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MEDIATISED IMAGES OF JAPAN IN EUROPE:  
THROUGH THE MEDIA KALEIDOSCOPE

MUTUAL IMAGES

ISSUE 6 – SPRING 2019

# MUTUAL IMAGES

## A TRANSCULTURAL RESEARCH JOURNAL

FOUNDED BY

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EDITED BY

MARCO PELLITTERI & CHRISTOPHER J. HAYES

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## A TRANSCULTURAL RESEARCH JOURNAL

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# Layers of the Traditional in popular performing arts: Object and voice as character - *Vocaloid Opera Aoi*

Krisztina ROSNER | Meiji University, Japan

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## ABSTRACT

*The paper analyzes how the concept of presence is put into play in connection to disappearance, contemporary popular media technology and objects in the 2014 production of Vocaloid Opera Aoi, composed by Hiroshi Tamawari. In the traditional noh theatre version of the famous story, the character Aoi does not appear "in person," she is represented by a kimono. In the 2014 production the modified story is performed with bunraku puppets and sung by a Vocaloid singer, a software. By analyzing this, I elaborate on the connection between the recent studies on object dramaturgy and the questions of nonhuman (Bennett, Eckersall), and the nonreflective position rooted in animism from the fan base of pop culture that attributes personality and emotions to their respective robot/android/software idol. I examine the latest performative events in contemporary Japanese theatre that involve both human and non-human actors/agents (animals, objects, androids, vocaloids): the corporeality of the organic and inorganic Other, focusing on how the presence of the organic and non-organic nonhuman appears within the interplays of representation, how it relates to the layers of empathy, responsibility and consent, in the frame of contemporary Japanese popular culture.*

## KEYWORDS

Contemporary Japanese Performing Arts; Transmedia; Vocaloid; Miku Hatsune;  
Theatre; Aoi; Object Dramaturgy; Presence.

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In this paper I take a close look at *Vocaloid Opera Aoi*, directed by Hiroshi Tamawari in 2014, a performance that blends one of the most well-known plays of traditional Japanese theatre with bunraku puppets, projection and Vocaloid. The Vocaloid is a constructed entity, a sound/voice product, which is generated by synthesizer software that uses human voice as a database library, and which is made visible by a projected image. It is my hypothesis that the *Vocaloid Opera Aoi* can be positioned on an axis of two major approaches of dealing with the nonhuman. The first approach is new materialism, especially the distinction between objects and things as a way of intensified ecological awareness (Bennett, 2015: 234), and the second is neo-animism, which term, with its background in cultural anthropology, offers a complex perspective on the performative qualities of nonhuman otherness (Jensen-Blok, 2013). The performing arts context include

the latest theatrical experiments with animals, objects, or robots on stage - as seen for example in the performances directed by Oriza Hirata.<sup>1</sup> These approaches allow us to reflect both on the ways of corporeality and its substitutes, and also on the image of the (female) body staged through object/absence in the case of the Vocaloid. The performative aspects of Vocaloid are a particularly interesting field, and I interpret the theatrical application of the Vocaloid as a method that challenges the concept - and the illusion - of performative presence defined by the live human body and voice.<sup>2</sup>

This theoretical question can be positioned in the context of some inherent linguistic and cultural aspects of Japan, with its traditionally intricate ways of “othering”: based on the dualistic image of “in” (*uchi*) and “out” (*soto*) there is a multi-layered sense and dynamic differentiation of inside(-r) and outside(-r), not only regarding the things a person shares with the public sphere (*tatema*) or keeps only for him- or herself and the closest circle (“*hon’ne*”), but also in the concept of hospitality, which *per definitionem* requires an act of exclusion, and designates the guest, the outsider, the other, in order for hospitality to be exercised. Reflecting on the diverse concepts of “otherness” and “othering” from a Japanese perspective offers an opportunity to extend the radius of the main Eurocentric references focusing on de Beauvoir, Lacan amongst others. In doing so, I follow Eiichiro Hirata’s (2014) thoughts on othering in relation to the experimental Japanese theatre dramaturgy, especially his suggestion on differentiating between assimilation, separation and “in-between” dramaturgy, and Ko’s (2010) analysis of otherness representations in Japanese films in relation to power, majority and the problematic idea of “Japaneseness”.

What follows is a survey of the representations of the title character in the adaptations of the play *Lady Aoi*. These representations are diverse in their materiality, and will be discussed in the context of the recent studies between things, objects, and other forms involving the nonhuman (Bennett, 2015; Eckersall, 2015). These theatrical representations appear for the spectator as an oscillation between withdrawn and manifest, which are,

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<sup>1</sup> More on Oriza Hirata’s robot theatre, please see Rosner (2016).

<sup>2</sup> The research was funded by the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science Postdoctoral Fellowship (“Reconsidering the Performer’s Presence: Non-Human and Neo-Human Aspects of Contemporary Japanese Theatre”, Waseda University, Tokyo, 2015-2017). Shorter versions of this paper were presented at the Performance Studies International conference “Performing Climates” (University of Melbourne, 2016), and the Mutual Images “Japan Pop Goes Global” conference (Aoyama Gakuin University, Tokyo, 2017), and I am extremely grateful for the reviewer for the valuable comments on the version published in this issue.

according to Bennett, the characteristics of the object (Bennett, 2015: 226). I agree with the assumption that “it is the very potential of theatre to put presence *into play* that enables us to consider the importance of theatre as an art form that can allow us to reflect upon and question the construction of “reality” in the contemporary world” (Power, 2008: 9, original italics), and that “presence should not be seen as something fixed which theatre has or doesn’t have, but as the subject of a constantly shifting interplay between theatrical signification and the context in which a performance takes place” (Power, 2008: 14). I suggest that in the theatrical representations of the Aoi character, the dynamic position of things, objects, bodies, voices, ghosts and spirits can be described with Latour’s term of “vacillating presence” (Latour, 2013: 244). My wider research examines how the recent theoretical interest in the performative role of objects and nonhuman agents connects to artistic practices involving different forms of “things”: puppets, objects and Vocaloids, accepting that “this is not just a matter of anthropomorphism or projecting human emotional responses onto objects; it is the beginning of an understanding of new modes of subjectivity” (Eckersall, 2015: 124). By positioning *Vocaloid Opera Aoi* in the contexts of tradition and technology, I intend to point out the performative moments where the dualistic approach, in which the human is identified as “us” and the nonhuman is identified as the “other”, is questioned. I will also analyse the possibilities for creating a character beyond / besides embodiment.

### **The Other, represented by an object – Lady Aoi and the noh theatre tradition**

The story of *Vocaloid Opera Aoi* originates from the Tales of Genji, written by Murasaki Shikibu in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, and was adapted to the noh stage by an anonymous writer, whose play Zeami Motokiyo rewrote at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. According to the story, Aoi, the young wife of the handsome and powerful prince, Hikaru Genji, falls ill unexpectedly: she gets possessed by a spirit. The family invites the priestess Teruhi, who finds out that it is the spirit of Lady Rokujo that is torturing Aoi. Lady Rokujo is one of Genji’s former lovers, a longtime mistress of the attractive prince. The spirit of the noble lady tells that she still loves Genji so deeply that she uncontrollably suffers from jealousy and humiliation: she wants to hurt Aoi to take away her soul. The family, scared, invites a Buddhist priest and, during the service, Rokujo’s jealousy embodies itself as an ogre that attacks Aoi and the priest. At the end of the fight, the vengeful spirit calms down and Aoi is cleansed.

One of the most important characteristics of the noh play *Lady Aoi* is that Aoi, the title role, does not appear on the stage as a character played by an actor. Instead a short-sleeved kimono (*kosode*) is placed on the stage at the beginning of the performance, representing<sup>3</sup> the ill and defenceless Aoi, who is possessed by a spirit, and therefore considered as not herself, already someone else, already an other (an-other). The focus of the play is the “possessing”, Rokujo’s great love and jealousy, and the very moment when Rokujo’s spirit beats the unconscious Aoi. This moment is enacted in the performative event by the leading actor, or *shite*, who suddenly thrusts his fan in the direction of the *kosode*. These instructions/actions are interpreted within the noh theatre context, with its strong tradition of the theatrical representations of (often iteratively possessing and possessed) spirits, ghosts, and the dead. Another example for context is the appearance of the stage assistants (*kōken*), who are perceived as outsiders to the layer of the fiction, but have a major role in the performative event. In this sense, the noh theatre context offers a constant interplay between visible and invisible. Also, in the strict visual codes of noh theatre, the metonymic or symbolic assembled props (*tsukurimono*) often have central importance. Therefore, in the realm of evocative objects, Aoi’s non-corporeal presence is not equal to the missing body: I suggest the term *withdrawn presence*.

This *withdrawn presence* of the Aoi character is closely linked to the noh theatre representations of ghosts and spirits, and it was fundamentally changed when the story of Aoi was adapted to modern drama and stage by Yukio Mishima in 1955. As Mishima notes, “[s]ince these are tales told by ghosts, their plots do not, as in most dramas, form a present progressive but depend on the evocation of the past, so that by the time a noh play begins, the drama is already over” (Mishima, 1971: 55). The retrospective quality of the noh plays even if the basic topics (evoking the past, and the jealousy as being possessed) remain the same as in Zeami’s play, Mishima’s adaptation, published as a modern noh play, and addressed by the author as “opera”, has two important differences. Firstly, in this version Aoi is portrayed by an actress on stage, rather than through the symbolic representation of a kimono in Zeami’s version. Secondly, the setting is a psychiatric ward, where the past events unfold at the unconscious Aoi’s, through the dialogue between the husband and

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<sup>3</sup> The most commonly used bilingual online edition of the play (The Noh.com, 2016) translates the verb 表す, *arawasu* as “to embody” – which, especially considered from the point of view of presence studies, is slightly misleading. As I suggest in this paper, the object (the kimono) doesn’t embody the character Aoi. Instead, I suggest to use the term “represent”, “express” in the context of noh theatre play.

Rokujo. Through these two major changes, the traditional noh form is blended with the imported system of psychoanalysis and stage realism. The “embodiment” of the Aoi character by a female human body is a major shift from the noh version. I suggest that it is a bigger change than just replacing an object with a performer: this shift represents an important difference between noh and the theatre of the modernity, namely *staging the female body*. While the stories told in noh often centre around female characters (usually in extreme emotional conditions such as mourning, possessed, jealous), on the stage of the noh theatre performance these characters are represented by *anything else but* a female body: male actors, or objects, or narration. The Aoi embodied by the female body of an actress in Mishima’s version therefore also represents the of the modern theatre. As she is lying conscious and motionless in a sickbed throughout the play, Aoi’s female body in Mishima’s play is also “feminized” in the sense Haraway uses the term: “to be feminized means to be made extremely vulnerable” (Haraway, 1991:166). In much the same way as the noh play, however, Mishima's Aoi is a silent role, thus maintaining a certain level of secrecy. “[I]n Mishima’s play, Aoi is still a cipher, more of a representation of a character than the true incarnation of a role. She shares no analogue with any pre-existing Nō role type; yet, through her corporeal presence, rather than that of a folded piece of costume, Mishima inspires an immediate, visceral sense of compassion for her fate at the deadly hands of his *shite*” (Neble, 2011: 127). Defining Aoi as a cipher is an important point. However, it is questionable that embodying Aoi (“filling” the character with the human flesh of a female performer) in itself triggers such an extra impact on the spectator. Instead, it can be seen as a mere (re-) enforcement of the major Western theatrical concept of modernity, which celebrates the corporeal presence of the actor and psychoanalysis-based plots.<sup>4</sup> In this regard, I suggest that Mishima’s version is the act of replacing Aoi’s “withdrawn presence” with character embodiment.

### **The Other as Artificial Voice – the case of *Vocaloid Opera Aoi***

This sequence of Aoi representation is once again modified by the *Vocaloid Opera Aoi*. Composed and directed by Hiroshi Tamawari in 2014, it is a 30 minutes long movie, set in a theatre stage setting without an audience. The story is performed by the bunraku

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<sup>4</sup> Mishima’s version is probably the most widely known adaptation of Aoi, in which the living female body is Aoi’s most important difference from the noh version. The question of embodiment and object-body got another turn, when the Youkiza puppet theatre performed Mishima’s play in 2013 - with marionettes. In this case, Mishima’s Aoi character becomes (again) a body-object.

puppets, and all characters are sung by Vocaloids. As a representative of Japanese contemporary technoculture, the Vocaloid is a commodity that reinforces the stereotype of anime “Japaneseness” on the global market. It is a series of multi-platform software launched in 2004 by the Yamaha Corporation, with a sound synthesizer-editor at its core that allows the user to create songs without a live singer. The slogan “it sings instead/for you” (Tamawari, 2014b) caters to the wish for withdrawn/hiding identity for an apparently wide social layer, and I see it as a performative antithesis of the other popular entertainment form karaoke (the “empty orchestra”). In the process of creating the database library necessary for the editor, the developers use human voices, from which the user can choose the “singer” character based on certain qualities (pitch, gender, language, etc.). This artificial singer is an instrument capable of uttering words, one layer in the other instruments. In the case of the visual associated with the vocal and for the anthropomorphic character of the Vocaloid, it is often the stereotypical and simplified visual codes of anime characters that provide the main motif for the body: big eyes, colourful hair, sharp body contours.<sup>5</sup> These virtual characters are stars “who” attract a global fan base (Crypton, 2019), and give full-house “live” concerts. Moreover, the development and operation of these characters are social products, as the songs written “for” and “with” the Vocaloids by the users are almost instantly made public online as shared content. These characters can therefore be interpreted not only as user-generated content (UGC), but also as spatially-temporally open, multi-authored creatures. The most famous one is Miku Hatsune, the turquoise haired singer-sprite, “who” regularly tours in Japan and in North America, in front of fans, who dress in Miku costumes. The character and the voice bank was developed and released by Crypton Future Media in 2007. Her name means “the first sound from the future”, and just as it is the case with other Vocaloids, her age, corporeal qualities are quantified: the fans have the information that she is 16 years old, 158 centimetres, 42 kilograms (Crypton, 2019). The Hatsune Miku phenomenon in relation to performing arts has been discussed in detail by Sone (2017). In the following I focus on cases when Vocaloids appear in theatrical and classical music productions, with or without human performers.

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<sup>5</sup> “Since the 1960s, in fact, fierce but beautiful female warriors (females who are fighters, leaders, heroes, or pilots, and also sexy, cute, attractive, and leggy) have proliferated across *manga*, *anime*, and television shows. [...] [These bodies] are overtly feminized in ways that could (and are) also read as sexual: skimpy costumes (short skirts, tight bodices, boots or heels) that show off flesh (standardly shaped as long legs, thin waist, rounded breasts). [...] girl heroes tend to strip down in the course of empowerment, becoming more, rather than less, identified by their flesh” (Allison 2006: 129).



The *Vocaloid Opera Aoi* is not the first attempt to combine classical music and the Vocaloid. The first such project, *Symphony Ihatov* by composer Isao Tomita premiered in 2012 after being inspired by writer Kenji Miyazawa's novels. This first Vocaloid symphony featured the Vocaloid Miku Hatsune singing along with the Japan Philharmonic Orchestra. The concert report emphasises how well the sound of the Vocaloid complements the human voice (Columbia, 2019). This might be true in the case of sound, but in the visual setting, the stage design of *Ihatov* contradicts this impression. In the concert, the traditional setting of the symphony (orchestra, chorus and conductor) is rendered in a pyramid shape hierarchy here, with the projected image of the Vocaloid at the top. The main impact of the stage design comes from the striking difference between the image of the dancing Vocaloid and the static chorus. This setting might remind us of Haraway's thoughts: "our machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert" (Haraway, 1991: 152).

Shortly after appearing in *Ihatov*, Miku Hatsune had her own "solo debut" in the first Vocaloid opera *The End* composed by Keiichiro Shibuya in 2012/13. The libretto was written by one of the most prominent playwright-directors in contemporary Japanese theatre, Toshiki Okada. Miku Hatsune has become the representative icon for the Vocaloid phenomenon. In this paper, however, I focus on a Vocaloid opera that does not feature the idol Miku, as I intend to emphasise the diversity and the playful multiplicity of recent theatrical experiments involving Vocaloids.

*Vocaloid Opera Aoi* was originally intended as a radio play. By classifying it as "opera," the composer Tamawari emphasises the link to the western tradition of orchestra music, which separates it from the musicality of noh tradition (Tamawari, 2015). As Tamawari has worked as a composer for popular computer and video games since the 1990s, *Vocaloid Opera Aoi* is influenced by the electronic music common in video games.

Jealousy, duplicity, and revenge are some of the central topics of the original noh play. In his adaptation, Tamawari blends these themes with the topic of the problematic relationship between a human and nonhuman artist, and the emotional relationship between the artist and his creation (Tamawari, 2014a). Tamawari's version tells the story of Aoi, a famous singer who is in a close relationship with the popular composer Hikaru. One day Aoi's manager gets a phone call that Aoi was involved in an accident and she is now in hospital. The hospital psychiatrist tells him that Aoi has been possessed by the jealous spirit, called Midori. Named after the colour of jealousy (緑, green), Midori is a

Vocaloid character, who used to be world famous for singing Hikaru's songs, becoming "Digital Diva", but her fame and popularity have faded, partly due to Aoi's growing popularity. The opening scene of the plot depicts the composer, who previously wrote songs for the Digital Diva, but recently fell in love with Aoi, the (human) woman who sings his songs so beautifully. In terms of psychological dramaturgy, this can be defined as a re-humanised Pygmalion syndrome. At the end of the story Aoi wakes up cleansed and the spirit of Midori disappears (Tamawari, 2014c).

Partly as a result of the opera positioning the Vocaloid character as a member of a high-tension triangle of jealousy, certain points in the plot can be interpreted as a *mise-en-abyme* of animism, in terms of attributing feelings, emotions to the Vocaloid, and treating her as an equal member of the love triangle between the characters. For example, the character Psychiatrist (in the traditional noh role of "tsure", the performer who accompanies the leading actor, the "shite") says that "Hikaru may have seen Midori as nothing more than an instrument that played his songs, but to Aoi, Midori had a heart. She devoted her body and offered her songs. She aspired to become her" (Tamawari, 2014a: 9). Animism, as a concept, is often and easily applied to the relation of the human and Vocaloid (non-human and anime), and even in this case, by the creative team of this opera. In the interview I conducted with the creators in 2015 (Rosner 2015), the producer tells how the young audience wants to "identify" with the Vocaloids in general, because they are cute. On the other hand, in the very same interview, the producer herself often reflects on the "spirit of the Vocaloid" as something effortlessly accessible. However, I suggest that even though the notion of animism offers a tempting link for humans to explain the emotional attachment to nonhuman, it must be handled with special care and caution. In doing this, I find it very important to consider both the current critical analysis of contemporary animism (Harvey, 2014) and Jensen's recent observations (Jensen-Blok, 2013). Jensen and Blok reintroduce Allison's term *techno-animism* ("reconfiguring intimate attachments" with cultural and technological commodities, Allison, 2005: 13). I find that that this term quite accurately describes the relation of the human and the other in contemporary Japanese techno-presence, because it "allows us to identify different modes of human-nonhuman cohabitation, thus infusing new energy into the analysis of non-modernities outside the Euro-American orbit" (Jensen-Blok, 2013: 92). However, I find that the Vocaloid seems to have a special position amongst the other hybrids (robots, androids) that appear in a theatrical event, for example the Vocaloid body is a projected

image without the materiality of the object (as it is the case with the robots and androids). What role does the materiality, the body-thing of a robot and the lack of it play in the performative application of techno-animism?

The stage design concept of the *Vocaloid Opera Aoi* considers the layers of the Aoi tradition, and focuses on the bunraku puppets, animated by the five puppeteers with Kosuke Yoshida as head animator. These big anthropomorphic objects dressed in lush fabrics – the characters Aoi, Aoi’s manager, and the psychiatrist – are moving in front of a projector screen with images referencing both to mandalas and video games, and the props used by the puppets (objects/things used by used objects) are the daily tools for our senses and communication processes, such as smartphones and laptops. This performance is different from the previous Vocaloid operas, where the Vocaloid had a projected body. In *Vocaloid Opera Aoi*, it is not only the voice of the Digital Diva character Midori that is created by the Vocaloid software by the composer Tamawari, but of *all* the other characters as well, including the “human” characters (Manager, Psychiatrist), too. Therefore, the *Vocaloid Opera Aoi* is an opera in which the main theme, the conflict between the human and nonhuman voice, is performed solely through the artificial sound software.

Just as the other “human” roles in the play, such as Aoi’s manager and the Psychiatrists, Aoi is represented by bunraku puppets. Aoi’s character is a body-object, she is positioned in the centre of the space; for the most part, the puppet is laid face down on the stage. This position of the body-object character can be seen as a very close reminder of the noh theatre version, in which Aoi is presented as a kimono on the stage.

In the *Vocaloid Opera Aoi* this body-object character Aoi does not have a text of her own, but at the peak of the story the jealous spirit of the Vocaloid Midori speaks/sings through her. On the other hand, Midori, the Digital Diva, doesn't have corporeal qualities, instead, she is presented through abstract, green laser projections. The character of the unconscious woman possessed by a spirit is constructed through the voice of the Vocaloid that doesn't have a body and a body-object that doesn't have a voice. The voice, the question of who “owns”, who “possesses” the voice seems to be a central conflict in the opera, for example in the duel between the human and Vocaloid singer, and in the case when the possessing spirit sings through Aoi. These questions are very clear in the fictional layer of the opera, within the plot itself, but this very clear set of questions gets confusing due to the fact that all characters are sung by Vocaloid sound.

In addition, this very tension between the fictional and performative is even more intensified by the bunraku theatre tradition. In bunraku, the human voice is already divided from both the puppet and puppeteer, as the voice of the object-character comes from a separate source. While the puppeteer provides the movement of the puppet, the voice of the characters and the occasionally occurring narrative elements are uttered by the chanter, seated at the side of the stage. The vocal skills of the chanter (*gidayū / tayū*) are traditionally renowned and respected. As a result of the composer Tamawari's decision that the whole opera be written and performed by Vocaloid software, in the case of the *Vocaloid Opera Lady Aoi*, it is not the corporeal presence of character or actor-puppeteer but the chanter that the Vocaloid replaces. Tamawari's gesture of excluding the live voice of the chanter by replacing it with the artificial sound, yet maintaining the body of the puppeteer and the object-body of the character, is the main difference from both the previous versions of Aoi's story, and the other Vocaloid operas. Consequently, it positions the artificial sound in the omnipresent role of the narrator, and yet it does direct our focus to the absent role of the chanter, rendering it present through its very absence, thus creating the withdrawn presence of the chanter.

One of the most significant common denominators between the Vocaloid shows mentioned above (*Ihatov* by Tomita, *The End* by Shibuya/Okada and *Aoi* by Tamawari) is the fact that the Vocaloid characters are highly self-reflective in their utterances. The lyrics sung by the Vocaloids emphasise their otherness, difference, uniqueness and aloofness – but in this self-explanatory expression of their existence there is an imminent human standpoint that is quite educative and even didactic. By these pseudo-self-definitions, the spectator gets to learn about not only the illusory way a Vocaloid is different, but also how a human being is described as opposed to the Vocaloid. This process shows similarities with Hiroshi Ishiguro's experiment of androids and his pursuit to know more about the human existence. The Osaka-based professor-celebrity Ishiguro has collaborated with the director Oriza Hirata's to create robot-theatre performances. Ishiguro's primary research is to develop humanoid robots from a profoundly anthropocentric standpoint: 'If you are able to give me a definition of human, I will happily design a robot matching that definition' (Ishiguro, 2014). Through creating performances featuring robots, Hirata and Ishiguro don't attempt to define what a robot is, but what human is: whether a 'core', an essential quality, exists by which it is possible to define 'human'. In this concept, the shape of the humanoid robot is considered as a shell (Ishiguro, 2011). Ishiguro's idea on robots is

controversial, as it still maintains the higher position of the anthropocentric order, in which the “role” and ultimate purpose of nonhuman is to get us closer to the definition of human. This reflective attitude is somewhat similar in the recent Vocaloid operas as well. In these operas the Vocaloids’ main mark is “Vocaloidness”, defined as being *different* from the human, being *the* other. This suggests that there still seems to be a need for an introduction to, and reflection on, the Vocaloid existence “as something else”. In Miku Hatsune’s projected appearances, “she plays herself”, she/it represents her own persona (as a special guest), and in her songs she clearly names and identifies herself. Tamawari’s Vocaloid opera, however, is a more complex issue, as the Vocaloid “plays” other characters as well, so this self-reflective position is combined with the Vocaloid character uttering the sound of the other characters. While the composers of the Miku shows bring her own persona into play, Tamawari multiplies these layers of identification in his *Vocaloid Opera Aoi*. This process operates by constructing characters that are easy to recognise and identify (they have names and motivated actions), and the Vocaloid character Midori is just one amongst these fictional characters.

This self-reflective quality remains on the verbal and vocal level, and doesn’t go deeper in the visual intermediality. These Vocaloid operas and the symphony keep “the lanes” of human and nonhuman appearances parallel with no specific interaction. The *Vocaloid Opera Lady Aoi* is a theatre-movie form. While it is not unusual to make a theatre movie with no audience but multiple camera angles (e.g. *The Tragedy of Hamlet* by Peter Brook in 2002), but in most of these cases, performance precedes the movie. But with *Vocaloid Opera Lady Aoi*, the theatrical form (bunraku) is recorded as a movie first. Pretending to be a theatre is the very hope of the creators that one day it would be turned into a live event. As if the story told by *Vocaloid Opera Aoi* was mirrored in its medium, the ultimate wish of the “technological” is to become live.<sup>6</sup> For the moment, therefore, one of the challenges of the relationship between human and Vocaloid seems to be an *institutional and contextual challenge*, as it raises the question of how perceptions change when the Vocaloids (existing mainly in the YouTube universe) make appearances in an institution that is designated primarily to theatre and classical music (on the stage of Bunkamura Theatre, Tokyo Opera City Concert Hall, or the Théâtre du Châtelet in Paris).

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<sup>6</sup> The consequences of medium shift for the performative aspects of the human-nonhuman interaction are quite visible in the case of *Sayonara*: while in the theatre version of Oriza Hirata’s play the human-like android presence and the android-like human presence was a matter of acting, this difference is even more concealed, airbrushed in the film adaptation of the play, directed by Kōji Fukuda in 2015.

The representations of the Aoi character as object, body, body-object and synthesized voice and the changes in the dramaturgical-performative role of object and voice modulates the Cartesian division of body and mind and the human vs. nonhuman hierarchy in theatre. Somewhat surprisingly, the simple situation depicted in the *Vocaloid Opera Aoi* (the female character, who steals the song written by the man for a Vocaloid) reflects not only on the non-human condition, but also envisions a certain “post-Vocaloid” image, thus reversing the commonplace of the negative utopia, the basic human fear of being replaced. To paraphrase Allison’s and Haraway’s insight (Allison, 2006: 56 quoting Haraway, 1991), not only robots, but Vocaloids, too, might be seen as both tools and myths, and there seems to be a “spectre of the ghost in the machine” (Haraway, 1991: 152). This also shows that even when depicting a post-Vocaloid image of turning back into human, the very image of that human character in theatre is already an assemblage of things, projections and artificial voice.

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