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## Database, *Pakuri* (Rip-offs), Hatsune Miku

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Keywords: Japanese popular music, *otaku*'s derivative works, Database Consumption, postmodern subjectivity

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### Explanatory Note

This paper was published in the inaugural issue (featuring Japan) of the critical journal *Shisō Chizu*, jointly edited by Hiroki Azuma, the leading critic on contemporary thought in Japan, and the sociologist Akihiro Kitada. *Shisō Chizu* was published in Japan as a new journal on cultural and social thought in the 2000s and aroused widespread interest throughout Japan.

Departing from Azuma's concept of "Database Consumption" (Azuma 2001), the present paper discusses cultural creation, originality and the changing subject in musical production through multiple topics, such as the comparison of derivative works in manga/anime culture (*otaku* culture) to sampling/remixing in DJ culture, critical discourse on the issue of "*pakuri*" (rip offs and the act of ripping off) and the acceptance of software for synthetic singing.

Intertextuality, oftentimes cited as a feature of postmodern culture, is a significant quality of contemporary Japanese pop culture as well. Fanzines (*dōjinshi*), or derivative works created by anime/manga fans reusing existing characters in different stories, are a prime example of this. At the same time, DJ culture, dependent upon sampling and remix techniques, can also be seen as the appearance of postmodern eclecticism within the realm of music.

Azuma states that, in the *otaku* world, elements from individual works (such as characters, settings, and the various elements that constitute such characters/settings) – rather than the works themselves – are collected in database form, and cultural expression takes place by users then selecting and arranging these various elements. Musical expression in DJ culture assumes a formal similarity to this. However, it varies on an important point. This paper identifies two major differences between *otaku* and DJ culture in terms of "creative effort" and "publicity" and investigates the varying forms of the database consumption phenomenon in manga/anime as compared to music.

Studies from these perspectives of creative effort and publicity are then applied to the following discourse on "*pakuri*." Examining the history of the term "*pakuri*," once jargon for economic fraud and later employed as a term for describing cultural plagiarism, the author reveals the presence of two varying reasons for criticizing "*pakuri*" conduct: the undeserved shortcutting of creative effort and the embezzlement of publicity value.

The effect of database consumption in music appears as the overlapping of developments in the field of shortcutting creative effort and the act of toying with publicity. The surging popularity of the synthetic singing software "Hatsune Miku," released in 2007, is a prime example of this dual nature. "Hatsune Miku," initially developed as a software program for substituting human singing with computerized singing, was adopted as an almost real singer in the minds of the users after its release, and (the character's) publicity came to be the object of consumption.

Although it is already customary to understand the creation and consumption of popular culture in contemporary Japan through the framework of postmodern culture, this paper attempts to further develop this discussion in the realm of popular music.

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## I. Introduction

Hiroki Azuma's concept of "Database Consumption" often appears in application to remix and sampling methods in music. This application is based on the logic that the practice of sampling only a piece of the original (rather than consuming the original recording itself) and combining these pieces to complete a different track (as typical in hip-hop and house music) can be structurally likened to the *otaku's* secondary or derivative manga works (*niji sōsaku*) that adopt characters from existing manga works.

Although discussions analogizing derivative manga works in *otaku* culture to DJ practices are not readily available in any coherent form, they nevertheless appear frequently (for statements by Azuma himself, see Azuma 2007:139, and for Go Itō's comments, see Itō 2007). Regardless of genre, these discussions are currently taken as proof of rising postmodern forms of cultural consumption.

Reiichi Kimoto's theory is a prime example of classifying postmodern isomorphisms (although Kimoto does not use the term "postmodern") in present-day music and *otaku* culture from the standpoint of cultural sociology (Kimoto 2005). Kimoto expands upon the concept of appropriation in cultural sociology and argues that present-day cultural production shifts away from the "production/consumption model," in which producer and consumer are clearly differentiated and cultural products are passed from producer to the consumer together with economic value (this has conventionally been considered the dominant theory in the culture industry), towards a "production-cum-consumption model," in which consumers appropriate and devise derivative works out of producers' works. He poses DJ and *otaku* culture side by side as examples of the latter's new cultural practices, investigating the mechanism in which products formed from such cultural practices necessarily result in friction with the "modern" system of copyright laws. Kimoto's argument, which expands Azuma's theory on database consumption in *otaku* culture to the music culture and gives it a sociological variance, has been accepted without much protest.<sup>1</sup>

I basically agree with the fact that, in general, the database consumption theory can be applied not only to *otaku* culture but to the current state of music culture as well, in other words, that there are similarities between fanzine writers (*dōjin-sakka*), working ardently on their derivative works, and DJs, remixing the materials they have found at record stores. There is a clear increase in producers-cum-consumers attracted to accumulations of compositional elements as opposed to autonomous works. However, I also believe there is a difference between music and the *otaku* culture of manga, anime and games – a difference that has not been accounted for in Azuma and Kimoto's theories.

This paper delves into a modest investigation of how the arguments posed in *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals* [*Dōbutsuka suru Posutomodan: Otaku kara Mita Nihon Shakai*] (Azuma 2001) can be applied to music. Discourse on *pakuri* (rip-offs and the act of ripping off) and the Hatsune Miku phenomenon will be discussed as examples of this, but neither topic will be discussed in detail in this paper.

## II. Databases in Music

Let us first take a look at the main points of the database consumption theory. The *otaku's* consumption behavior is geared towards characters and settings, rather than the individual narratives (or works) that they compose. Furthermore, these characters are comprised of symbols that can be reduced to *moe* elements.<sup>2</sup> These symbols, which trigger the *otaku's* desires, are based on the accumulation of information in a form similar to a database that does not compose any narrative-like system (Azuma calls this the "Grand Non-Narrative").

These characters, removed from the "original" narrative, are used as elements by the *otaku* for their derivative manga works. However, the relationship between the "original" and derivative work is not that of an original

1. Koji Namba adopts Kimoto's idea here in a special edition of an academic journal looking back on mass media studies over the past ten years. Namba calls it "the most impressive theory" on "subculture as counterculture" and gives high praise to the fact that "it accurately points out the hidden contemporaneity and similarity between fashionable club culture and anti-fashionable *otaku* culture — subcultures on seemingly opposite poles — as media culture." (Namba 2007: 36)

2. *Moe* is a Japanese word used to express a strong affection for anime/manga characters. (translator's note)

(archetype) vs. copy, but rather that of two simulacra, equal to the extent that they are both composed of elements accumulated within the database. Rather than *humanly* agreeing to an individual work or author's worldview, the *otaku* imagination is oriented to *chara(kyara)-moe*,<sup>3</sup> which responds *animalistically* to symbolically-produced characters. This is the result of the modern decline of the Grand Narrative and the increased influence of the postmodern social environment, and the cultural production and consumption methods of *otaku* culture can be considered a model for postmodern society as a whole. This concludes a somewhat rough summary of Azuma's database consumption theory, which is now beginning to spread as an influential theory on present-day culture.

Now, let us similarly apply this theory to music. New dance music, such as hip-hop, house and techno, that developed in the 1970s and 80s and rose to the status of popular music in the 90s can be characterized by the presence of a DJ that "plays" existing records, rather than musicians that play certain instruments. In a club, the DJ puts on a record or layers sounds from multiple records based on the mood of the people gathered there. This real-time DJing in clubs developed into a form of music production based on sampling, in which existing records are edited and combined and new sounds are added to produce works of music.

To a DJ, each record is merely an ingredient for his derivative work. The meaning infused into the "original" record is broken down and focus is placed on separate music fragments. These fragments, or ingredients for this new act of creation, are called "stuff." DJs collect records not as great works (of music), but for *use* as stuff. They thus literally create a database of musical sound fragments.

This kind of practice in DJ culture coincides, formally to a great extent, with the orientation towards characters in *otaku* culture. Consumption, or the creation of derivative works, occurs based on the unit of elements (breaks and specific sounds/characters and settings) rather than the entirety of the individual work (music, narratives), and the derivative work holds a status equal to the primary work (rather than a relationship of original to copy, they are equally simulacra to the database). Furthermore, the producers-cum-consumers of both types of derivative works respond "animalistically" to elements rather than perceiving the works as small, complete works in and of themselves (small narratives). As Go Itō points out, this can be compared to "anime eyes" (a corporeality that responds acutely to the symbolic format of *moe* element symbols constituting anime characters) and "techno ears" (a corporeality that fathoms pleasure from inorganic electronic sounds) (Itō 2007: 265). However, there is a difference in database consumption in *otaku* and DJ culture that cannot be overlooked. This difference is mainly the result of differences in the characteristics of manga, anime and music in media theory.

First of all, sound fragments like break beats (parts of a song extracted as samples) and other special sounds that form the DJ's unit of consumption, have a lower level of autonomy as compared to characters that appear in manga, anime and games. The DJ's imagination consumes these sound fragments as elements to be incorporated into a "different song" (there would likely be very few users who would listen to a CD of samples on a daily basis). On the other hand, characters can be consumed alone, without having to belong to a particular work, and thus assume a semiologically more complicated structure.

This semiologic difference between the two likely rests in the qualitative difference in the creative effort exerted in the two cultures' practices and databases. Azuma mentions the double articulation of characters and *moe* elements in the *otaku* database, in which there is a database of characters and settings and furthermore, a database of the individual elements that compose these characters and settings (Azuma 2001:77). This kind of double articulation of characters and *moe* elements, however, does not exist in the DJ's database of sound fragments. In music sampling, a unit of consumption that is identical to a unit of reproduction results in replicas consisting of superficial sounds (sampling using machines), while the same for characters in the *otaku*'s derivative works do not reproduce such simple replicas.<sup>4</sup> While founded upon images depicted in manga or anime, derivative works in *otaku* culture attempt

3. In the English translation of Azuma's book (2009), *chara (kyara)-moe* is explained as "the feeling of *moe* towards characters and their alluring characteristics." (translator's note)

4. Of course "changes" are made in the actual production process for sampled music, in the form of filtering or equalizing, however, such changes form a semiologically indexical relationship (a semiotic relationship based on direct causality). On the other hand, the reuse of characters in *otaku* culture is based on an iconic relationship (founded on similarities) or symbolic relationship (founded on customs). Simply put, while music cannot be sampled on the basis of human memory (there is an inevitable need for some sort of device that realizes the physical reproduction process), the reuse of characters in *otaku* culture depends upon semiotic abilities and human recognition of similarities. Borrowing

to attach different lives to characters by imagining (or collectively creating) characteristics that are not necessarily included in the existing manga or anime. On the other hand, sampled sound fragments, the unit of consumption in DJing, are practical sounds that do not have a “thickness” equivalent to *otaku* characters (which can be imbued with characteristics). Thus, there is a difference in the semiological status of the two cultures as well as in the creative effort required in reproducing them.

Furthermore, DJing does not necessarily depend upon the publicity value of the individual sound fragments used (in other words, the public appeal of a famous work). Rather, a DJ’s skills are oftentimes demonstrated by the unknown breaks they find.<sup>5</sup> A well-known anecdote is that the earliest hip-hop DJs played with records stripped of their labels, for fear of others discovering their “stuff.” DJ culture expects sampled sound fragments to act as “materials” for their music production, and it is rare to find sampling conducted for the purpose of praising or admiring a song’s publicity value.<sup>6</sup> This is different from the *otaku*’s derivative works, in which a character’s publicity exists first and foremost to then be reused. DJs use their database of sound fragments as a zero-dimensional “environment” for what may be termed “original creation.”

To summarize, the difference between database consumption in the *otaku* and DJ cultures rests in: (a) the semiological difference between music and anime/manga (the strong presence of characters cannot find its equivalent in music) and (b) the selection strategy of not necessarily relying upon the source’s publicity value. In other words, the structural difference between music and anime/manga (or games) in terms of media theory as well as the difference in their historical contexts (the history of conflict with modern systems such as copyright laws) make it difficult for the database consumption theory to be applied as it is to music.

### III. The Structure of Criticism Surrounding *Pakuri*

From the producer-cum-consumer standpoint, database consumption in *otaku* culture is structured on the unit of characters, which can cross over freely between individual works, and their publicity values. The producers-cum-consumers of derivative manga works extract publicity-bearing characters (that have the ability to form the producers-cum-consumers’ interpretive community) from an existing body of work and introduce these characters into the derivative works that they (re)create. In the process, the character’s publicity value is actually further strengthened. This cyclical structure lowers the status of the “work” as the primary object of consumption or production. Instead, it has the tendency to heighten the status of the characters. Database consumption is thus grounded on elements (characters and their qualities and settings in the case of manga and anime) that can be enjoyed independent of the works they are based on as well as the publicity value that such elements hold for the producer-cum-consumer.

On the other hand, because it is difficult to voluntarily insert character-like objects or elements with publicity value into a text of music (both in terms of media theory as well as within the scope of social norms), the effect of database consumption in music cannot assume the formal simplicity of the *otaku* culture’s mangas/animes and instead assumes a more complex pattern. The following investigates this idea supplemented by a discourse on

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from phrases often used in the study of copyright laws, there is a difference in “sweat of the brow” between parody manga works and sampled music.

5. This may partially be the effect of a series of lawsuits concerning the act of sampling in hip-hop that ensued in the United States — where the practice of DJing appeared for the first time in society — in which the modern system of copyright laws suppressed a postmodern cultural practice. Industry practices related to sampling in hip-hop were developed from the late 80s to the 90s, and a systematic process was established for copyrights related to derivative uses of original works. Sampling fees skyrocketed with the flourishing of hip-hop, and in the United States, it is beginning to be difficult for hip-hop works that sample existing American songs to be released in the general market.
6. Special cases of this include samples of famous works intentionally used to suggest an intertextual association to the audience. The fame and anonymity of sampled works likely form a gradation in which, the closer to fame it is, the more it will assume a parody-like essence while, at the same time, there will likely be a greater need for licensing with the original copyright-holding artist. Some classic examples of sampling renowned works include “Motor Man” by SUPER BELL”Z (1999) and “B-DASH” by Tongari Kids (2005). These works are devoted to consuming the publicity value of the sampled sounds (announcements on the Yamanote train line, sound effects from the game *Super Mario Bros.*, etc.) and is semantically similar to the *otaku*’s derivative manga works. The fan-arranged works prevalent in so-called *dōjin-ongaku* (a genre of music that has formed within the *otaku* culture in Japan since around the 90s. It encompasses various musical styles and is defined more by its form of distribution (as Comic Markets, etc.) rather than its musical form) also have a strong tendency to depend upon the original work’s publicity value and thus may apply more to the theoretical construct of database consumption as opposed to DJ culture, but this point will be saved for discussion at a later time.



criticisms surrounding *pakuri* (rip-offs as well as the act of ripping off).

The word *pakuri* was not originally defined as the plagiarizing (*tōsaku/hyōsetsu*) of cultural works. Rather, as the word *pakuri-ya* (meaning somebody who conducts “*pakuri*,” or a type of con man unique to Japan) suggests, *pakuri* was a word that came into use after World War II to signify economic crimes, such as the counterfeiting of bills and bonds or the embezzlement of wares. Examples of its use as a term denoting plagiarization in music and literature begins to appear from around the 1970s (or so it is estimated, although there are no definite sources that can be cited), and it becomes a popularly employed term through the 90s. Examples of the use of *tōsaku* (plagiarism) and *pakuri* in the Ōya Sōichi Library index<sup>7</sup> show that *pakuri* (the ripping-off) of cultural works was commonly called *tōsaku* or *hyōsetsu* throughout the 1980s. The occasional use of the term *pakuri* in place of *tōsaku* or *hyōsetsu* only begins to appear from around the 90s. We can perhaps see this as the time when the idea of plagiarism (*tōsaku* or *hyōsetsu*) as equal to an economic crime took hold, in other words, when cultural and economic issues merged. At the onset of its use in this sense, the term *pakuri* was mostly used with quotation marks — as “*pakuri*.” It became common to eliminate these quotation marks around 1993, showing that its use as a new or metaphoric term was replaced by a solid definition of this term as plagiarism (equivalent to *tōsaku/hyōsetsu*), which began to catch on at around this time.

Articles on *pakuri* see a sudden rise and popularization from around the year 2000. This was likely the result of a vicious cycle of internet textboards like 2channel (*ni channeru*) – which became popular at around this time – stirring heated talk about suspicions of music and novel *pakuri* (rip-offs), which then became articles in weekly magazines. Criticism of *pakuri* is now so popular that *pakuri* has become a standard topic for weekly magazines and talk/variety shows. These discussions, at times, incorporate a condescending view towards East Asia as well (of a backwards China compared to the advanced intellectual property rights of Japan), such as with the Beijing Shijingshan Amusement Park, which became a heated topic in the fall of 2007. The concept of *pakuri* thus extends beyond that of a simple cultural issue, merging into the sphere of political and economic discourse as well.

A detailed investigation of such criticism surrounding *pakuri* will not be covered in the present paper, but it is important to point out that acts labeled as *pakuri* can largely be divided into the following two categories. This stems from the fact that the following two typologies exist at the core of why *pakuri* should be criticized.

- (1) *Pakuri* exploits the efforts of another’s creative work and enjoys only its achievements without exerting any labor.
- (2) *Pakuri* is parasitical on works that are already famous and hold publicity value, exploiting the work’s appeal to its fan-base.

In other words, (1) criticizes the act of paring down creative effort while (2) criticizes the use of another’s publicity value. Thus, both these acts, signified by the single word “*pakuri*,” differ in content.

The purpose of criticizing *pakuri* in terms of (1) would be to expose the “original source” that the plagiarizer attempts to hide. The many websites that purport to expose *pakuri* acts address the laziness of reusing another’s creative elements and breaking the rules by keeping quiet about it. Thus, sources are cited for cover songs and credits are added (or the required rights are procured) so as to make clear whose creative effort the work depends upon; by doing so, the work, although based on bypassed creative effort, escapes the label of *pakuri*. This category applies to examples of *pakuri* concerning any reduction in creative effort, including plagiarized songs and texts or traced manga works. This definition is the equivalent of the traditional use of the terms *hyōsetsu* and *tōsaku*.

On the other hand, in terms of (2), it is already clear what the “source” is (or its publicity will not serve the required function). Criticism may or may not ensue based on the genre and scale the work it is reused in as well as how it is used in general. While derivative manga works by fanzine writers (*dōjin sakka*) have gained a certain level of cultural recognition (putting aside the issue of copyright laws), they are not often criticized for their *pakuri* acts.

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7. The Ōya Sōichi library index is a citation index database for magazines held by the Ōya Sōichi bunko, a private library that carries a collection of popular magazines in Japan. (translator’s note)

On the contrary, however, in the Noma Neko incident in 2005, the Avex Group's reuse of Mona, a character considered the joint product of a number of anonymous "creators," spurred heated criticism.

This publicity-related *pakuri* incident differed from the former case in that its focus was on the appeal of an existing symbol, rather than the exploitation of creative effort. This could certainly have been termed *hyōsetsu* (plagiarism), but the arrival of the word *pakuri* made the essence of this act more readily understandable. In other words, as opposed to the creative process, it was the effects of plagiarism – especially in relation to profits – that attracted a high level of interest and resulted in the popularization of the concept of *pakuri* (tied to idea of property rights).

These two different purposes behind the cultural practice of *pakuri* – bypassing creative effort and reusing publicity value – in other words these two cultural and economic opportunities formed an arrangement different from what could conventionally be found in the increasing intertextual cultural practices of the postmodern cultural environment and instigated a debate on the appropriate means for understanding them. Clearly delineating these two points brings to view a definitive contrast between the *otaku* and DJ cultures.

Derivative manga works in *otaku* culture remove themselves from being criticized for *pakuri* – in the sense of (2) – by setting up a closed arena so that (at least as an official stance) the fanzines (*dōjinshi*) will not be distributed in the general market (this is why such works in which publicity leads to excessive economic gains are oftentimes subject to a great deal of criticism). At the same time, they are not criticized for *pakuri* in terms of (1), or bypassing creative effort, since the creators of parody fanzines illustrate their works using their own hands, much like the creators of the originals. By setting up this closed arena, they are able to establish an autonomous sphere – sometimes called the *dōjinkai* (fanzine society) – in which they can conduct their cultural production-cum-consumption founded on the publicity values of existing manga/anime characters. The idea of database consumption, treating both original and derivative works equivalently as simulacra, is made possible through the *otaku* culture's continual "play" with characters and their publicity values within an interpretive community founded on the characters' publicity values and based on the historical process of constructing the necessary criteria for avoiding social conflict. Derivative works by the *otaku* do not aim to bypass creative effort, rather, they are made to extrapolate the publicity value of manga/anime characters from their social and economic ties and (if it is alright to put it this way) to obtain visual enjoyment.

On the other hand, DJing in music remains relatively independent of the issue of publicity, based on the two factors described in the previous section. Instead, the sampling method adopted by DJs falls under the category of bypassing creative effort. Borrowing something that "someone" has fixed onto a recorded medium offers a means of incorporating into one's work special beats, phrases, voices or sounds that are difficult to produce solely through one's own instrumental efforts. This includes not only the sampler, but also other equipment like synthesizers, preset with various sounds, that allow one to use sound sources pre-recorded by "somebody" onto a silicon memory, instead of making something from scratch. Creators of such music can manipulate and combine various sounds that they cannot produce alone through the (literal) database of sound sources. On the other hand, (as a means of reducing the risk of contact with legal matters) the practice of sampling requires carefully avoiding the use of publicity values from existing musical pieces (passing it through numerous equalizers and filters so that the classics are unrecognizable).

"*Pakuri*" is thus a magical word that allows us to sum up the different genres' varying structures of intertextualities and values adopted therein as a uniform act of cultural and economic infringement. This is not necessarily equivalent to the infringement of copyright laws. Furthermore, the principles behind derivative manga works and sampled sounds make them constantly liable to being labeled "*pakuri* (rip offs)" anytime it is outside of the sphere in which their cultural norms hold true – derivative manga works for their misuse of publicity and sampling for breaking the rule of bypassing creative effort.

In this sense, criticism of *pakuri*, which rose to conspicuousness from around the year 2000 in Japan, can be interpreted as a response by modern systems to postmodern culture's production-cum-consumption style (database consumption). In other words, it is a manifestation of opposition by the "production/consumption model" — the prerequisite of modern creators' ideologies and legal systems – towards the practice of the "production-cum-consumption model" by consumers acclimatized to the postmodern social environment.

On the other hand, however, it is also true that discourse on *pakuri* today incorporates within it an excessive quality that goes beyond the simple criticism of property right infringement. Why is it that we cannot be indifferent to *pakuri* (the ripping off) of somebody's work (property)? Perhaps people's attitudes of calling any similarity – no matter how small – “*pakuri*” and being the first to denounce it is representative of something that can be termed *pakuri*-phobia (the fear of rip-offs). Behind the criticisms surrounding *pakuri* that has accompanied the progress of postmodernization is perhaps the idea of one's being that cannot help but assume other people's *pakuri* issues as issues connected to “oneself.”

During the period when talk of *pakuri* within popular music was heightening, the view of problematizing “*pakuri*” further in the sense of similar characteristics between artists, rather than similarities in the music (works) themselves emerged – a point that should be investigated. Classic examples of this are Hitomi Yaida (who debuted in 2000), who has oftentimes been called Ringo Sheena's (who debuted in 1998) *pakuri* and Hikaru Utada, who debuted in 1998, versus Mai Kuraki (who debuted in 1999). Sheena and Utada were both newcomers to the J-pop world who had gained popularity during this time and were then received by the Japanese as highly original artists. While Yaida and Kuraki are almost never considered *pakuri* today, at the time, there was a strong tendency to see the qualities of the two artists as “Sheena-like” or “Utada-like.”<sup>8</sup>

This popular case between Utada and Kuraki is a great expression of excessive *pakuri*-phobia. When Hikaru Utada appeared on the music show *HEY! HEY! HEY!* (Fuji TV) on June 26, 2000, the comedy duo Downtown, who hosted the show, mentioned Mai Kuraki as Utada's “*pakuri*.” This comment incensed Kuraki's office, prompting Fuji Television and Yoshimoto Kogyo, the entertainment conglomerate that employs Downtown, to make a formal apology. A debate ensued in magazines and over the internet as to whether Kuraki was a *pakuri* or an original. In the end, an article appeared in the July 25, 2000 issue of *FLASH* verifying the acoustic similarity in the two voices by analyzing the frequencies of both Utada and Kuraki's voices. According to the article, the similarity between the two voices lay in their skillful production of high frequencies around 8,000–12,000 Hz, a phenomenon that, according to a certain study, could only be observed in 4–5% of every 6,000 people. The article hypothesizes that the two have similarly structured oral cavities, proving the “scientific” similarity between Utada and Kuraki.

However, can Mai Kuraki's oral cavity really be called a plagiarized form of Hikaru Utada's? This is, of course, nonsensical. The logic that *pakuri* can be proven through a strict verification of similarities is evidently absurd, but what is important here is that similarities in the artists' characters were collectively incorporated into the concept of *pakuri*, in other words, it showed the idea of viewing these similarities as some sort of infringement on property rights ensuing from the act of creation. Of course, the element in question here is not the creative effort exerted in creating the work (music) but the publicity value found in the artists' characters. The fact that the similarities in these artists' characters were asserted so strongly that it prompted the appearance of such an article suggests that the idea of misappropriating an artist's publicity was merged into the concept of *pakuri* in music, equating it to breaking the rule of bypassing creative effort. In other words, the artists' characters were fully exposed to criticism regarding *pakuri*, without the shelter of a closed field, as with the *otaku* culture, in which to play with the qualities of publicity.

Let's take a look at this from a different perspective. Eiji Ōtsuka points out that the expanding sphere of character-oriented imagination has not only resulted in manga and anime characters being independently consumed, but humans also being understood in a character-oriented manner (Ōtsuka 2004: 128–132). Ōtsuka expresses a sense of uneasiness towards the sensibilities of “the younger generation” who regard human personalities as reducible to a bunch of settings that are perceived as “characters” and calls this the “informatization of the ‘self.’”

It goes without saying that there is a commonality between this understanding and the worldview of Azuma's databases. In the depths of the world is an information layer, and personality is “felt” to be a combination of certain pieces of information selected from this layer. While Ōtsuka, with a modern subjective consciousness, feels uneasy about this, he says that the “younger generation” takes this kind of understanding as self-evident. From this, Ōtsuka says the following about the perception of personality in the modern age:

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8. For more on Yaida, see Tomisawa (2001: 104).



When the “characteristics” of “oneself” are understood as an accumulation of information, the act of somebody releasing, stealing or damaging a segment of this information somehow connects to the sense of damaging the personality’s dignity ... When a piece of information that one has accessed or acquired is incorporated into one’s personal information, its reuse feels like a danger to the dignity of “oneself.” This feeling is part of what constitutes the concept of protecting personally identifiable information. It is an issue of how to protect the new information theory-based self ... Perhaps the “protection of personally identifiable information” in an age when the internet has become so commonplace, is a feeling similar to how we are to protect the bundle of information that makes up the “self” (Ōtsuka 2004: 133-134).

Ōtsuka’s statement here lies within the context of personally identifiable information, but let us expand upon this in the context of criticizing *pakuri*. Within a database environment, human personality becomes recognized as something similar to a character, or a certain bundle of information. If personality is understood as combinations of qualities or information that can be shared (characters), rather than something with an unpredictable thickness (as in the modern subject), noticing “the same information” incorporated within somebody else’s personality may trigger a sense of the self having been “stolen.”

The sensations of internet users who manage websites that vehemently criticize *pakuri* pro bono may then perhaps be based on “the bundle of information that make up the ‘self.’” If all personalities are bundles of information or characters, *pakuri* is not only an infringement of property rights but an infringement upon the subject’s personality, understood as bundles of information. The fear that this personality-based subject may be a *pakuri* would conversely produce excessive aggressiveness towards similarities in other characters. Criticizing *pakuri*, then, is supported by the existence of this kind of database-like self.

The effect of database consumption in music appears, not only in the phenomenon of flourishing DJ sampling and remix activities, but also in the form of the artist’s (or consumer’s) informatization of the “self” and their concerns over its “dignity.” It is because infringement upon the realm of the “self” is felt as an existential threat that *pakuri* is oftentimes so heatedly criticized. Thus, similarities in artists’ characters (a sign of exploited publicity) becomes newly incorporated into the concept of “*pakuri*,” in addition to similarities in the work of music itself (symptoms of bypassed creative effort), and this appears as threats towards the informatized “self.” The above events can be interpreted as the reason why the seemingly divergent phenomena of criticizing *pakuri* and DJing appear simultaneously alongside postmodernization.

#### IV. A Voice Without a Body: Hatsune Miku

What become apparent from this investigation of criticisms against *pakuri* are two (different) aspects that the environment of database consumption phenomenalizes in popular music. Fragmentary music consumption is driven by the musical practice of sampling, giving rise to new modes of music production and consumption enabled through reduced creative effort. Here, the creative subject’s authority is curtailed, giving rise to a “musical practice without a subject,” built upon the accumulation of an abundant source of creative efforts mediated through technology.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, the informatization of the “self” raises a concern for the publicity value of other subjects, leading to a scrutiny of artists’ characters as elements or as subjects of consumption.<sup>10</sup> In addition to being the creative subject, the “artist” in popular music manifests him/herself as a source whose publicity is reused, much like the fictive characters used in the *otaku*’s derivative works.

In this case, the effect of database consumption in music appears as the clash between character-oriented

9. The “*sakkyoku no jidai* (age of musical composition)” discussed by the author referencing Jacques Attali (1985) relates to this condition. See Masuda and Taniguchi (2005) and Masuda (2006).

10. In terms of J-pop, I feel that the tendency to promote the consumption of the artist as opposed to the music has started to intensify since the 2000s, accompanying the decline in CD sales after its peak in 1998. Within this is the aim to supplement the decline in CD sales with an increase in loyal fans who purchase related products. New releases by standard J-pop artists are now commonly accompanied by deluxe editions that come with limited first-edition DVDs. The increase in greatest hits albums and remix editions can also be validly understood as part of the trend towards selling fan products as opposed to music.

imagination and bypassing creative effort. Perhaps the “Hatsune Miku” phenomenon should be seen as something born for the purpose of reducing the subject’s creative effort and the creator’s authority, compiled into publicity-oriented consumer behavior.

“Hatsune Miku” is a software (released for sale August 31, 2007) for creating vocals with lyrics that can be freely added by users. The software uses the voice synthesis system Vocaloid2, a revamped version of the Vocaloid system developed by Yamaha in 2003, combined with a voice library by the voice actress Saki Fujita. The use of an anime-style character, Hatsune Miku, set as a 16-year-old girl who loves to sing, categorizes “Hatsune Miku” as a “virtual singer,” or a software in which an imaginary character “sings” (Photo 1).



**Photo 1** “Hatsune Miku” package

The software was planned and developed by Crypton Future Media in Sapporo. Crypton Future Media was originally a media company that produced computer music software, mainly sampling CDs and sound generator software, and was primarily a developer with no connections to the *otaku* culture.

The first voice synthesis software developed by Crypton Future Media was “MEIKO,” released in November, 2004. “MEIKO” also assumed a human-like appearance, as a “Japanese female vocalist with superb singing talents,” however, the figure on the package lacked so-called *moe* elements (Photo 2) and received only limited response (this may have also been caused by the technological limits of Vocaloid technologies at the time). With this in mind, a “Character Vocal Series” was designed with character settings that resonated largely with the *otaku* culture, with the appearance of “Hatsune Miku” in the first phase of its development.

Wataru Sasaki from Crypton Future Media, the producer of “Hatsune Miku,” states the following about where this software stands:

Sasaki: [With “Hatsune Miku”] I strove towards something easy to understand, with recognizability at the forefront, and a sound generator that is pleasant to use. At the same time, with the upgrade to Vocaloid2, lyrics and melodies have become catchier. Additionally, the general mood was such that a new sound source felt necessary, and it was great timing overall. However, the grounds are that there is still something that does not meet the standards of human singing in terms of reality (human imitation). In the end, in discussions on “emotion” or “soul,” it is inevitably at a disadvantage. In that case, we thought conversely to deform the vocalist and use voice actors so that they can be loved



**Photo 2** “MEIKO” package

as evolutionary androids that provide the experience of what is possible with voice synthesis technologies in the current year 2007. Then we thought, why not make a visual image incorporating anime and manga culture that connects to the image of a digitized singer? (DTM Magazine 2008: 46)

In other words, character-oriented design was added originally to supplant the limits of Vocaloid2 technologies (a lack of musical reality), and the initial aim of the developers was to further advance a technology that assists musical production. When all kinds of instruments can be simulated by electronic devices today, “voice” remains the final remaining technological challenge. “Hatsune Miku” was simply a provisional product suggesting the current level of results achievable in the face of this challenge.

However, the character of Hatsune Miku, added simply as an expedient, brought huge success for the product beyond what could have been imagined. The confusion this wrought can be read from Sasaki’s words:

Sasaki: I feel that there must have been some users with negative outlooks towards the initial release of “Hatsune Miku.” I believe that these people were looking for a full-fledged Vocaloid that strictly pursued reality. This, of course, is necessary at some point in time. However, what we needed to do first was to bring a friendly, pop culture-sensibility to the forefront to attract the attention of a new user base as well as the people who had stopped using computer music in the age of GM/GS format sound sources ... Hatsune Miku is a strong presence with a niche voice, so more types of Vocaloids must be added as soon as possible, or there will be an increased danger of misunderstanding. (DTM Magazine 2008: 46)

In other words, the developer’s confusion was rooted in the fact that a product that they had supposedly sent out into the world to assist musical practices in DJ culture (for the purpose of widening the users’ selection of controllable music pieces by reducing the necessary creative effort) was reused in the environment of derivative creation meant to consume the character’s publicity value.

As if a reflection of this confusion, two opposing points of view can be observed in the debate surrounding “Hatsune Miku” online (although, with the huge quantity to be found, it is already difficult to follow all such discussions). The first is a point of view that perceives “Hatsune Miku” as an electronic instrument for music producers,

along the lines of conventional computer music software. While, from this perspective, “Hatsune Miku” is appraised for having expanded the possibilities of music production, this is only a single step in the development process.

The other understanding of “Hatsune Miku” perceives it as a software program that creates an environment for derivative works to be made. The presence of the character Hatsune Miku, a far more unique and outstanding character as compared to MEIKO, arouses a production-cum-consumption drive towards derivative forms of narratives, works, or songs. “Hatsune Miku” should be categorized in this case as a landmark product that makes it possible to operate characters that act within the field of music.

These two standpoints oftentimes collide (while loosely intermingling within practice). Discourse acknowledging “Hatsune Miku” as the former views its character-oriented design as an impurity. For the latter, however, it is its very essence. At the same time, the former perspective undervalues the innovativeness of “Hatsune Miku,” while the latter has a tendency to overvalue it. The “Hatsune Miku” phenomenon is based on the context of these two opposites – whether to categorize the musical practice enabled by this new technology as a reduction of primary creative effort along the lines of DJ culture or to understand this new field of derivative creation that plays with a character’s publicity value as something newly cultivated within the culture of computer music.

Crypton Future Media was a proponent of the former perspective (at least when the software was initially released). While Hatsune Miku’s software license agreement (included in the software, under which buyers are obligated to use the product) demands a separate license from Crypton Future Media for this form of use, in which the character Hatsune Miku seems to become the subject that “sings,” its “use as a synthetic voice within a work credited under an existing person (as the artist of the work)” is licensed in advance to the user (while some exceptions exist, such as use for commercial karaoke or ringtones). In other words, “Hatsune Miku” is sold under contract requirements that encourage software buyers themselves to compose music, rather than have Hatsune Miku sing it.

Regardless, the Hatsune Miku boom is currently propelled by the desire to fabricate the character Hatsune Miku and make her sing, rather than the use of the software “Hatsune Miku” as a vocal source for one’s own work. While the main battlefield for this boom is currently the website *Nico Nico Douga*, what is posted here are movies (many of them combinations of still pictures or partially animated) accompanied by music. A large number of “Hatsune Miku” movies have already been posted, many of them accompanied by the character’s figure, deformed or minutely redrawn. Many of the creators dub themselves “~ P,”<sup>11</sup> adopting the fictitious title of “producing” an imaginary character called “Hatsune Miku,” rather than emphasizing the fact that they have created the music themselves.

The fact that something sent out into the world as a tool for lightening the load of creation can be bent towards the enjoyment of a character’s publicity based on character-oriented imagination tells of the deeply-rooted structure of (our) imagination (towards sounds) in connecting the sound source of a voice to the existence of a certain being. It is interesting to note the anecdote that when Crypton Future Media was asking around to record a voice library for the Character Vocal Series, many professional singers refused the offer.<sup>12</sup> We cannot escape our habit of imagining a certain being inside the context of a singing voice. Technologies like Vocaloids are likely to break down this habit eventually (we no longer imagine a human presence behind drum beats), however, we currently remain tied to this attachment. Roland Barthes heard the body that appeared in the voice, in other words the “grain of the voice,” through the sounds of Charles Panzéra’s records (although this must have been a sound emitted by a “device”) (Barthes 1984: 197). If Barthes were alive today, what would he hear behind the singing voice of Hatsune Miku? (It is certain, however, that it would probably not be the processor’s data processing or access to the hard drive)

This bias is not just limited to Barthes; we ourselves also certainly seek the form of a “body” behind a voice without a body, satisfying ourselves by applying a fictitious character in this position. What the explosive “Hatsune Miku” boom that even the developers could not foresee suggests is that, at least in Japan, the sound source of a

11. “P” stands for producer or player and is thought to come from the custom of naming players in *The iDOLM@STER* (Namcot, 2005), an idol production game.

12. The offer was initially made to 10 singers with cute voices instead of voice actors, but this sparked concern over clones of the artist and a flood of covers and did not easily lead to mutual agreement. So the approach was shifted, under the logic that using professional voice actors who are experts at cute voices may yield better results. Major production companies were then solicited and the voices of a total of 500 or so male and female voice actors were observed repeatedly to narrow down to a voice that fit the concept. “It was easier to elicit understanding from voice actors used to the idea of acting out an anime character” (Okada 2007).



“voice without a body” is not imagined as the accumulation of creative effort by a dispersed number of subjects but instead runs along the lines of character-oriented imagination, in the strongly enrooted context of easily returning it to some sort of “being,” no matter how fictive.

“Leon” and “Lola” are two computer music products from abroad (Zero-G, UK, released 2004) that use Vocaloid technology like “Hatsune Miku” (Photo 3). However, the close-up of only the singing lips on the package does not make one recall a concrete personality (it is as if a spirit is singing). While the imagination that appropriates a “quasi-personality” (Itō 2005: 95) to a voice without a body may not be universal and may perhaps be something that an environment unique to Japanese society has fostered, we do not have the space to go further into detail here.



**Photo 3** Lola package

The effects of database consumption both propel the development of technologies that lessen the required creative effort while simultaneously creating a new form of “being.” This new “being that plays music” seems to still be on the path towards growth and proliferation. It may be that the sound fragments of artificial voices coincidentally found a place to rest in the fictive characters familiar to *otaku* culture in the context of Japanese society at the start of the 21st century. However, whatever may be the cause, it is certain that the simple hackneyed phrase (that is nowadays even accompanied by a sense of nostalgia) the “death of the author” is not enough for us to comprehend the full extent of issues such as the aesthetic ownership of music and the problems of infringement that may ensue.

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## Editor’s notes

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