ways that people experience culture. The habitus creates a habituated way of seeing the world.⁶

Bourdieu's theory, while presenting an interesting framework with which to view the elements of culture, assumes that the cultural elements deemed worthy of the upper classes have the greatest cultural capital. However, as fan culture has become more prominent, and as online mediums like Twitter have erased the boundaries between celebrity and fan, cultural capital must be reevaluated. John Fiske correctly notes that

⁵ Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital,' in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John G. Richardson (London: Greenwood Press, 1986), pp. 241–258 (p. 244).

⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 78–87.

Bourdieu's theory does not allow for elements of gender, race, and age in its discussion of social discrimination. Fiske also points out that Bourdieu does not address subculture, or the culture of the subordinant, with the same careful consideration that he dissects dominant culture.⁷ This might be due to the fact that Bourdieu's analysis often refers to his contemporary economy, or the fact that the study of subculture was not as prominent in the era that Bourdieu formulated his idea. Nevertheless, we must consider the ways that fandom and subcultures have affected cultural capital.

Thornton's *Club Cultures* is a key text for discussing what she (following Bourdieu) styles as subcultural capital and music. In her book, Thornton describes ways in which groups of dance music fans create their own hierarchy of importance, from knowing the latest or most obscure tracks to negating the tastes of other fans. Indeed, this emphasis on the negative in others was one of the most often-observed methods of establishing subcultural capital that Thornton encountered during her fieldwork. She hypothesizes that the models she witnessed for establishing dominance are applicable across many subcultures and many fandoms.⁸

Thanks to the Internet, fandom does not necessarily require a monetary investment. Music, films, books, photography, and art are all attainable online, often for free (though not necessarily free by legal means). In order to become a super-fan, one no longer needs to travel to each stop

⁷ John Fiske, 'The Cultural Economy of Fandom,' in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. Lisa A. Lewis (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 30–49 (p. 32).

⁸ Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media, and Subcultural Capital* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995), pp. 92–93, 99–102, 114–115.

on a band's tour, or hunt down a copy of the rare, unpublished manuscript of a given author. These and other endeavours still help to establish prestige in fan communities, but they are no longer requirements for fandom in the same ways they were in previous decades. New markers of fandom have emerged, such as engagement with the subject of the fandom online, be that through interaction with celebrities, updating blog or forum posts, or creating fan fiction and other extension art based on the original. Seeing the live event becomes a further implement of attaining subcultural capital, but engagement with the live event has also changed (for example, recording the event on a mobile phone and uploading the footage later for other fans to see). Bourdieu's and Thornton's theories have laid valuable foundations, but as Fiske suggests, they are frameworks which must be modified as new expressions of fandom alter the value of cultural and subcultural capital. Many fandom theorists employ Bourdieu's theories, but as will be shown below, often they do so from a highly critical viewpoint.

Theoretical Frameworks for Fan Studies

Henry Jenkins's book *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (1992; 2013) provides a framework for analysing fan cultures surrounding a range of television programmes; however, his work has become so well known in fan studies that his theories have been adapted to a variety of fan communities. In the book, Jenkins provides five levels of activity that surround and help to define fandoms, and these are directly applicable to Vocaloid fans.

a. Fandom involves a particular mode of reception. Fan viewers watch television texts with close and undivided attention, with a mixture of emotional proximity and critical distance. They view them multiple times [...] to scrutinize meaningful details. They translate the reception process into social interaction with other fans. [...] Making meanings involves sharing, enunciating, and debating meanings. For the fan, watching the series is the beginning, not the end, of the process of media consumption.⁹

In Jenkins's first level of fan activity, we need only substitute Vocaloid for television and alter some of the terminology to mould it to Vocaloid fandoms. Vocaloid fans engage constantly with Vocaloid-related media, including pictures, music, and music videos. In interviews, several fans described their Vocaloid discovery experiences as 'getting lost for hours' watching YouTube videos, becoming 'obsessed' with the concept of virtual singers or even a particular song. 'bioloid' said that when he heard Megurine Luka for the first time, '[His] mind was screaming, "OH MY GOD, SHE'S BEAUTIFUL. THIS ONE, THIS IS THE ONE!" I spent the next 4 hours, listening to her sing and watching her dance [sic].' When describing the first time she heard a Vocaloid singer (Hatsune Miku), Site B user 'BAGU' commented, 'Right after I watched the YouTube video I downloaded "World is Mine" on my iPhone and that was all I listened to for two days straight [sic].'

As fandom progresses, the engagement continues to be intense for many of the fans. Site B user 'lemonlime' described his routine of daily involvement on forums:

Let's see [...] I check this forum [Site B] every day and I'm subscribed to a lot of reprinters on YouTube. I also occasionally go

⁹ Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture (Updated Twentieth Anniversary Edition)* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 277–278.

on Nicovideo and search the Original Songs tag and the Vocaranking, but not that often. When I go on this site it's usually for the people, because I have some really, really great friends here like BAGU, I see you've talked to her already. [...] I often go into the Songs/PVs/MMDs section to find new music too, and the Reprinting Request Thread and Requests and Recommendations are also really useful. [sic]

'lemonlime' specifically mentions that talking to other fans is a big motivation for visiting online forums; many Vocaloid fans who I interacted with described making close friends on a variety of websites, and indicated that their conversations will sometimes meander to personal matters rather than Vocaloid. An overwhelming amount of the interaction on forum threads has to do with sharing music and photos, enunciating love for a specific character, releasing insider information, or debating the merit and meanings of specific songs. Of note, and unlike other fan communities, songs do not seem to spark the same heated debate in Vocaloid fan culture as they do in other fan cultures covered by previous studies. The overwhelming amount of posts indicating preferences for songs or characters, or revealing 'what this song means to me,' are met with enthusiasm and affirmation, as opposed to rancour.

Jenkins's second level of fan activity reads,

b. Fandom involves a particular set of critical and interpretive practices. Part of the process of becoming a fan involves learning the community's preferred reading practices. Fan criticism is playful, speculative, subjective. [...] [Fans] create strong parallels between their own lives and the events of the series. [...] This mode of interpretation draws them far beyond the information explicitly present and toward the construction of a meta-text. [...] The meta-text is a collaborative enterprise; its construction effaces the

distinction between reader and writer, opening the program to appropriation by its audience.¹⁰

Again, by substituting the television references with Vocaloid, we get a glimpse into common practice within Vocaloid fan communities. New Vocaloid fans quickly become acquainted with the sharing, reposting, and commenting styles used on their forum of choice. For those who engage and post often, trends can be seen in successive posts. Some fans consistently create and discuss parallels between the lyrics of songs and their personal experience. This is no different from fans of any band who feel that the music ‘speaks’ specifically to them and their circumstances.

Meta-texts have also emerged in Vocaloid fandom, which manifest in fan fiction and artwork depicting the Vocaloid characters ‘hanging out’ after gigs, getting into mischief, taking roadtrips, and participating in other antics. Another meta-text also exists that might seem confusing at first. A common theme of many posts is the idea that a Vocaloid character is best friends with the original poster (OP). The OP might use photographs or elaborate stories to paint the picture that the Vocaloid lives with the OP, regularly calls or texts the OP, or that the two have been out on the town together. In FBGroupA, this regularly included posts that suggested that the Vocaloid lived with the OP because the two are involved in a romantic relationship. For example, one user has created a series of posts that describe such a scenario, and many of those posts are similar to this:

Another addition to ‘My Life With Luka’ series:

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 278.

I'm just sitting here, Dyonn & I are message-chatting about cars and such. Naturally I'm doing my usual, long-winded replies. But then he says that he needs to get some rest, and I realize that I'm fairly tired too. So He & I say our good-nights and end the chat-session. My mind turns to my beautiful Luka. Instantly, I just want to hear her sweet and sexy voice. And right then, guess who just called? You got it! None other than my Lovely Pink-haired lady herself! She sounded happy. She says that she'll be home in about two hours or so. She has an after-concert get-together with the other Vocaloids, and they are already gathering to go. But she wanted to get to a quiet room to call me. So she stepped away from the group for a few minutes, and slipped back into her dressing-room. She says that she's O.K. and not to worry. (I will anyway.) She also said that Miku is very, very tired, and worn out, poor dear. But she wants to stay for the after-party anyway. Luka, being the loving big-sister type she is, will stay with her. She says that the fans were awesome, and how she loves doing this. But she can't wait to come back home and snuggle up under the blankets, and listen to the sounds of the night with me, as we drift off to sleep in each others' arms. I told her that I can hardly wait to do that, but may be in bed when she gets home. She said that that's quite alright, and that the others were getting ready to go, and Rinny just ran in to tell her to 'Come on'. So we said our 'I love you's and hung up. So now, I'm off to bed, but I know my babe will quietly slip in beside me soon.

See you soon babe, I <3 You! [sic]¹¹

The elaborate and detailed nature of this post is not uncommon to the fanciful stories the fans weave and post about their favourite characters.

Other posts suggest that the Vocaloid is posting on behalf of the OP ('Miku here, I'm uploading the video to YouTube right now and should finish before [FBGroupA user] gets home, can't wait till he sees it!!' [sic]¹²) Posts like these come from a variety of users. But the meta-text which allows the Vocaloid to live with multiple people, or hang out with fans on opposite sides of the world at the same time, or be in a romantic relationship with more than

¹¹ FBGroupA post, 19 October 2014

¹² FBGroupA post, 20 October 2014

one person (while simultaneously wholly devoted only to a given OP) does not seem to faze other fans. In FBGroupA, such posts garner a large amount of ‘likes,’ sometimes from users who have made similar posts about the same Vocaloid shortly before. The acceptance and praise of these posts by many fellow fans illustrates that the online community can sometimes function as an ‘echo chamber,’ where ideas are circulated so often that they become expected, and in cases such as those mentioned here, laudable. In some cases (but not all, as will be discussed in the Conclusion), immersion within the online space has removed the participants from the reality of their actual social situation and responsibility, and this can result in unusual or extreme views becoming normalised. Fans in FBGroupA broadly accept the curious stories that are crafted and shared within the online platform. Both the stories and their approval can function as escapism for fans.

Jenkins’s levels of fan activity continue with the third classification:

- c. Fandom constitutes a base for consumer activism. Fans are viewers who speak back to the networks and the producers, who assert their right to make judgments and to express opinions about the development of favorite programs. [...] Fandom originates, at least in part, as a response to the relative powerlessness of the consumer in relation to powerful institutions of cultural production and circulation. [...] Official fan organizations generate and maintain the interests of regular viewers and translate them into a broader range of consumer purchases; i.e. spinoff products, soundtracks, novelizations, sequels, etc. Fandom (i.e., the unofficial fan community) provides a base from which fans may speak about their cultural preferences and assert their desires for alternative developments.¹³

¹³ Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, pp. 278–279.

Jenkins's third assertion might appear complicated when viewed from a Vocaloid-fan perspective, but I believe his theory aligns with the fact that Vocaloid output and artefacts are almost exclusively fan created, a unique aspect of the genre. Jenkins paints unofficial fan communities of television shows as subversive entities that express the desires of the greater fan body. Vocaloid achieves this as well, although it achieves it through different means. Because Vocaloid music and artwork is produced by and large by VocaloidPs, fans have already bypassed the wants and desires of professional producers. By eliminating the need for studio executives (precisely as Crypton Future Media intended), the Vocaloid community can create exactly what they want to see and hear. If a producer wishes to make any money from a Vocaloid album or performance, he or she must not only go through a fan (a VocaloidP), but must also bow directly to that fan's taste as the original creator of the music. The will of the Vocaloid fanbase therefore exhibits more control over consumer activism than in many other types of fandoms.

In Jenkins's fourth level of fan activity, he explains,

d. Fandom possesses particular forms of cultural production, aesthetic traditions and practices. Fan artists, writers, videomakers, and musicians create works that speak to the special interests of the fan community. Their works appropriate raw materials from the commercial culture but use them as the basis for the creation of a contemporary folk culture. Fandom generates its own genres and develops alternative institutions of production, distribution, exhibition, and consumption. [...]

Fan art [*sic*] as well stands as a stark contrast to the self-interested motivations of mainstream cultural production; fan artists create artworks to share with other fan friends. Fandom generates systems of distribution that reject profit and broaden access to its

creative works. [...] There is evidence that these practices are beginning to change – and not necessarily for the better. Witness the emergence of semiprofessional publishers of zines and distributors of filktapes, [...] yet even these companies originate with the fan community and reflect a desire to achieve a better circulation of its cultural products.

Fandom recognizes no clear-cut line between artists and consumers; all fans are potential writers whose talents need to be discovered, nurtured, and promoted and who may be able to make a contribution, however modest, to the cultural wealth of the larger community.¹⁴

Many of the facets of this fourth activity easily correlate to Vocaloid fans.

Vocaloid music and fanart is directly aimed at the fan community and appeals to a Vocaloid aesthetic (influenced largely by anime and manga). The work of Vocaloid fans is an appropriation of the characters and voices that were created by a corporation (Crypton Future Media in collaboration with Yamaha).

It is true that many VocaloidPs sell their music. And it is true that some Vocaloid artists are commissioned for their work (either by other fans or by larger entities who need the artwork for a variety of reasons). But the VocaloidPs are still fans themselves, and in each of the interviews I conducted with VocaloidPs, the excitement over creating and distributing music was not related to money. Rather, the excitement stemmed from the desire to give something to the Vocaloid community, which the VocaloidPs knew would happily receive it. It also reflected a hope that new songs might reach new audiences and therefore draw new fans into the fold. Gaining notoriety as a VocaloidP was further down the list of priorities for the

¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 279–280.

VocaloidPs I interviewed, but none of them stated or suggested direct links between the notoriety they desired and the desire to make more money.

Jenkins's last level of fan activity states,

e. Fandom functions as an alternative social community. [...] fandom offers not so much [...] an escape from reality as an alternative reality whose values may be more humane and democratic than those held by mundane society. [...]

Its appeal to the consumer is linked to its ability to offer symbolic solutions to real world problems and felt needs.¹⁵

Jenkins dedicates more space to describing this activity than to the other four combined. He elaborates extensively on the ways that fandom improves quality of life for many. The alternative reality of a world created by a given television programme (or of a world where Vocaloids are real entities) is matched by the alternative reality of the fan community, in which one is rarely (arguably never) alone, and where there is constantly the promise of something better coming along. For Vocaloid fans in particular, the virtual existence of the fan community is extremely important; because Vocaloid is still relatively obscure in the West, and because it might be viewed as strange or entirely dismissed within Western aesthetics, the online Vocaloid community bolsters itself (and especially its Western participants) by giving its members an outlet for creativity and fascination, without judgement and in a wholly democratic format. A Vocaloid fan can even choose to engage anonymously in every aspect of the community. Indeed, the Vocaloid fan community, like the communities Jenkins describes in his book, is 'defined by

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 280–281.

its refusal of mundane values and practices, its celebration of deeply held emotions and passionately embraced pleasures.¹⁶

Andrea MacDonald's article 'Uncertain Utopia' outlines her conception of hierarchies in fandom. Other theorists have proposed hierarchies within fandom, but MacDonald's is important as one of the first frameworks for such distinctions. This is made even more significant by the fact that MacDonald developed her hierarchies during a time when leading fan studies scholars (including Jenkins and Camille Bacon-Smith) did not recognise hierarchies within fandoms. Jenkins had not addressed hierarchies but chose to focus on the universality and grassroots nature of fandom; Bacon-Smith claimed that fans broke into 'circles' or groups, but that there was no hierarchy within or between groups.¹⁷ MacDonald, however, presents five hierarchies that explain a variety of aspects of fan culture.¹⁸

First, it is proposed that fan communities contain a hierarchy of knowledge, or as MacDonald explains, 'A fan's position within a specific fan community [...] is determined by the amount of knowledge that person has about the fictional universe.'¹⁹ The more knowledge a fan possesses about that particular topic, the more they are viewed as being authoritative, and the more their opinions are valued by the other members of the fandom. Online Vocaloid fans often comment on or begin threads that display their extensive

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 283.

¹⁷ MacDonald, 'Uncertain Utopia,' p. 136.

¹⁸ Note that MacDonald's theories in this article are related to fandoms surrounding science fiction television programming.

¹⁹ MacDonald, 'Uncertain Utopia,' p. 137.

knowledge of particular Vocaloids, including information about new music, new products, or even new updates to the software.

Next, there is a hierarchy of fandom level, or quality. MacDonald relates this specifically to fan participation at conventions, although it has wider implications for other types of fan interaction. For example, Vocaloid fans who engage more frequently or more extensively on online forums gain notoriety and authority by being prolific. Fans might favour certain forums or sites over others, and so they may experience different levels of hierarchy on different sites. MacDonald also notes that the type of interaction is important in this hierarchy; within many fandoms, fan-to-fan interaction is considered more valuable than fan-to-industry interaction, as those who engage in fan-to-industry interaction may be seen as ‘sell-outs.’ This, of course, varies from fandom to fandom, and is particularly grey in Vocaloid, where music and other fan objects are created by fans for fans, but selling a song to a major label for use in a Vocaloid album or concert is considered a great accomplishment for VocaloidPs.

MacDonald’s third type of hierarchy is a hierarchy of access. A fan who has insider access to the production of the fan object will be met with respect, admiration, and jealousy by other members with less access. In Vocaloid, this might relate to someone who passes along word of a new software update before the news is publicised by Yamaha. VocaloidPs are also high on this hierarchy as the developers of Vocaloid artefacts; they know when they will publish new songs or albums, and they often intimately know the work of their VocaloidP friends.

Unsurprisingly, there is also a hierarchy of leaders in fan communities.

MacDonald writes that,

Each fandom is broken down into smaller groups. These divisions occur along geographic, fan interest, or friendship lines. A natural dynamic of these smaller groups is that some people are viewed as ‘leaders’ of the group and others are not. As small groups join up with larger groups [...] there is an implicit recognition of pecking order among the leaders by the followers.²⁰

In online fan communities, this distinction is clear because forums have moderators. The moderators have a fluctuating amount of power, based on the design of the forum. In some cases, like with FBGroupA, the moderators are carefully selected and kept to a very small number. Before becoming moderators, they must prove themselves as being high on the hierarchy of fandom level, or quality, since a major portion of the decision to make them moderators is based on the amount of interaction they have on FBGroupA. The moderators are also solely in charge of adding people to the group. If a moderator does not know you or has no reason to believe in the quality of your fandom, you will not be admitted to FBGroupA.

MacDonald’s last type of hierarchy is a hierarchy of venue. While this is most broadly assigned to fans who host fan events in their homes or in spaces they have organised, it is also applicable to those who create online spaces for fans to congregate. In this way, it is related to the hierarchy of leaders; most often, the person who created the forum will be recognised as its leader. Only when that person formally announces that they are ‘stepping back’ or leaves the group entirely will they lose their position of authority, but

²⁰ Ibid., p. 138.

they sometimes maintain a mythical status among users for some time to come.

It is important to note that ‘fans may occupy multiple positions simultaneously, and thus fans’ positions within fandom are determined by their position within all possible hierarchies.²¹ This makes hierarchy a particularly difficult aspect of fan culture to precisely assess. However, fans seem to intrinsically understand how hierarchy works within their fan community. They know who the most knowledgeable, high-quality leaders are with the most access and the most control over venues. The fans gather this knowledge often without realising, but it is reflected in many ways, including the fact that multiple fans will often point outsiders to the same figures of authority within their fan community. When I first began engaging with Vocaloid fans, the same names kept appearing each time I asked who I should speak to, who could give me the best information, who was the authority on new music. And the fans who achieve this level of authority are most often the ones who engage with the outside world or are outspoken about their love for Vocaloid, and are therefore the representatives for the entire fan community.²²

Citing MacDonald’s theory as ‘a sensitive and detailed account of the multiple dimensions of fan hierarchies,’ Matt Hills’s book *Fan Cultures* (2004) furthers the discussion by presenting a linear explanation of the development

²¹ Ibid., p. 138.

²² Ibid., p. 138–139.

of fan hierarchy theories.²³ Hills starts from Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, which is based on 'an "economistic" approach.'²⁴ Fan theorists have used Bourdieu's descriptions of the 'dominating fraction of the bourgeoisie,' the 'dominated fraction of the bourgeoisie,' the petit bourgeois and the working class. It is possible to employ these terms to analyse the Vocaloid fan community. Within what appears to be an extremely inclusive group, there are divides, since VocaloidPs have the potential of rising to fame. It is therefore possible to consider those who listen to but do not create the music as the petit bourgeois, those who consume the culture but are not considered to be experts. They do not digest and understand Vocaloid to the extent that the VocaloidPs do.²⁵

However, Hills points out,

The flaw with this argument is that it simply assumes the legitimacy of a fixed and monolithically legitimate 'cultural capital', rather than considering how 'cultural capital' may, at any single moment of culture-in-process, remain variously fragmented, internally inconsistent and struggled over.²⁶

Hills goes on to explain that Bourdieu's model should not be applied to fandom because fandom is 'so often placed within a moral dualism,'²⁷ in relation to which he quotes Jenkins's description of fandom as being 'a scandalous category in contemporary culture, one alternately the target of

²³ Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 57.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 47.

²⁵ See John Fiske, 'The Cultural Economy of Fandom,' pp. 30–49. See also Hills, *Fan Cultures*, pp. 47–48.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 48.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 49.

ridicule and anxiety, of dread and desire [...]'²⁸ In other words, what makes a ‘good’ fan or a ‘bad’ fan is determined by factors other than their class or economic status, and is often a fluid conception. For those within fan communities, as well as outsiders looking in, social rejection is a very real consequence of aesthetic distaste, a fact that further complicates models of hierarchy in fan cultures. Democratisation in fan communities can suffer as people shift position within fan hierarchies, and some voices are deemed to be more valuable than others. In the Conclusion of this thesis, I will discuss Jenkins’s work on democratisation in participatory digital culture, and will signpost the problems with the assumption that online fandoms are principally democratic spaces.

Psychoanalysis, Fantasy, and the Perfect Pop Star

Vocaloid fandom can be investigated from two perspectives: the relationship of the fans to the Vocaloid characters, and the relationship of the fans to VocaloidPs (who, of course, are fans themselves). There are many possible explanations for why the fans of Vocaloid are so adamant about their favourite characters, songs, and VocaloidPs. To approach Vocaloid fandom from a psychoanalytical perspective, Melanie Klein’s concept of projective identification states that from an early age of development, infants are trying to separate (as Klein terms it) the life instinct from the death instinct. The life instinct refers to the perceived environmental and emotional elements that

²⁸ Ibid., p. 9.

will bolster the child and make him or her feel safe and validated; the death instinct refers to the elements that might alienate or persecute the child and lead to their demise or ostracisation. The ego projects part of the longing for the life instinct and part of the fear of the death instinct onto external objects, and internalises the other part. The projection of the positive life instinct is said to create the ideal object. When projective identification occurs, the subject takes projection one step further. The subject will project parts of their internalised longing for the life instinct onto the ideal object, thus identifying themselves with the ideal object in a very close way. Conversely, they may project themselves onto a bad object in order to gain control of that object.²⁹ It can then be argued that, like the positive form of projective identification, some fans project what they consider to be their best traits onto celebrities. These fans therefore believe that celebrities exhibit the best traits of the fans themselves. This forms an attachment for the fan between him- or herself and the celebrity.³⁰ The potential for projective identification in Vocaloid fans is great, as Vocaloids are consistent pop stars. They will always behave in the way they are programmed, and thus are highly reliable. Once a fan discovers the particular Vocaloid who exhibits the correct traits, the fan can easily become attached.

This phenomenon can be seen in the example of ‘bioloid,’ who, as mentioned, is a Vocaloid fan and frequent participant on Site B and

²⁹ Hanna Segal, *Introduction to the Work of Melanie Klein* (London: Karnac Books, 1988), pp. 25–28.

³⁰ A summary of the relation between Kleinian theory and fan theory can be found in Hills, *Fan Cultures*, pp. 96–97.

FBGroupA. ‘bioloid’ is a married man (with a male child born during the course of this study) who works as a scientist in Maryland, USA, yet he confesses his romantic love for a Vocaloid named Luka. ‘bioloid’ disclosed his love for Luka in several anonymous postings on Site B, as well as email correspondence with me during October 2013. When I first asked ‘bioloid’ about his love for Luka and whether or not it mattered to him that she was not real, that she was created on a computer, he responded:

Obviously, it isn't a negative to me. In fact, I celebrate it. It is many things to me. Sometimes, I think its [*sic*] miraculous. Sometimes, I think that Vocaloids are our first ‘creation’, our first artificial creature. I would find it delicious irony if Artificial Intelligence is a failure but Artificial Emotion, something we haven't spent decades on, is not.

There is something else about their status as constructs. They are works of art in their own right. There is something pristine, and truthful about them. They will never lie to you, cheat on you, or end up in rehab. Their voices need never change. They need never age. They need never die. They lack our worst faults while simultaneously embodying one of our loftiest pursuits.³¹

Obviously, ‘bioloid’ is an extremely avid and loyal fan. The object of his love is not real, but that does not bother him. He views Vocaloid characters as ‘works of art’ and they are thereby linked to one of mankind’s ‘loftiest pursuits,’ which is to create something perfect and beautiful. He makes a valid point about the nature of Vocaloids as pop stars: a Vocaloid cannot pull out of a gig, end up in rehab, miss a dance rehearsal, or sing flat. Vocaloids are perfect and ageless, as long as the software continues to run.

‘bioloid’ also touches upon a very interesting concept: Artificial Emotion. Artificial Emotion is nothing new in the world of performance.

³¹ Email correspondence with ‘bioloid’ on 16 October 2013.

From actors to opera singers to rock stars, all performers must at times create artificial emotions on stage (and sometimes muster wildly different emotions in rapid succession), which generate what might be described as artificial emotions among audience members. The difference in this context is that the emotions of Vocaloids are always artificial because Vocaloids, like cartoon characters, are artificial. And yet, the fans believe the emotions that the Vocaloid characters are programmed to exude. As Vocaloid technology advances, the ability to convey emotion through Vocaloid – and the ability to encourage an emotional response from fans – advances as well. Facial expression, movement, and vocal expression are constantly improving, so the line between what is real and what is false becomes increasingly blurred. Vocaloid fans are connecting with an object via a system of signs (the semiotics that humans employ and interpret in interaction), but even more so, they are connecting with what that object seems to offer: reliability, consistency, purity. The fact that Luka herself is ultimately unattainable for ‘bioloid’ does not alter his devotion. As ‘bioloid’ discusses the traits of his ideal object (Luka), it is clear he longs for her best qualities to be his best qualities. How wonderful it would be for him to be as honest, reliable, and immortal as Luka is.

A few weeks later, ‘bioloid’ wrote about his feelings on a more public forum, posting on prominent Vocaloid blog MikuStar using his real name.³² He told me after the post went live that, ‘To me, the main different [sic] is that

³² Ken Durbrow, ‘Words Of Love For My Luka,’ 9 November 2013, <<http://www.vocajump.com/words-of-love-for-my-luka/>> [accessed 10 November 2013].

privately I will admit that I am in love with Luka. It's probably pretty obvious to anyone reading that piece that I do love her; however close I get, I don't explicitly say it.³³ But despite the fact that he didn't 'explicitly say it,' he admitted, 'I was a little proud of me for being able to do that.'³⁴

Lacanian psychoanalysis is applicable to Vocaloid fan theory when we consider the potential of a Vocaloid character to operate as *object a* for fans. Lacan's theories follow on from Freud's in trying to establish the cause of human desire. According to Lacan, desire is unavoidable for all humans once they reach the age of language processing; once a human knows how to assign names to the object of desire, that desire can never be eluded. Desire will always remain unfulfilled, but fantasy is one mechanism for attempting to satiate the desire.

One of the clearest explanations of Lacanian theory can be found in Stephen Hinerman's essay "I'll Be Here With You": Fans, Fantasy and the Figure of Elvis' (1992).³⁵ Hinerman explains that for both Freud and Lacan, desire begins from a sense of lack; for Freud, this develops early in the infant, but for Lacan, the desire cannot begin until language acquisition because language is a system for describing differences. The child can then understand the difference between herself in possession of the desired

³³ Email correspondence with 'bioloid' on 10 November 2013.

³⁴ Email correspondence with 'bioloid' on 13 November 2013.

³⁵ Stephen Hinerman, "I'll Be Here With You": Fans, Fantasy and the Figure of Elvis,' in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. Lisa A. Lewis (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 107–134. See also Kenneth M. Smith, 'The Tonic Chord and Lacan's Object *a* in Selected Songs by Charles Ives,' *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, 136:2 (2011), pp. 353–398.

object and herself not in possession of the desired object.³⁶ To compound the matter, the parents of the child have expectations for their baby, which remain unvoiced but which the child begins to become aware of around the same time (a phenomenon Lacan calls *Jouissance of the Other*).³⁷ The beginning of language acquisition is therefore when drive – the need to eat and sleep – is replaced by desire, and ‘the ego is formed which allows the child to “fit” into the world of language and family while the unconscious is formed to house repressed desire.’³⁸

In Lacanian theory, *object a* is a specific manifestation of desire, and it is inherently other to the subject. The subject sees it as proof that ‘the psyche can have contact with an unmediated, potentially wish-fulfilling reality.’³⁹ *Object a* is external and prized for being unlike the subject, and for the desirability that accompanies Otherness. Perhaps the subject could ultimately fulfill his desires if he could obtain *object a*, but this will never happen because by its nature, the *object a* cannot be attained.

On the fan-operated blog MikuStar (mentioned above), creator ‘Scott’ has built a forum for fan artists to post artwork and video inspired by their favourite Vocaloids. He also gives guest writers the opportunity to post news about Vocaloid and to espouse their personal connection to the characters.

³⁶ It should be noted that language acquisition does not necessarily mean the child has developed the ability to speak. The child has simply developed the ability to understand the sounds of language as representative of the world around him.

³⁷ Stephen R. Friedlander, ‘Glossary of Lacanian Terms,’ in *The Subject of Lacan: A Lacanian Reader for Psychologists*, ed. Karen Ror Malone and Stephen R. Friedlander (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), pp. 361–369.

³⁸ Hinerman, ‘I’ll Be Here With You,’ p. 114.

³⁹ Friedlander, ‘Glossary of Lacanian Terms,’ p. 368.

For the sixth anniversary of Crypton Virtual Media's release of Hatsune Miku in August 2013, 'Scott' himself posted on MikuStar:

Miku's influence can be felt on a massive scale, but there is also the manner in which she has inspired so many individuals on a personal level. Thanks to Miku, there are many of us who have discovered our own unique potential. In fact I personally realized a passion for writing and web publishing, which is something that I never would have done had she not come along. [...]

I have said before that Miku *the entity* and the love that she comes with is as real as it needs to be. At a time of great social, economic and political upheaval, Miku is always there to offer us solace. She fills our world with life, love and beautiful music. Truly, she is an angel. [...]

And though I am sure there are many of you who feel as I do, today I also want to celebrate the very personal light that Miku brings into my world, to honor the one who filled a great void and gave my life true meaning.

So here's to you Miku, my inspiration, my angel, my treasured little waifu. Have a wonderful birthday Sweetheart!⁴⁰

'Scott's post reflects the passionate feelings that many Vocaloid fans possess for their favourite characters. He specifically points to Miku as offering 'solace' in 'a time of great social, economic and political upheaval.' She is not part of the problems of this world. She is other, different, and not subject to human woes. She is 'Scott's *object a*.

As discussed in chapter 6, the type of adoration for fictional characters expressed by 'Scott' and 'bioloid' is increasingly common in Japan, where a growing number of people are abandoning real-life romance and (in the case of Japanese men) embracing love of two-dimensional characters instead.⁴¹

⁴⁰ 'Happy Birthday, Sweetheart...', 31 August 2013 <<http://www.vocajump.com/happy-birthday-sweetheart/>> [accessed 29 January 2014]. Original emphasis.

⁴¹ See chapter 6, especially the section discussing LovePlus.

Neither ‘Scott’ nor ‘bioloid’ is Japanese, but there is no shortage of examples of *otakus* or *moe* in Vocaloid (and other manga/anime-centric) fandoms in the West. This section has attempted to explain this (particularly male) devotion using psychoanalytic theories, but it has not yet elaborated on one simple fact that might seem obvious and yet still merits discussion: the objects garnering this adoration are, for the most part, images and voices of young, beautiful girls.

Nothing about the appearance or sound of a Vocaloid is unexpected. We are told that they are characters that will never age (remember, Hatsune Miku will always be sixteen years old, despite the fact that her birthday is celebrated by thousands of fans every 31st August). Vocaloid voices, though electronic, align with their appearance. They sing sweetly, if digitally, with expression; each character’s voice is unique to them, meaning that fans in the Vocaloid community can differentiate the characters just by hearing them. The male characters’ voices have male timbre, while the female characters’ voices sound female. And their physical appearances always align with their character biographies. They look young, attractive, sprightly, and with the right artwork, emotionally aware. All of the official VOCALOID characters are Caucasian and have round eyes, which is a continuation of the aim of anime and manga to avoid limiting its settings to Japan (see chapter 6). In short, as we have seen with other virtual musicians, the image construction of Vocaloids perpetuates stereotypes of both gender and ethnicity.

The young, attractive, and yet wholly incorruptible pop princesses of Vocaloid hold mass appeal, especially for men (from any place around the globe) who are living in societies that are renegotiating relationships between male and female. Like the shifting dynamics of men and women in Japan described in chapter 6, similar shifts are occurring around the world, and both genders must adapt. What has resulted, however, is an interesting duality in the male reaction: many men want women to experience more freedom of expression, especially sexual expression; and yet men still feel some desire to police this expression, even if they feel motivated by paternal intentions. In the case of Vocaloid, this duality explains the male fans' love of the characters, their immersion in the fictional world the characters inhabit, the tendency to claim a particular character as 'the one,' or to write fan fiction in which the fan plays a safe or protective figure for the Vocaloid. The male fans seem to want to celebrate, protect, worship, and shield the female Vocaloids at once, because the image that has been constructed around female Vocaloids aligns with the male understanding of the female in popular music and beyond.⁴²

Conclusion

⁴² These assertions highlight the fact that this study focussed primarily on male fans. This was not the initial intention of the researcher; however, the study shifted due to the overwhelming number of responses by male fans over female fans as research was undertaken. Male fans volunteered for interviews and research much more often than female fans did. The motivations and practices of male fans therefore came to the forefront, and elucidated interesting and problematic issues in Vocaloid gender constructions, and male fans' consumption of them.

This chapter has attempted to act as a first step in documenting a fan culture that is unique. While Vocaloid fandom does indeed align with other types of fandom, certain elements belong to Vocaloid alone, such as the fans' role in the creation of the object of desire itself, namely, Vocaloids. The fans' engagement is powerful, and it responds directly to fan taste, rather than to the tastes of executives or producers.⁴³ As such, Vocaloid has the potential to pave an entirely new path for fans in other fandoms, by serving as a model for increased necessity and immediacy of fan interaction. Further work on Vocaloid can and should pursue this idea, as it has important implications for fan and popular music studies, for reasons that I have outlined above. This work could also include investigations of the convention and concert spheres of Vocaloid fandom, which are thriving. A study of the physical, real-world interaction of Vocaloid fans could retroactively shed more light on the importance of anonymity to Vocaloid fans, especially amongst male Vocaloid fans over the age of forty.

In a broader sense, Vocaloid fandom reflects an interesting dynamic of the current state of popular music. In general, the Internet allows fans to engage more closely with the object(s) of their fandom than they ever have before. Twitter, Tumblr, Facebook, personal blogs and fan pages, forums, and countless other spaces on the Internet allow fans to speak directly to the musicians and to give instant feedback. Fans from around the world can interact with one another instantaneously, eliminating social and cultural

⁴³ While each character is initially designed by the company that manufactures the software, fans take great liberty in re-imagining the appearance of the Vocaloids, giving them new physical traits and costumes in the myriad of fanart found online.

barriers. Technology has advanced the state of fandom, and creations like Vocaloid encourage fans to submit fully to this new way of being. And yet, for all the good, bad, and unknown, advances in technology have not changed culture enough to eliminate or modify fan expectations about gender and ethnicity. Even with entirely virtual pop stars, essentially the same looks and sounds are marketed to the public. And the public consumes the same stereotypes in novel ways.

Conclusion

Much of the research pertaining to virtuality in music stresses Otherness or Difference. Researchers have asked, ‘How do virtual bands alter reality, or heighten it?’ The technologies used to create virtual bands are indeed highly sophisticated, and chapters 1, 2, 6, and 7 have explored and theorised these advances from a range of perspectives. There is much to admire in new digital technologies like holograms and voice recreation and modification; the innovations of these mediums showcase human creativity and intelligence, and an evolving understanding of and desire to craft art that resembles and challenges reality in new ways, sometimes leading to heightened or surreal forms. But in considering, engaging, and studying these technologies, it is possible that many fans and scholars have been blinded to the elements of virtual bands that are conformist, conservative, and even reactionary.

As discussed in chapter 1 and highlighted throughout this thesis, the concept of virtuality has received increasing scholarly attention, as demonstrated by *The Oxford Handbook of Virtuality*¹ and *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Virtuality*.² Many of the authors in these volumes focus on the technological advancement and complexity of virtual media and its ability to reach into and reconfigure numerous aspects of our lives, such as consciousness, communication, religion, law, culture, and the environment. With some exceptions (e.g. James K. Scarborough and

¹ Mark Grimshaw, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Virtuality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

² Whiteley and Rambarran, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Virtuality*.

Jeremy N. Bailenson, Giuseppe Riva, Christian Lloyd)³, the assumption is that virtuality offers a means to expand and extend humanity in positive ways. This thesis, however, has concluded that in most cases, the reproduction of gender and ethnic stereotypes in virtual band characters assists the suspension of disbelief demanded by affective engagement with virtual entities, with the effect that stereotypical expectations of gendered genres and racial or ethnic performance practice remain entrenched.

While this conclusion is supported by evidence provided in this thesis, it should be further nuanced. Gender and ethnic identities are constructed by virtual bands in a variety of ways and with varying degrees of stereotypical representation and subversion. Similarly, the characters, music, and folklore are received variously by audiences, not least because of the complex and varied means by which fans engage with these entities. As argued in discussions of agency throughout this thesis, understanding how virtual bands are received is vital to understanding how they function and why they achieve popularity.

³ Scarborough and Bailenson explore both the positive and the negative psychological effects of avatar usage, providing evidence that using avatars affects and alters human behaviour. James K. Scarborough and Jeremy N. Bailenson, 'Avatar Psychology,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Virtuality*, ed. Mark Grimshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 129–144. In Riva's chapter, he outlines the ethical and safety issues surrounding medical clinical usage of virtual reality; this is particularly important because of the rapid growth in virtual reality technologies in the medical field since the 1990s. Giuseppe Riva, 'Medical Clinical Uses of Virtual Worlds,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Virtuality*, ed. Mark Grimshaw (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 649–665. Lloyd employs many examples to discuss 'what it means "to listen" in our age of virtual music' (p. 18). He investigates the notion that easy, quick access to digital music has made listeners shallow, and inaccurate in their remembrances and discussion of the music. Christian Lloyd, "'Seventeenth Heaven": Virtual Listening and Its Discontents,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Virtuality*, eds. Sheila Whiteley and Shara Rambarran (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 17–34.

For example, in the discussion of Gorillaz in chapters 4 and 5, I not only set out the details of Gorillaz' backstory (which functions as a canon and has evolved over time) and the meticulous and varied media forms they explore (music video, holograms, etc.), but I discussed how fans engage with the world of Gorillaz. The fans participate in the Gorillaz universe knowing that it is fictitious, and yet give themselves over to the outlandish nature of the construction. My research focussed on the ways in which fans listen, discuss, and interact online. For example, the fan forum discussions about characters like Del the Funky Homosapien, The Boogie Man, and The Evangelist (discussed in chapter 4) show that Gorillaz fans are familiar enough with the band's folklore to debate these characters' place and importance within the canon; furthermore, it reveals that fans care enough to spend time having such discussions.

In response to my first research question outlined in the Introduction – 'How are gender and ethnicity represented visually and aurally in virtual bands and Vocaloid, and do these representations align with, subvert, or advance gender and ethnic stereotypes commonly found in popular culture?' – I have provided both small and in-depth case studies throughout this thesis to illustrate ways in which gender and ethnicity are represented visually and aurally in virtual bands. The extent to which they further or subvert gender and ethnic stereotypes is different in each example. In many cases, the depictions of gender and ethnicity comply with Cook's category of conformance. A great number of characters in virtual bands are styled as clearly male or female, and are attributed as having specific ethnic

backgrounds; representations of these gender and ethnic labels are present in the way the characters are rendered, in the way they speak and sing, and sometimes in the way they play instruments or the sounds and musical styles with which they are associated. As has been seen, however, a large number of virtual bands employ representations that merely reinforce established cultural clichés about gender and ethnicity, rather than challenging such cultural norms, or representing ways in which gender and ethnicity are actually experienced. At a base level, therefore, the visuals and audio produced by many virtual bands *conform* to what many audience members expect to see and hear. Furthermore, the visuals and the audio give clear examples of both the associative and documenting visualisations that Lindelof has theorised, through live performance and through music video. For example, associative visualisations appear in music videos in which the virtual band characters participate in activities that elicit emotion or remind the viewer about the themes of the music; this happens often in Vocaloid music videos that are made by fans, where drawings or animations of sad characters accompany morose lyrics. Documenting visualisations are more direct, such as when a Vocaloid hologram sings on stage, and the animated lips of the character synch perfectly with the music.

In Gorillaz, the folklore of the characters has been crafted over more than a decade; the Japanese female character and the African-American male character included in the line up are a nod to diverse representations within popular music. And yet, the actual realisation of these two characters is troublesome, from the way that their cultural backgrounds are either largely

ignored (Noodle's Japanese heritage), or used to establish legitimacy (Russel's blackness as a conduit to hip-hop culture), to the fact that Gorillaz' musical output does not reflect the specifics of the characters (there are few elements included that could be easily recognised as Japanese, and Russel's rhythmic contribution to the Gorillaz' catalogue is not distinctly 'Russel' in sound; it could be provided by any number of drummers or drum machines). By contrast, Studio Killers does provide representations of women as powerful and autonomous, but the singing voice of the lead female character is ambiguous.

As discussed in chapter 3, the identity of Studio Killers' human lead singer is unknown, but is rumoured to be male singer Teemu Brunila. The anonymity of the musicians behind Studio Killers (and some other virtual bands) raises an important ethical question. Is it unethical that some human participants do not receive due credit? The question would probably best be answered by each participant. On the one hand, human musicians negotiate in advance of starting a new project or collaboration, and the purity of the final product (the idea that fans will not know the identity of the actual musicians) is a legitimate strategy since it conspires in the suspension of disbelief and the idea that the virtual characters are autonomous. On the other hand, an artist who wishes to receive credit for their work should unequivocally have that recognition, making the anonymity of some human virtual band collaborators troubling. The fact that the identity of the visual creators is often more likely known than that of the musicians involved also

raises the question whether, at the point of production, more value is attributed to the visual dimension than the sonic.

An important distinction needs to be drawn between virtual bands and Vocaloid. As Hiroyuki Itoh's lecture reveals, the creators of VOCALOID have been explicitly clear about their reasons for constructing the software (discussed in chapter 6). Their goal was to create a platform on which anyone could create music, and by which any member of the community could use that music for their own creative purposes. VOCALOID's original programme designers sought to make software that would be democratic and provide a (literal) voice to its users.

But the intentions of other virtual band creators are not so clear. Albarn and Hewlett explain in interviews that they created Gorillaz to fly in the face of the popular music industry, and this thesis has briefly covered some ways in which that aim is demonstrable. Given that Gorillaz became a huge commercial success, however, its role as a subversive mockery of the music industry is complicated. On the one hand, Gorillaz can be read as a parody of popular music, and its success is a revealing commentary on the expectations of the commercial music industry, and of the cultural acceptance of bands that buy in uncritically to gendered genres. On the other hand, Gorillaz does not break with convention in many ways other than its initial premise: cartoon musicians.

Vocaloid is distinct from virtual bands in that it is based on the idea of providing audience members with the means of realising their own virtual musicians and music. As such, Vocaloids represent examples of the

reception of technology in the hands of numerous producers, albeit within a virtual environment that is to some extent prescribed, as with virtual bands.

Accordingly, when discussing virtual bands, my attention has been focussed on agency, reception, and effectivity. As discussed in chapter 2, effectivity is ‘the enactment of agencies that make a difference,’ or the idea that everything living and nonliving will somehow influence an outcome, and therefore has agency.⁴

My second research question asked, ‘How are the concepts of authenticity, authorship, and agency negotiated in the context of virtual bands?’ These concepts have been seen to function in different ways in virtual bands. Authenticity is a shifting notion in popular music, and is difficult to pinpoint because it differs from genre to genre, and over time. Virtual bands rely on accepted models of authenticity within their given genre, as seen particularly in the case studies of Josie and the Pussycats and Dethklok. Here, in addition to tropes of gender and ethnicity, we see tropes of bubblegum pop and heavy metal music at large. It is through these explorations of well-known tropes that each band posits itself as a legitimate entity in their respective genres. The level of authenticity that a virtual band achieves feeds its agency, by persuading audiences to accept the fictitious characters as creators of the music.

When audiences accept that authenticity, a tension arises between traditional notions of authorship and how virtual worlds undermine them. One possibility is that virtual bands decrease the audience’s appreciation of

⁴ Stanyek and Piekut, ‘Deadness: Technologies of the Intermundane,’ p. 18.

who is actually writing the music; they care less about the actual authors because the premise of fabricated musicians is captivating. The role of virtual band creators is unique because of the specific balance they strike between how known they are to the public, and how much information about themselves they withhold. For example, with Gorillaz, Albarn and Hewlett's roles in the band were at first diminished in their interactions with the press and with fans, but are now common knowledge, and Albarn appears on stage at Gorillaz' shows as himself. Conversely, the identity of the human musicians behind Studio Killers is unknown.

The differing ways in which virtual band creators reveal (or do not reveal) themselves relates to research question 3: ‘Who are the “true” and perceived authors of virtual bands, and to what extent and in what contexts of reception and consumption does this matter?’ The difference between the ‘true’ and the perceived authors of the music matters greatly to reception. As discussed in chapters 1 and 2, audiences look for an origin of the sound they hear, a body to house the musical talent. In some cases, like Gorillaz’ earliest live performances, the audience rejects a representation that is wholly virtual, and a marriage of the human and the inhuman is required in order for audiences to buy in to the fabrication. And yet, Auslander rightly observes that our world is becoming increasingly televisual; the markers of ‘real’ and ‘virtual’ are not static, and audience expectation evolves. A virtual band functions well when that distinction between ‘real’ and ‘virtual’ disappears, generating an alternative reality that is immediate and immersive.

Finally, I asked in the Introduction, ‘How does suspension of disbelief function within virtual bands and Vocaloid?’ Suspension of disbelief functions like a contract between the band (or rather, the creators) and the audience. While the audience is not truly deceived by the cartoon, puppet, or hologram musicians, they agree to the proposition that fictitious characters compose, play, and sing, and engage with them accordingly. For the contract to work, the representations of the characters must be consistent over time; in many cases, the virtual band creators provide the audience with a fictitious body that matches the sound of the characters’ voices or fits genre expectations, and this is when gender and ethnic stereotypes emerge most clearly. By contrast, in those cases that seemingly attempt to subvert gender or ethnic stereotypes, there is a turbulent but important negotiation of the suspension of disbelief: what will the audience believe? How much will they agree to?

To a large extent, the conclusions reached in this thesis are ethical ones, which might be used to exhort virtual band creators to actively consider issues of gender and ethnic representation in their work, and those who study, listen to, or engage with virtual bands to be conscientious of what they are consuming – especially in cases like Vocaloid where the fan directly shapes the oeuvre.

Jenkins has expressed optimism that digital culture allows for mass participation and democratisation, making it easier than ever before to engage with the object of one’s fandom. Digital culture also allows

consumers to become ‘prosumers,’ creators of elements of the fan object.⁵ This reality is a double-edged sword, however, and Jenkins’s optimism, while admirable, is not always matched by the reality.

In its purest sense, the democratising nature of digital culture and its use by fans and prosumers is a laudable development. It places the power of creation into anyone’s hands, and distributes agency to more people than just the professional producer. In any culture, a multitude of voices creating and engaging with a medium means that a variety of perspectives will emerge, which, in one sense, is a highly desirable outcome. But, as with any facet of democracy, such freedom of creativity and expression can mean that narrow and bigoted ideas are represented, along with the more open and progressive. However, attempts to regulate any expressions lead to the problematic territory of censorship. Ongoing discussion across many disciplines and in many public arenas is vital to navigating a careful balance between freedom of expression and personal responsibility.

Jenkins also signposts another important element of participatory digital culture: the balance that prosumers achieve between virtual engagement and their social and physical responsibilities in everyday life. It is easy to assume that fans might lose themselves to online worlds, wherein they can represent themselves as anything and behave in almost any way they choose. In an online community, one can craft any identity and carry that identity for years and in many incarnations. There is evidence that this

⁵Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, p. xxii. Jenkins specifies that fandom is a type of participatory culture with its own ‘history and traditions.’

is one outcome of digital culture. However, the main fandom case study of this thesis – the Vocaloid community (more specifically, FBGroupA) – revealed engagement with both real and virtual worlds in equal measure.

During the months of my targeted research, and in the subsequent months when I continued to follow these groups, the fans discussed both their real lives and their virtual obsessions on the forum. Members of the group posted about weddings, about having children, and in one instance, about coming out as transgender. All of this serves as evidence that these fans were engaging in their everyday lives just as readily as they were engaging in the virtual world of Vocaloid, and that in some cases, participation in the virtual world influenced their real world lives and identities.

The topics of virtual bands and Vocaloid invite critical perspectives from a range of disciplines, including popular music, sound, media, gender and cultural studies, drawing on theories of genre, postmodernism, surrealism, monsterization, and more. But my thesis has pursued an interdisciplinary approach in which the musical and the sonic also demand attention.

Virtual bands, and especially Vocaloid, illustrate that technology can aid in the innovation of sound. Vocaloid has potential for unlimited creativity, and is not restricted by the physical boundaries of the human voice and body. Vocaloids can sing faster, higher, and lower than human voices, and can sing longer phrases without breathing. Beyond these physical attributes, Vocaloid software allows VocaloidPs to create any sonic world they choose, using a wide array of instrument effects, and a voice that can be manipulated

to sound as realistic or unrealistic as desired. Its malleability is proof that technology has and will continue to produce new sounds and new music that has been previously unimaginable.

The universes, or fictionalised environments, in which various virtual bands exist also have significant implications on what is heard in their musical output. Gorillaz, for example, have created a world that allows for a wide array of influences: their environments – Kong Studios, Plastic Beach, the house on Wobble Street – are in diverse locations and display artefacts and decorations that show varied popular culture influences (band posters from several genres and knick knacks). Their folklore and membership are also eclectic, which is reflected in the inclusion of Noodle's and Russel's heritages, and 2D's love of zombie films.⁶ The degree to which these influences are audible in the music varies, as discussed in chapters 4 and 5, but the important point is that Gorillaz exists in a world that is sonically permissive; Gorillaz can explore a variety of genres and soundscapes because its virtual world permits and encourages plurality. In their universe, it is even legitimate for ghosts (Russel's musical ancestors) to serve as collaborators.

Conversely, the world of Alvin and the Chipmunks is more restrictive, which is why The Chipmunks' output continues in the way it long has: mostly covers of popular songs. Alvin, Simon, and Theodore form a band that seeks success within the popular music industry as we know it. Their presence as singing rodents is an amusing way to recreate songs that are

⁶ Browne and Gorillaz, *Rise of the Ogre*, pp. 51–52.

already widely known. While they sing songs from several genres, they simply recycle the music, rather than combine genres or play with genre expectations. The worlds of virtual bands therefore provide another level of contextual understanding which influences their music and the way their music is received.

Future Directions

This thesis could be continued in several directions. Clearly, my research questions could be applied to many other virtual bands not covered in these pages. But the case studies found here could also be examined in different ways. Each Phase of Gorillaz, for example, could be studied individually, especially as the characters evolve and because the overall sound of the band alters, album to album.⁷ The reception research of Vocaloid fans that I conducted for this thesis could be applied to Gorillaz, including new fan reactions to *Humanz* and research of the fandom that occurs offline. Specifically, fans could be surveyed and interviewed about their feelings of how gender and ethnic representation functions in Gorillaz.

As previously mentioned, a fascinating next step in Vocaloid research would be a close investigation of the fan culture of conventions and concerts, when fandom and music-making step out from behind the computer screen. Particularly interesting would be an exploration of cosplay (costume play) in fan circles. Who engages in this cosplay? How do the expectations of

⁷ As mentioned in chapter 4, Gorillaz' folklore is broken into titled Phases that coincide with the release of each album.

femininity and masculinity of Vocaloid characters translate into fan costuming? Whether the costumes are homemade or professionally crafted, and whether they are donned by people who identify as male or female, how does the reception of costumes in the fan community link to the virtual stars' representations of perfection? Do fans accept cosplayers that subvert the established gender and ethnic depictions of the characters?

Additionally, there are myriad further theories in a number of disciplines that could be applied to virtual bands, and specifically to the investigation of gender and ethnicity. For example, Bourdieu's concept of somatization could be applied.⁸ According to Bourdieu, somatization is the phenomenon whereby humans often believe that the cultural ideals and assumptions they are exposed to are natural and have always existed; humans believe these conventions are generated internally because they are viewed as normal. But the truth is that such cultural expectations are external and fabricated. In Bourdieu's model, however, there is no such thing as a presomatized existence. Because we are born into an existing culture, and because somatization has already occurred in every culture, there is no escaping some degree of somatization in our lives.

This idea explains a circular phenomenon happening in culture at large, a phenomenon that then impacts the creation of virtual band characters. As described by Biddle and Jarman-Ivens, an instrument (or a character in a virtual band) 'is discursively constructed in gendered terms because the technologies have their own already ascribed gendered

⁸ Biddle and Jarman-Ivens, 'Introduction: Oh Boy!', p. 12.

meanings; and the gendered-ness of technologies is grounded by the already ascribed gendered-ness of the instrument.⁹ Somatization explains why the circular thinking employed in such constructions is so deeply ingrained: there is a part of the human mind that believes these assumptions about gender are true because they belong in nature and have always existed. Somatization can also explain why conceptions of gender and ethnicity have and will always exist, no matter how aware we are of them or how often we analyse and deconstruct them. They will continue to exist because ‘their ascription – the fact that they are ascribed at all – has always already occurred.’¹⁰

While it may seem bleak at first glance, Bourdieu’s framework is not a death knell to attempts to remove gender and ethnic stereotypes from popular culture. Rather, it highlights how entrenched such views have become. The gender and ethnic stereotypes that appear over and over again in popular culture are rarely useful, and many are harmful. Even if they do not openly degrade a given gender or ethnicity, they are certainly limiting, confining gender or ethnicity to certain expectations and certain modes of representation and reception. But understanding the way these tropes are built into virtual bands could prove to be enormously helpful in making people aware of the ways that gender and ethnic stereotypes infiltrate all cultures worldwide.

⁹ Ibid., p. 12.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 12.

For example, as mentioned earlier in this thesis, the characters of Dethklok exist in a world where their selfishness and drive for money, drugs, alcohol, and their own comfort result in extreme violence. They are not directly connected to this violence, but the violence stems from the intensely heated reactions that Dethklok's fans and detractors adopt within *Metalocalypse*. As discussed in chapter 3, the extreme violence of Dethklok's world is meant to be a humorous commentary on cultural stigmas around heavy metal: that the genre breeds vitriol and encourages destructive behaviour. The music and the characters are designed to play out this commentary, but to do so in a way that is (at first glance) safe – a satirical parody. The cartoons cannot do harm to the physical world. However, they can react to and influence it. The grotesque violence in the series could positively influence its viewers ('Violence is wrong, and to associate violence and music is inaccurate'), or negatively influence them ('Violence is funny and entertaining').

When a cartoon television show has the potential to influence a culture in such a way, it is no stretch to say that the characters themselves are part of that influence. The importance of creating characters that are constructed with careful forethought can therefore not be overemphasized. And yet, how many virtual band creators are devoting this level of care to their creations? Why are they consistently creating more personas that align with tropes and stereotypes of gender and ethnicity?

The answer is linked to the characters' commercial viability. The aim of creating something that will have wide (and profitable) impact often

outweighs the desire to create something that is socially or culturally beneficial, or that challenges stereotypes. The opportunity to create a character that would shatter stereotypes of gender and ethnicity sometimes slips through the cracks of the most creative minds in the popular music industry. Whether this is symptomatic of the fact that when advanced technology is employed questions of content take second place to innovation, or whether it is simply a matter of time before a virtual equivalent to Bob Dylan, David Bowie, or punk music comes along, is yet to be determined.

Finally, there is so far little evidence of a truly plural, democratic participation in virtual bands or even Vocaloid. Much as Jenkins theorises it and lauds it, the reality of a pure democratisation of fandom is still elusive, though it arguably is drawing closer through constructions that function like Vocaloid. The example of the Vocaloid fan announcing her transgender identity on a fan forum suggests that the fan felt comfortable in the fan space, and therefore felt empowered to come out. I suggest consequently that an interesting route for further research would include a fan-based study of virtual bands that might reveal evidence of more creative approaches to identity construction by fans. Such a study could include further discussion on how virtual band fandom impacts or empowers engagement with the real world, not just the virtual.

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Appendix A: Table of Virtual Bands

Appendix A: Virtual Bands with Non-Human Members

The table includes 100 virtual bands, chosen at random, as examples. The information here can be used to categorise the bands in a few ways, including by medium or by label.

Band Name	First Appearance	Label (if applicable)	Most notable for	No. of Albums
Aerosmith (cartoon)	<i>The Simpsons</i> (1991)			
Aimi Eguchi	Introduced as new member of AKB48 in June 2011	Defstar, King, Gold Typhoon, Galaxy	Composite of features of most popular performers from AKB48; the fact that she is virtual was withheld as a marketing stunt	1 AKB48 album
Allstar's Allstar Band	<i>The Snorks</i> (1984)			
Alvin and the Chipmunks	Christmas single 'The Chipmunk Song' (1958)	Liberty, Capitol, Chipmunks Recording, RCA, Sony Wonder	Commercial success across seven decades	52
Amazing Chan and the Chan Clan	CBS, 1972			
Bébé Lilly	2006	Heben Music	Depicted as a baby girl	4
BINKY	<i>Arthur</i> (1998)		In the animated world of <i>Arthur</i> , BINKY is a Finnish band that are revealed to be holograms; their producer writes their music	
Boyz 4 Now	<i>Bob's Burgers</i> (2013)			
Boyz 12	<i>American Dad</i> (2012)		Their single 'Girl You Need a Shot (Of B12 (Boyz12))' was released on YouTube almost 8 months before the episode introducing them aired	
Brak	<i>Space Ghost: Coast to Coast</i>	Rhino		1 solo; 2 as guest artist
Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kids	NBC, 1973			
Captain Murphy	2012	Brainfeeder	Animated alter-ego of rapper Flying Lotus	1
Class of 3000	Cartoon Network, 2006	Laface	Created by Outkast's Andre 3000	1
Crazy Frog	Internet animation in 1997	Ministry of Sound, Universal Music Group, Warner Music	Remix of 'Axel F' in 2005	3
Crescendolls	<i>Interstella 5555: The Story of the 5ecret 5tar 5ystem</i> (2003)		Group of aliens in anime film, which features Daft Punk's album <i>Discovery</i> (2001) as soundtrack	
Deathmole	Internet, 2005		Created by cartoonist Jeph Jacques	7
Dethklok	<i>Metalocalypse</i> (2006)	Williams Street		4
Detroit Metal City	<i>Young Animal</i> magazine (manga) (2005)	Defstar		1
Dr. Teeth and the Electric Mayhem	<i>The Muppet Show</i> (1975)			Featured on Muppets film soundtracks
Ed Sheeran (puppet)	Video for Sheeran's single 'Sing' (2014)		The puppet is a debaucherous doppelganger for the squeaky clean Sheeran	
Eternal Descent	<i>Eternal Descent</i> comic book (2004)	Incendium		2
Fat Albert and the Cosby Kids	CBS, 1972			
Fat, Horny, Black, and Joe	<i>Family Guy</i> (2005)			
Feltworth	Internet, date unknown		Associated with Canadian rock quartet Sloan, who released their first album in 1992 and their most recent in 2014	
Fingerbang	<i>South Park</i> (2000)			
Fire Bomber	<i>Macross 7</i> (1994)			13
Frein in Green	Internet, date unknown			10
Girls Dead Monster	<i>Angel Beats!</i> (2010)	Key Sounds		2
Gorillaz	First EP released in 2000	Parlophone, Virgin EMI, Warner Bros.	Grammy-award winning band	5
Green Day (cartoon)	<i>The Simpsons Movie</i> (2007)			
Groovie Goolies	CBS, 1970			
Gummibär	2007	Sony Music Entertainment	Gummy bear related songs, including 'I'm a Gummy Bear (The Gummy Bear Song)' (2007)	4
Hampton the Hampster and band	HamsterDance.com (1998)	ZYX Music	'Hamster Dance' (2000)	1
Hex Girls	<i>Scooby-Doo and the Witch's Ghost</i> (straight to video film, 1999)			
Ho-kago Tea Time	<i>K-On!</i> (manga) (2009)			
James Taylor (cartoon)	<i>The Simpsons</i> (1994)			
The Holograms	<i>Jem and the Holograms</i> (1988)			
Jessica Rabbit	<i>Who Framed Roger Rabbit?</i> (1988)			
Jet Screamer	<i>The Jetsons</i> (1962)			
Josie and the Pussycats	CBS, 1970-73		All-female trio who appeared in two animated series	
Little Chrissy and the Alphabeats	<i>Sesame Street</i> (1973)			
Little Jerry and the Monotones	<i>Sesame Street</i> (1970)			
Lobos de Plata	<i>Curious George</i> (2010)			
Love Fist	<i>Grand Theft Auto: Vice City</i> (2002)			5
Lubbock Lou and his Jughuggers	<i>The Muppet Show</i> (1977)			
Major Lazer	FFX, 2015		Major Lazer is an animated series based on human band Major Lazer; the human band is on Interscope and Warner Music labels and has 4 albums	
MC Skat Kat	Paula Abdul's 'Opposites Attract' video (1989)	Virgin Records	MC Skat Kat was animated into Abdul's live-action video; he went on to have his own album	1
Milgrom	Internet, date unknown		Stop-motion band from Tel Aviv	
Miss Monochrome	Part of the Horie Yui Wo Meguru Bouken III Secret Mission Tour (2012)		A manga and television series were both developed because of the popularity of the character	3
Mistula	Internet, 2004		First Filipino virtual band comprised of ball-jointed dolls	
Moop	<i>South Park</i> (2003)			
Mystik Spiral	<i>Daria</i> (1997)			
One EskimO	2005	Shangri-La, Little Polar, Lucky	Also a human band with 3 members, the 4-member cartoon version appears in music videos for the human band	2

Appendix A: Virtual Bands with Non-Human Members

The table includes 100 virtual bands, chosen at random, as examples. The information here can be used to categorise the bands in a few ways, including by medium or by label.

Band Name	First Appearance	Label (if applicable)	Most notable for	No. of Albums
One-T	2000	Minority		2
Pinky and Perky	BBC, 1957	Columbia, MFP, Telstar	Pinky and Perky pre-dated Alvin and the Chipmunks, and appeared on <i>The Ed Sullivan Show</i> in September 1958, months before The Chipmunks would appear	11
Powerline	<i>A Goofy Movie</i> (1995)			
Prozzäk	Released <i>Hot Show</i> (1998)	Sony Music, Hollywood Records, Epic Records		4
Quasimoto	Featured on Peanut Butter Wolf's <i>My Vinyl Weighs a Ton</i> (1998)	Stones Throw Records	Animated alter-ego of rapper/producer Madlib; voice is created by speeding up Madlib's voice on tracks	3
Savlonic	Released <i>Red</i> (2014)		Characters represent an example of a band whose characters look realistic, but are still unmistakeable as animated	1
Schnuffel	Created by German company Jamba! for ringtones (2007)		Ringtone was expanded into a single ('Kuschel Song' or 'Cuddling Song') and became number 1 on the German Singles Chart	3
Schroeder	<i>Peanuts</i> comic strips (1951); <i>Charlie Brown</i> television specials		Extreme love and admiration of Beethoven	
Skeleton Staff	Released <i>Solipsism</i> (2010)		From Sydney, Australia	3
Snakes 'n Barrels	<i>Metalocalypse</i> (2008)		Pickles's first band	
Spacemonkeyz	Gorillaz folklore, 2002	Parlophone, Virgin	In the folklore, alien monkeys arrive from space and create a dub remix (<i>Laika Come Home</i>) of Gorillaz' first album	1
Star Wars Cantina Band	<i>Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope</i> (1977)			
Strawberry Flower	Released 'Ai no Uta' (2001)	Owned by Nintendo	Comprised of characters from Nintendo's Pikmin video game; gained popularity in Japan because single was featured in commercials for their game	
Studio Killers	Released 'Ode to the Bouncer' (2011)	Studio Killers Records		1
The Archies	<i>The Archie Show</i> (1968)	Calendar, Kirshner, RCA	Single 'Sugar, Sugar' reached no. 1 on the Billboard Hot 100 in 1969	1
The Banana Splits	<i>The Banana Splits Adventure Hour</i> (1968)	Decca		1
The Beagles	CBS, 1966			
The Beatles (cartoon)	ABC, 1965			
The Beets	<i>Doug</i> (1991)			
The Bots	Released <i>Bushwhack</i> (1992)	Magnatune	Some characters in The Bots are modeled to look extremely realistic, while others bear characteristics that humans do not have	2
The Brady Kids	ABC, 1972		Animated version of <i>The Brady Bunch</i> (1969-1974)	
The California Raisins	California Raisin Advisory Board commercial (1986)	Priority Records	Stop-motion rhythm and blues raisins	4
The Cattanooga Cats	ABC, 1969			
The Chipettes	<i>Alvin and the Chipmunks</i> (1983)		Female counterparts to Alvin and the Chipmunks	
The Cobblestones	<i>Sesame Street</i> (1980)		Parody of The Rolling Stones, featuring lead singer Mick Swagger	
The Country Bear Jamboree	The Country Bear Jamboree attraction at Walt Disney World (1971)		The Disney attraction has been opened at 3 major Disney parks (Disney World, Disneyland, Tokyo Disneyland), and the bears were featured in 2002's <i>The Country Bears</i> film	
The Electric Eleven	<i>Peg + Cat</i> (2013)			
The Gogolala Jubilee Jugband	<i>The Muppet Show</i> (1976)			
The Grasshoppers	<i>Doctor Doolittle</i> (TV show, 1970)			
The Impossibles	CBS, 1966			
The Jackson 5 (cartoon)	ABC, 1971			
The Misfits	<i>Jem and the Holograms</i> (1985)			
The Moopets	<i>The Muppets</i> (film - 2011)		Tribute act to The Muppets who play at a casino; all puppet members except Dave Grohl (Animool)	
The Neptunes	<i>Jabberjaw</i> , 1976			
The Nutty Squirrels	Released 'Uh-Oh' (1959)	Hanover, Columbia, MGM, Excelsior	Taking from the success of Alvin and the Chipmunk's 'The Christmas Song,' The Nutty Squirrels' animated television show <i>The Nutty Squirrels Present</i> (1960) beat The Chipmunks' show to air	6
The Oinker Sisters	<i>Sesame Street</i> (1985)		Parody of the Pointer Sisters	
The Party Posse	<i>The Simpsons</i> (2001)			
The Snowmen	Released 'The Hokey Cokey' (1981)	Stiff Records	Their version of 'The Hokey Cokey' reached number 18 on the UK Singles Chart; the foursome also appeared on Top of the Pops	1
The Stingers	<i>Jem and the Holograms</i> (1988)			
The Who (cartoon)	<i>The Simpsons</i> (2000)			
U2 (cartoon)	<i>The Simpsons</i> (1998)			
Various bands and musicians	<i>Rock and Rule</i> (1983)		Animated feature film about an aging rock star hoping to unleash a demon who can secure his immortality and permanent musical success	
Vbirds	Animated shorts on Cartoon Network UK, 2002	Liberty Records		
Vocaloids	Release of first VOCALOID software (2004)	Each Vocaloid can have their own label	Music is written exclusively by fans, called VocaloidPs, who own VOCALOID or similar softwares	Number varies by Vocaloid
Your Favorite Martian	Internet, 2011			
Zazz Blammymatazz	<i>Metalocalypse</i> (2010)		Dr. Rockzo the Rock and Roll Clown's original band	
Zorak and the Original Way-Outs	<i>Space Ghost: Coast to Coast</i> (1995)		Zorak is a villain from the original <i>Space Ghost</i> series in the 1960s and 1980s, brought back as the band leader for Space Ghost's talk show	Featured on 2 <i>Space Ghost</i> themed albums

Appendix B: Interview with Joey David (creator) and Uno (bass player) of
Mistula

This interview was conducted via email on 3 December 2013. Questions for Joey David and her answers appear first in bold type; questions for Uno and his responses follow.

Alicia Stark (AS): How do most of Mistula's fans discover them? What are people's reactions like when they discover Mistula for the first time?

Joey David (JD): Most of the fans say they discovered Mistula on Philippine TV.

The people's reactions to Mistula are usually:

- a. "Weird."
- b. "AWESOME!"
- c. "How much is the Uno doll?"
- d. Sometimes, all of the above.

The people who answered B turned out to be our most loyal supporters and advocates. They are the reason the band continues to exist.

AS: When you had the idea to turn the dolls into a band, how long did it take you to make the idea a reality?

JD: When I'm seized by an idea, I usually do not rest until it's completed. The creation of Mistula took roughly two months, and that includes music production, photo shoots and web design. It was both tiring and exhilarating.

AS: Could you elaborate on your role and Rey's role in organising/managing the band? Who decides on their look, outfits, and accessories for photo or video shoots? Who coordinates the real musicians for the recordings? Do either of you play on any of Mistula's tracks?

JD: Rey produces Mistula's songs. Everything that has to do with music is his responsibility.

I handle everything else: styling, photography, web design and management, and media relations. I also help Uno interact with the fans through his blog and the Mistula social media assets. I also manage their personalities, which can be daunting.

AS: I saw an interview on Mel & Joey where you expressed great delight in making people ask questions like, "Why have you done this? What is the point of making a band if the real musicians want to remain unknown?" Why do those reactions make you so happy?

JD: Because those questions mean we've created something disruptive and thought-provoking. Had they been exposed to the idea before, they will simply ask cliché questions, and that will be boring. Rock n' roll is all about rocking the boat.

AS: What would you like the world to think of when they think of Mistula?

JD: That nothing should stop a great idea from coming to life in any form.

:-) [sic]

AS: When and how did you learn to play bass?

Uno: I learned to play guitar first. I played along to my favorite songs, just like any other guitar student who wanted to emulate their rock idols. Never really had any formal training. I was studying the songs by ear, then I gradually noticed that I was actually following the bass lines more. So I gravitated towards the bass. I just learned to love the sound of it, how it forms the backbone to most of my favorite songs.

AS: How would you describe your bandmates to someone who had never met them?

Uno: Lugosi is the drummer with manliner who bosses us around. Manx is our six-string sex siren. Lobo is ... [sic] complicated and confused. One of his two personalities is our rhythm guitarist.

AS: What do you think of the rock and roll lifestyle? Does it suit you?

Uno: Mistula's rock and roll lifestyle is a little different from what was portrayed in movies like "Almost Famous" and "Rockstar". We haven't trashed any hotel rooms. It's not possible for us to commit suicide or die of AIDS. But we have groupies! Who needs stretch limos when I can be carried around by nubile girls? That suits me just fine.

AS: What new projects are Mistula working on?

Uno: Super secret things that only Lugosi, our band leader, knows of. Something that has to do with a web relaunch, and a new song that

**"brings us back to our roots, but has a more straightforward approach"
whatever he means by that. [sic]**

AS: Could you describe the collaboration process when working on a new song, please?

Uno: The songs always come from poetry ideas written by Lugosi. He writes the words, then the whole band comes in and puts music to the piece. The poetry dictates the musical direction. The words usually inspire riffs. Or vocal parts. Or basslines. [sic] Then we build the whole song around the strongest riff ideas, catchiest melody strings. Everyone has a say in terms of where the song, music-wise, would go. But in the end, only the strongest ideas would usually end up in the recordings.

AS: You've said that poetry is very important to the band, and that you want to create pieces of art rather than just songs. Why is this so important to you and to the band?

Uno: Because songs just come and go. But the most inspired pieces of art stay with everyone's minds and hearts, inspire action, create religions, foster beliefs. Change things. And that's what we've always strived to do.

Appendix C: Interview with Vocaloid Producer Aki Glancy

This interview was conducted via email on 29 September 2014. Aki Glancy is also known by her VocaloidP name, EmpathP.

Alicia Stark (AS): How did you first discover Vocaloid? When was that?

Aki Glancy (EmpathP): I discovered Vocaloid back in 2008. I believe it was shortly after the vocaloid [sic] Gakupoid had been released. The technology was still very new then. I learned about the character first after watching a CaramellDansen [sic] dancing video where all the Vocaloids up to that point were dancing to the song. I then looked them up and was fascinated by them.

AS: Which versions of the software have you worked with/are you working with now? Do you find it easy to learn and use the software? Are there any challenges? Are there any aspects of the software that you would change?

EmpathP: I exclusively used [sic] Vocaloid 3 (or V3) at the moment. V3 really advanced the means of tuning and editing in Vocaloid. For me, it made everything easier because the controls were simplified. I think the biggest challenge I had when first using the software was learning the controls. Originally I used the free vocal software 'UTAU', which is similar to Vocaloid in many ways, but also extremely different. The controls for editing things like vibrato, pitch bending, ect. [sic] were all different. Once I adapted, [sic] to the different software features, the rest of the knowledge was easily learned. I think if I were to change one thing about Vocaloid 3, it would be to edit the software in such a way so as to better utilize more powerful vocal types.

AS: What is appealing about producing Vocaloid music?

EmpathP: The thing I like best about producing this style of music is that it feels like its 100% mine. I'm not a very powerful singer myself, and generally I don't work with singers. But when it comes to using Vocaloid, I am able to create my ideal singing style from a digital voice. I feel like it gives my songs more character and makes them sound distinctly my own.

AS: Which character(s) do you write for? Do you prefer composing for male or female characters? Why?

EmpathP: I have over 30 Vocaloids, and I try to use them all, but it can

be difficult to use all of them. They are all distinctly unique and you have to use different means of programming and tuning them. I would say I use English language Vocaloids the most, simply because I am trying to gradually move to primarily producing English music. I usually use female singers the most, simply because a majority of songs I write are from a female point my [sic] view.

AS: Does it effect you to know that you are creating music for a fictitious character? If yes, how? If no, why not?

EmpathP: In some ways, it does help me to know that my Vocalist [sic] is not a real person. In a way it makes my music that much more emotional, because this is a vocalist with no true life, so in a sense, the things I have them sing about BECOME their life and their story. Miku isn't a real person so she doesn't have a family or a home or anything else. She'll never be in the tabloids and she'll never do something I don't approve of. Therefore, if I write a song where she loses someone she loves, it becomes that much more real.

AS: How would you describe the online Vocaloid community to someone who knows nothing about Vocaloid?

EmpathP: This is a tricky question to answer. There are many people in the online community who are wonderful and helpful people. However, there are also many in the online community who can be very harsh and cruel. While these people are far outnumbered by the kind members of the community, it is the crueler people who always stand out. The Vocaloid community is one that is driven by its 'fans' rather than its 'producers'. Most producers love hearing new Vocaloids and trying new things and working with each other. They are usually not as harsh in criticism as the rest of the community. But, as I said before, it is the FANS who usually affect what products we get when it comes to Vocaloid. If enough fans say they want "mid range male vocals", then chances are that the production companies are going to try to make mid range male Vocaloids. This can be both a good thing and a bad thing when it comes to what we producers are given. It would be nice if companies listened more to the people producing the music, rather than the fans who just LISTEN to the music.

AS: How would you describe the way the online Vocaloid community treats VocaloidPs? Are VocaloidPs revered, followed, and admired (like popular musicians or singers) within the Vocaloid community? Or are the Vocaloids themselves more loved than the VocaloidPs?

EmpathP: Again, this is a very double sided [sic] question, and one that must be answered by pointing out something very important. Every single thing that fans of Vocaloid have come to associate with

the community would not be possible and in fact would not exist without VocaloidP's. [sic] Without VocaloidP's, you would have no concerts, no CDs, no DVDs, and probably not anything else. People tend to forget when they see Miku singing and dancing on stage that were was a musician and producer behind every single song she sings. On one hand, within the Japanese community, I think Vocaloid Producers are respected. In the American community however, while there are several who are indeed respected, for the most part, we're usually forgotten. I think this is a shame.

AS: Please describe the means you use to distribute your music (which websites, forums, etc.) Do you produce any physical albums or is everything digital?

EmpathP: I have 2 stores where I sell my music online. I sell my music on Storenvy and Bandcamp primarily. All of my digital albums have physical copies which I sell both online and at conventions. Every once in a while I make a convention-exclusive CD which I will sell. That's always a lot of fun because it makes the CD that much more special.

AS: Have you ever made money from your recordings or artwork? Or would you ever consider selling your recordings or artwork for profit?

EmpathP: I sell my artwork and music all the time. As I said before, I go to a lot of conventions and sell merchandise. Not only that, but I am also available for commissions. If someone wants me to draw them something, they can pay me a small fee and I will draw them something original. My biggest commission was from Zero-G when I designed the English Language vocaloid [sic] AVANNA.

AS: Who is your favorite Vocaloid? Why?

EmpathP: My favorite Vocaloid is SeeU. It's hard to say why exactly, I'm just drawn to her. I think she's got a very cute design and an adorable voice. She was also the first (and only) Korean Vocaloid, which I think is fantastic. I also got a lot of wonderful reception from the Korean community, so I respect that as well. My first big Vocaloid song that hit big was also a SeeU original, so that probably helps.

AS: Who is your favorite VocaloidP? Why?

EmpathP: My favorite VocaloidP is also the one who inspired me to try my hand at making music. That is Binyu-P (also known as RyuRyu). He's got a very soft and atmospheric style that I adore. He mostly uses Miku, but the way he tunes her is also interesting.

AS: Other than Vocaloid, what are your favorite music genres? Favorite

artists?

EmpathP: To be honest, I don't really listen to anything other than Vocaloid. But I tend to enjoy Rock, Ballads, DnB music the most.

AS: When working on illustrations for Avanna, what influences or inspires you?

EmpathP: I drew a lot of inspiration from Celtic and Renaissance styles. I did several different designs for Zero-G before they selected the design which would become AVANNA's final look. The final look was particularly inspired by the fusion of Roman and British culture with the Celts and the Anglo Saxons. And of course, I put a little fantasy spin on the final outfit.

AS: Do you think the appearance of most female Vocaloids is problematic (for example, most are depicted as young girls, often with exaggerated figures with long legs and big breasts, wearing short skirts; many appear to be highly sexualised)? Does their manga/anime-influenced design change how you feel about their appearance?

EmpathP: This is one of those instances of culturally [sic] difference between Japanese and American culture. Japan is a culture very much moved by the idea of “idol” singers. These are cute and often times teenage girls with perfect bodies. And often times in Japan, when it comes to their real human idols, they are heavily exploited. It is a sad fact. As far as Vocaloids are concerned though, I do not see nearly as much exploitation by the companies. In fact, most of the exploitation you see that involves Vocaloids comes from the fans and the producers. Keep in mind; [sic] we would never have a sexy song about Miku unless someone sat down to write it. I'm not saying the companies are innocent, as they then take the songs and make concerts with them. But as far as the orginal artwork and such created by the companies, the majority of it is very tame in my opinion. And as far as their manga/anime based designs, that doesn't bother me at all.

Appendix D: Selected Answers from Survey Posted to FBGroupA

Participants were asked to complete the phrase, 'I use [FBGroupA]...' and were allowed to click all answers that apply or to comment with other activities they participate in on FBGroupA. The given answers were:

- a) 'To share news about new releases, concerts, and other items related to Vocaloid.' (29 [65.91%] respondents clicked)
- b) 'To post pictures of fanart that I did not create myself.' (30 [68.18%] respondents clicked)
- c) 'To post music that I did not create myself.' (26 [59.09%] respondents clicked)
- d) 'To post pictures of fanart that I did create.' (9 [20.45%] respondents clicked)
- e) 'To post music that I did create.' (4 [9.09%] respondents clicked)
- f) 'To browse, like, comment, and share other people's posts, but I do not create posts myself.' (24 [54.55%] respondents clicked)

Eight respondents typed comments to add other activities. Responses included:

- 'To be with the community! [FBGroupA] is my group of friends :)' [*sic*]
- 'To simply enjoy the friendships I've made in the Vocaloid community'
- 'Post cosplay of vocaloid [*sic*] that I did or didn't do'
- 'To connect with other like minded, [*sic*] and passionate fans who love Vocaloid as much as I do'
- 'For the caring, and wonderful community :)' [*sic*]

Participants were asked to ‘click any of the following statements that apply to you.

If none of them apply, please leave them blank.’

- a) ‘Online fan resources are very important to me as a Vocaloid fan. My friends and family don’t appreciate Vocaloid, so the online community is my connection to the music.’ (35 [77.78%] respondents clicked)
- b) ‘Online fan resources are somewhat important to me as a Vocaloid fan. I have friends and family in my everyday life who are Vocaloid fans, so we use online Vocaloid communities as another way to expand our knowledge.’ (10 [22.22%] respondents clicked)
- c) ‘Online fan resources are somewhat important to me as a Vocaloid fan. I don’t mind and/or I enjoy being the sole fan of Vocaloid in my everyday life, so online communities are a nice way to immerse myself in Vocaloid fan culture when I want to.’ (16 [35.56%] respondents clicked)
- d) ‘Online fan resources are not important to me as a Vocaloid fan. Without them, I would still attend conventions and find other ways to get new music and to follow the characters.’ (0 [0.0%] respondents clicked)

Participants were then invited to explain their choices. Nine participants responded, and responses included:

- ‘Vocaloid mostly happens on the internet! Where else are you gonna [*sic*] find it? Especially the specific types of interaction you can only find on the internet. Roleplay is an example. Or chatrooms or concert videos... [*sic*] it seems that whatever medium you choose, it’s usually at least slightly virtual.’

- ‘I’m getting more and more deep in this fandom, [sic] even friends start to understand and get interested but I still [sic] more confident to talk about Vocaloid on internet groups and communities, because they know exactly what we are in love with this [sic]’
-

Participants were given the prompt, ‘Something I would like the world to know about Vocaloid is...’ Thirty-three participants responded, and responses included:

- ‘They open up a whole new universe to us’
- ‘How great the community is’
- ‘that their [sic] is a song for everyone out there that you can relate to!’
- ‘Vocaloid changes lives for the better.’
- ‘People need to stop treating her [Miku] as an object, and more like the revolution that she is.’
- ‘It is music of hope and aspiration for all peoples.’
- ‘to please enjoy it and stop criticizing it. If [sic] you find it weird, fine, but at least let us enjoy it.’
- ‘Vocaloids are a great way to express yourself through art and music. Give it a chance and you’ll see the heart behind every song and work of art.’
- ‘They are what you want to be, the voice of humanity.’

- ‘I aboslutely [sic] love Hatsune miku [sic] and I’m extremely thankful for her existence... [sic] she helped me/ keeps helping [sic] get through hard times and depressions :) [sic] its [sic] magic’
- ‘There’s room for you to create something unique.’
- ‘It has the power to change the world, it has the power to change your life.’
- ‘They are not anime/cartoons. They can be more real and genuine than “human” performers.’
- ‘They are humanity’s beautiful children; don’t be afraid of them.’
- ‘The new and more meaningful type of music than those mainstream music with “soulless”, “stupid” meaning.’
- ‘Vocaloid is love; a voice to those that might not have one.’
- ‘It is a new dimension, not a threat or something to be hated as (for example) synths were when they first appeared on the scene.’