INTERSECTIONAL ANDROGYNY IN CYBERSPACE: GENDER, COMMERCIALIZATION, AND VOCALITY IN FEMALE RYOUSEIRUIS’ MUSIC VIDEOS

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ABSTRACT

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Japanese popular music, particularly the video-sharing website Nico Nico, represents a site of creation and production that encompasses a complex interplay between vocality, expression of identity, and capitalistic ventures. In this thesis, I will explore how expressions of gender and sexuality are articulated through both vocality and the (digital) body, or the visual aspect of music videos on Nico Nico, and the dialogic relationship between business models and the articulation of these modes of identity.

In terms of both gender and sexuality, contemporary Japan is composed of interweaving histories, ideologies, and traits characteristic of the transculturalism experienced by many nation-states of an increasingly globalized world. How Japanese popular music - utilizing the internet as a space for dialogic interchange - transforms these gender ideologies within frameworks of commercialization and global discourses is a topic that significantly informs current notions of gender. Additionally, music culture, not only a source of empowerment or power for a group of people, has become a commercialized product, one that has become an integral part of global commercial exchange. Given the significant influence that Japanese popular culture has on global popular culture, J-pop should be further interrogated as a linguistic imaginary riddled with contestations of gender norms, sexual binaries, and power, all of which operate under the auspices of global capitalism.

The ryouseirui, a Nico Nico term designated for a singer that utilizes both “male” and “female” voices, contributes a substantial part of Nico Nico content, with ryouseirui music videos present on the website. By investigating vocality, the business model of video sharing
websites, and various ryouseirui and their respective music videos, I will describe how economic practices may form and inform resistance and change of gender on the video-sharing website Nico Nico. Considering a diverse range of literature, from Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* to Gottlieb and McLelland’s compilation of work on Japanese cybercultures, this thesis will explore female ryouseiruis’ role on Nico Nico as a catalyst of deconstruction, negotiation, and reimagination of gender identity.
This thesis is dedicated to other sheep like me, to other shepherds in the making, and to those who gave me eyes to see, ears to hear, a voice to speak, and a heart to feel.
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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION – NICO NICO AND INTERSECTIONALITY

On the worldwide Japanese video-sharing website Nico Nico, one can find a plethora of digital entertainment, with categories ranging from “arts and technology” to “musical performances.” Nico Nico, which could perhaps be described as a “Japanese YouTube”, features countless music videos uploaded by an abundance of mainly Japanese users, and ultimately creates virtual space to singers known as utaite. Utaite is “a Japanese term for people who cover previously released songs and post them on Nico Nico…and YouTube.”¹ The ryouseirui, a Nico Nico term designated for a singer that utilizes both “male” and “female” voices, contributes a substantial part of Nico Nico content, with ryouseirui music videos present on the website. Two notable ryouseirui include Kisuke no Yuujin and 96neko, female² singers whose “manly” voices fulfill their ryouseirui persona.

Nico Nico represents a site of creativity and production that encompasses a complex interplay between vocality, expression of identity, and capitalistic ventures. Drawing from literature including philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler’s Gender Trouble³ and Freya Jarman-Ivens work on queer voices,⁴ I will explore the role of female ryouseirui on Nico Nico as a catalyst of deconstruction, negotiation, and reimagination of gender identity. By investigating the business model of video-sharing websites and various ryouseirui and their respective music videos, I will examine how economic practices form and inform gendered resistance and change.

² It was pointed out to me that perhaps the term “female-bodied” might be a more appropriate designation. Considering especially Judith Butler’s work on gender, I do not wish to utilize sex designations as unmarked discursivities of gender. Yet regarding identity, I cannot say for certain that such singers actively identify as “female-bodied.” Additionally, I am more concerned with how others, particularly fans, viewers, and listeners, interpret her sex/gender. These interpretations result in views that regard such singers (after audiences learn that the singers are indeed “girls” despite androgyny) as decidedly female, unsurprisingly without regard to Butler’s writing. Thus, throughout this document, I use the term “female” in relation to how most people in associated online communities would likely interpret these singers, as well as what I have assumed to be the singers’ sex assigned at birth.
The State of J-Pop in Ethnomusicology

Much scholarship on Japanese popular music is prevalent in popular culture studies. When considering music, however, such work is often focused more on song lyrics, the consideration of culture, or genre, and less so on the sonic aspect of music. Additionally, research on Japanese music (especially traditional music) has been particularly grounded in musicological methodologies. Aside from works relatively few and far between, such as ethnomusicologist Jay Keister’s monograph on *nagauta shamisen*, most studies are based in historical research and theoretical analyses of music. The lack of scholarship that considers Japanese music as a cultural phenomenon is noted by Keister:

> What is evident in reviewing the literature is that although Japanese music has been well documented in terms of its history, form, theory, and performance practice using methodologies commonly associated with historical musicology, Japanese music has not been sufficiently analyzed as an aspect of Japanese culture using methodologies that have become common in ethnomusicology.5

As argued by Keister, the inclusion of ethnomusicological methodologies may challenge prevailing hegemonic notions of Japanese musical culture, particularly those that reify totalizing and essentialist models.

I seek to approach my study of Japanese popular music within a popular culture studies paradigm. I consider J-pop music through several specific case studies, through specific singers and associated records, and through theoretical models based on popular culture, gender, and vocality. I will also utilize non-scholarly Internet sources, particularly those created primarily by communities associated with the Nico Nico website. Further, my study follows scholarship that examines popular music, ethnicity, race, class, the music industry, and transnationalism.

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In contrast to much scholarship on J-pop music, this document focuses on going beyond this paradigm of current scholarship (particularly that published in English) by focusing on Nico Nico, *ryouseirui*, virtual spaces, commercialization practices, music as sound, and vocality within a decidedly ethnomusicological context: as cultural phenomena that inform the relationship between sound and people. Thus, I seek to approach my study of Japanese popular music with an interdisciplinary methodology, drawing from empirical and theoretical scholarship from ethnomusicology, popular music studies, history, anthropology, and cultural studies. In the following section, I outline the theoretical vantage points that inform my research.

**Transnationalism, Queer Theory, and Vocality within the Context of Intersectionality**

Contemporary Japanese popular music has its origins in Anglo-American popular culture and music, as evidenced by the writings of Carolyn Stevens and Michael Bourdaghs.6 These works taken together, Japanese popular music is well represented with in-depth case studies, and is appropriately considered within culturally-situated contexts regarding notions of authenticity, power dynamics, and the intricate processes of musicking. Yet, while international and transnational cultural flows between Japan and the West are factors that are adequately addressed by Stevens and Bourdaghs (as well as other scholars on J-pop), neither of their works (nor the scholarship that I have encountered during my research) include in-depth considerations of the internet as a facilitator of culture.

The internet’s role, especially in contemporary society, should be contextualized within transnational and globalizing cultural processes. Sociologist Bandana Purkayastha asserts that “Transnational spaces are composed of tangible geographic spaces that exist across multiple...”

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nation-states and virtual spaces." These virtual spaces are seen to have revolutionizing effects; for instance, disadvantaged people may seek to offset a lack of privilege within a national community by accessing transnational social spaces. A state government’s exertion of authority and control of virtual spaces seems to reinforce the transformative and ultimately powerful effects of these transnational spaces. In the case of J-pop, the Japanese website Nico Nico is an example that shows how the production of, distribution of, and engagement with music are greatly influenced by such transnational spaces. To better understand gender in J-pop, transnationalism, queer theory, and commercialization must be considered.

Queer theory in ethnomusicology has largely referred to the beginning of gay and lesbian studies within musical discourse, as well as the deconstruction and problematization of binaries regarding gender, sex, and sexuality. In this thesis, I consider “queer theory” in two ways: 1) as a dialogue within gender and sexuality studies and 2) as a framework referring to a deviation from a norm. Within the context of gender and sexuality studies, I utilize both anthropological and musicological works, such as those by Judith Butler, Annette Schlichter, musicologist Suzanne Cusick, feminist Cathy Cohen, ethnographer E. Patrick Johnson, Dwight McBride, and lesbian feminist poet Pat Parker, that serve as not only a deconstruction of gender binaries but also as cultural critique of a racially white, middle-classed, male-centered hegemony. Thus, in my discussion of gender and sexuality in Chapter II, I consider the ways in which Japanese culture has historically deviated from fixed binaries, and which continues to do so within Japanese popular culture. Queer theory as a framework informs my analysis of vocality in Chapter IV. As something that is neither fully of the self or one’s environment, I approach the nature of the voice

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as queer, a concept particularly useful when addressing the nature of malleable voices such as those of *ryouseirui*.

Intersectionality, a theoretical tool that accounts for not only how different structures or manifestations of identity are related but also inform each other, has its origins in the Black feminist movement. As a critique of the first two waves of US feminism, Black feminism accounted for race as an identity marker that informed oppression of women. Intersectional theorizing has also been seen to be useful in post-colonial feminist movement, particularly evidenced in works by postcolonial feminist Chandra T. Mohanty, feminist critic Gayatri Spivak, philosopher Linda Alcoff, literary theorist Trinh Minh-ha, and anthropologist Ruth Behar and women’s studies scholar Deborah Gordon. It is in this same vein that I seek to utilize intersectional theorizing for a post-colonial feminist investigation of gendered articulations within culturally situated contexts, in this case Japanese popular culture.

Increasingly, intersectional theorization has been shown to be useful to queer theory. Scholars have argued that queer theory would benefit greatly from non-White- and/or non-Western-centric theorizing. Queer critical race studies scholar Shinsuke Eguchi’s autoethnography, which highlights discontinuities and dismantles hegemonic hetero/homonormative ways of thinking, examines the relationship between his particular social background and access to diverse social networks. Jon Binnie also comments on the globalized nature of contemporary understandings of sexuality, pointing out that context often plays a major role in social development:

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9 Notable and influential writers and scholars include bell hooks, Audre Lorde, Barbara Smith, and Alice Walker.
10 According to Eguchi, (white) American homonormativity is a social construction of a gay lifestyle that privileges whiteness, middle-classness, and maleness. See Eguchi (2014). Other mainstream media more closely related to American gay subculture includes Internet websites like Pride and Everyday Feminism; see Flores (2016) or Kacere (2015).
Globalizing processes operate unevenly and have differential impacts upon individual nation-states (as well as within them). It is imperative that any geographical or other analysis of queer globalization respects both national differences and differences within national boundaries.\textsuperscript{11}

His work, as well as case studies of Japanese gender expression, shows the need for not only more emic-slanted theorizing but also non-binary derived models in order to adequately explain identity and gender, both outside and inside of the popular cultural sphere.\textsuperscript{12} It thus seems appropriate to further apply intersectionality theory in order to better understand characteristics of Japan’s gender ideologies. In a similar vein, by using queer theory, I approach my case study with the goal of deconstructing gender binaries and gendered vocality\textsuperscript{13} in order to better understand J-pop music, commercialization, and identity.

Furthermore, the effect of gender performance on audience building and business practices is a way in which gender and commercialization intersect. As I will ultimately argue, the performers in my case studies perform gender through vocality and avatars. These gendered performance practices are generally found within the industry machine of J-pop, and play a crucial role its commercialization.\textsuperscript{14} It thus seems appropriate to further apply intersectionality theory in order to better understand characteristics of Japan’s gender hegemonic ideologies.

The presence of all of these issues must be considered within the context of ryouseiruis’ musical practices. The sheer scope and simultaneity of their presence in real time begs for the consideration of intersectionality as a theoretical vantage point as well. Not only are ryouseiruis’ musical activities within these transnational spaces, but they would also be best approached with

\textsuperscript{12} See also Eguchi (2014), McLelland and Dasgupta (2005), or Mostow (2003).
\textsuperscript{13} In the context of this document, I consider the works of Dunn and Jones (1994) and Karantonis et al. (2014) for a definition of vocality, where vocality is defined as a spectrum of vocal utterances, or any vocal utterance that includes and goes beyond language. In Chapter IV, I consider multivocality, Meizel’s (2011) expansion of vocality.
\textsuperscript{14} See Cogan and Cogan (2006) or Darling-Wolf (2004).
non-Western theorizing. Only then can these liminal, virtual spaces in question be properly interrogated without mistaken assumptions of Western thought systems.

**Methodologies and Limitations**

A major limitation of my study is the inability to communicate with the singers that I have written about. Indeed, what might the singers think? How might singers identify in relation to their voices? Which vocalization might be considered their natural voice? How do they live their lives? What identities consciously shape their lives? What are their economic situations? What are their racial or ethnic identities? Certainly, interviews with the singers would otherwise be invaluable to this document, eliminating many uncertainties and assumptions that I have had to make in my analyses. Unfortunately, I was not able to communicate directly with these singers due to several factors.

The foremost factor is the considerable distance between me and the singers: these singers, as far as I know, live and/or tour in Japan. Since I lived in the US (Ohio, specifically) during the period of my research, meeting in-person and scheduling interviews were unfeasible options due to time limits or budget constraints. Additionally, I was unable to find any identifying or direct contact information. This wasn’t particularly surprising, however, as some of these singers prominent on the Nico Nico video-sharing website are as young as high-school students (possibly younger). Considering the prominence of the idea of separation between public and private life (I talk more about this within the context of sexuality in Chapter II), as well as concern for the general safety of the singers, interviews did not play a major role in my analysis and conclusions; I instead turned to textual analysis for the bulk of my ethnographic research.
As argued by ethnomusicologists Timothy J. Cooley, Katharine Meizel, and Nasir Syed in *Shadows in the Field*, virtuality (including Internet space) is a cultural production that carries just as much weight as “real-life” ethnographic spaces:

Virtuality is only as real as any other cultural production; it has only the meaning with which people imbue it. Focusing on how *people* experience – and invest power and meaning in – communicative technologies returns the ‘ethno’ to virtual *ethnography*.15

Similarly, I approach my case studies (and the respective music videos and recordings through the Internet) within the framework of textual analysis. I thus consider the Internet, acting as a continually expanding site of cultural production, as a part of my ethnographic field, and hope to contribute to ethnomusicological scholarship that considers the Internet as a significant platform for music and musicking. With the ever-expanding reach of the Internet, especially in the context of Japanese popular culture, Cooley et al.’s argument seems particularly appropriate for such a situation:

As an organic part of our very real experiences – a part of our everyday lives – virtuality is also one of the many ways we experience people making music.16

A final issue regarding my analysis of voice and vocality (see especially Chapter IV) is the fact that I am “hearing” gender. Suzanne Cusick notes about the importance of audience reception in gender performances: “…the intelligibility of…gender performances depends on the audience’s experience of the ‘background’ of cultural norms that link Song to gender, sex, sexuality.”17 Although singers in my study are identified as *ryouseirui*, I am making the decision (probably moreover unconsciously rather than consciously) on what voice is the “woman” and what voice is the “man.” According to Jarman-Ivens, the voice is theoretically ungendered;

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16 Ibid., 127.
listeners bring gender with them. I have my own conceptions of what gender sounds like, one that is grounded in Western depictions of men and women who speak English. More likely than not, this is in not adequately comparable to ryouseiruis’ (or even a Japanese person’s) conception of what gender sounds like when spoken in the Japanese language. It would certainly have been helpful to poll native Japanese speakers who grew up within Japanese culture for their opinion on music examples.¹⁸

My initial wishes for a more egalitarian co-production of knowledge were ultimately unfulfilled. Thus, I do not attempt to assert any knowledge of the intent of the performers themselves any more than what information is already accessible on the Internet. Instead, I focus more on the role or meaning of my musical case studies within the context of Japanese society. Therefore, in order to alleviate this potentially problematic representation, I have striven to 1) write self-reflexively when appropriate and 2) utilize intersectional theorization that attempts to adequately consider Japanese contextualization and resist the universalization of Western thought systems. Although this solution is far from ideal, it is perhaps one of the better courses of action, considering my limited contact with any epistemic collaborators.

**Overview of Chapters**

In Chapter II, I begin with the history of gender and sexuality in Japan. Here, I focus mainly on gender within the visual realm, saving sonic articulations of gender for my chapter on vocality (Chapter IV). I also address gender performances and performativity, particularly in the classical Japanese dramatic art form kabuki, as well as specific popular cultural contexts. I finish my consideration of visualized gender with a comparison study of Nico Nico music videos.

¹⁸ Plans to conduct interviews with native Japanese speakers were made at the outset of this project. Due to Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB) requirements and time constraints, however, I was not able to conduct interviews before the completion of this document.
Finally, I include a postscript on sexuality, commenting on the problematization of its manifestation in Nico Nico music videos.

In Chapter III, I move to considerations of globalization, commercialization, and the Internet within J-pop. After a brief introduction of J-pop music, I focus on the articulations of gender within the commercialized context of the international Japanese popular culture industry. I conclude the chapter with two case studies: 1) a comparison of business practices between Nico Nico and YouTube and 2) an analysis of 96neko’s record *Brand New*... within the context of the popular music frameworks.

The unifying locus of my project, *ryouseirui* vocality, is presented in Chapter IV. I argue for the nature of the voice as queer and malleable. I then move on to concepts of performativity and performance in terms of gender and the voice, drawing on work by Judith Butler and Annette Schlichter. Issues of race, ethnicity, and language further inform my analysis of *ryouseiruis’* gendered vocal practices. I conclude my chapter with three case studies: 1) binary reification of gender in the record *Time for Heroes*, 2) commercialization in 96neko’s performances, and 3) the consideration of gendered identity in Kisuke no Yuujin’s vocality.

My conclusion, Chapter V, offers further considerations on the research of vocality, particularly regarding language and the significance of record labels. I also consider future work in terms of online communities, music video production teams, and the potential for popular culture as a medium for resistance and change. In sum, I argue that by utilizing tools of globalized commercial practices, *ryouseirui* are able to offer legitimized transgressive gendered performances.
CHAPTER II: JAPAN’S HISTORY AND CONTEXTS OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY

Japan has a rich history of non-binary gender systems that can be traced back to the Edo period (1603-1868). Japan’s pre-Meiji Edo period\(^\text{19}\) gender system relied upon not only the sexed body, but was also informed by sexuality, class, and age. Scholars Hitoshi Ishida et al. (2005) note that from the beginning of the Meiji period up to the end of the Second World War (1868-1945), Westernized gender binarisms became more prominent in structuring Japanese social expectations.\(^\text{20}\) Yet following Japan’s military defeat, a loss of confidence in conservative, Westernized sexual morals led to a surge in marginalized sexual (and gendered) identities, an aftereffect that continues to be felt in present-day Japan.\(^\text{21}\) This has led to the presence of multiple gender ideologies evident in many modes of performance, including those on Nico Nico. Hence, in terms of gender, contemporary Japan is composed of interweaving histories, ideologies, and traits. This is characteristic of the transculturalism experienced by many nation-states in an increasingly globalized world.

**Gender in the Visual\(^\text{22}\) Realm: From the Edo Period to Westernization**

To understand the impact of (and resistance against) Westernization, one should consider pre-Westernized notions of gender and sexuality, specifically beginning with 17\(^{th}\)-century Edo-period depictions of sexuality and gender. In “The Gender of Wakashu and the Grammar of Desire”, Joshua Mostow begins by questioning the notion of applying Western notions of

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\(^{19}\) By the end of the Edo period, Japan had acknowledged Western technological and militaristic superiority. The fall of the shogunate, along with the adoption of Western-style institutions, government systems, and education, led to the Meiji restoration, a cultural and political movement which informed the Westernization and modernization of late-19\(^{th}\)-century Japan.

\(^{20}\) See Chapter 3 in McLelland (2005).


\(^{22}\) Although gender can be expressed both visually and sonically, I have saved my analysis of aural articulations of gender during my consideration of vocality, which is later in this thesis (see Chapter IV).
sexuality and gender to that of the Tokugawa period. His research indicated that these two systems of sexuality had many differences. For example, Mostow notes that the modern-day, Western sexuality/gender system emphasizes sameness, especially concerning the categories of both power and age. However, based on 17th-century visual depictions of sexuality and desire, it appears that the 17th-century Japanese sexuality/gender system was instead dependent on four genders: the wakashu, men, wives, and (female) prostitutes. The wakashu was a young or youthful male that was the object of desire of both women and older men. Katherine Mezur also notes the efficacy of the wakashu and the male youth, writing that Edo-period Japan “was a society in which the men in power integrated behavioral codes, assimilated from Confucian models, with a multilayered, diverse system of Buddhist and Shintō beliefs and practices” and that “the beauty of the young boy eventually became the ideal of beauty for both men and women.” Yet despite the presence of the wakashu, any hopes for the absence of patriarchy were not fulfilled. This gender system was ultimately phallocentric, and allowed the degradation of mature women while also precluding the existence of female homoeroticism.

The significant gendered performance that engaged within (and outside of) this particular gender system was the male-only performance genre kabuki, often thought of as Western “opera” (as far as I know, there doesn’t seem to be a Western theatric/musical genre that adequately parallels kabuki). According to Mezur, the kabuki onnagata (term for the men that played women roles), “from mid-seventeenth century until the late nineteenth century, had the exclusive rights to female gender role representation on the public stage in Japan.” And yet, while

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23 See Chapter 4 in Bryson (2003).
25 Ibid.
26 Mezur, Kabuki Female-Likeness, 2.
reifying a theoretical female gender role, Mezur argues that the performances of onnagata were resistant of fixed gender binaries:

   In researching onnagata gender acts throughout the Edo period, I have observed that early onnagata may have followed a culturally accepted style of sexuality, shudô (the way of boy love), which had its own gender acts, aesthetics, and erotic practices. It follows then, that gender acts are not necessarily fixed binary gender codes constructed to appear opposite to the male gender roles. Onnagata may have represented female gender roles, but, in a sense, onnagata gender acts did not have to comply with an image or the allure of the heterosexual female role as an opposite to the [young adult male] gender role.27

Thus, 17th-century Japan did not operate within modern, Western notions of gender, and that although Japan is long past the 17th-century, it should be noted that in comparison to Western societies’ historical exclusion of non-binary understandings of gender, Japan’s exclusion toward non-binary understandings has occurred relatively recently.

   By the end of the 19th century, Japan was undergoing modernization through its cultural interaction with the West. In an effort to remain politically, economically, and militaristically competitive, Japan adopted many of the West’s cultural practices in order to integrate, internalize, master, and ultimately utilize the advances (both technological and cultural) of Westernization. The construction of the Rokumeikan, a building specially created for the hosting of diplomatic parties with Western entities, as well Early Western Oil Painting (yōga), were both examples of Japan’s attempts to Westernize itself. Bryson emphasizes the idea that the Meiji modernization was led mainly by and for Japanese men, and that in both cases of painting and ballroom diplomacy, women were used as racialized and sexualized vehicles for cultural legitimacy. Bryson writes:

27 Ibid., 38-39.
Rather, the interaction that the presence of women as quasi-available sexual objects permits is such that each side starts to assimilate the other through the milieu of sexuality, localized in the bodies of their attendant females.  

…the process of cultural assimilation was figured through a female iconography; the relationship between the men who ruled the modern world was visualized across the bodies of women whom modernity excluded.

With the wakashu now past its peak of cultural intelligibility, it seems that Japan’s willingness to Westernize contributed greatly to the reification of the gender binary, as well as Western notions of sexuality understood at the time. Though not accountable for every nuance of the sexuality/gender system in Japan today, it is sensible to trace roots of modern-day Japanese notions of sexuality and gender to this specific point in time.

**Gender in the Visual Realm: Contemporary Discourses**

The media and popular culture are powerful tools for the distribution and reification of gender ideologies in contemporary Japan. One example of how gender hierarchies are reified and propagated in Japan occurs within the TV company structure, as well as within the types of programs such a company chooses to run. In “The Telerepresentation of Gender in Japan”, Andrew Painter describes his experience with the ZTV workplace. He writes that the workplace is male dominated, and that it isn’t uncommon to encounter the belief among older men (who tend to be in higher ranking positions) that women are seen as the inferior sex and thus as inferior workers. Perhaps in support of such a notion, TV programs contribute to the naturalization of women’s roles parallel to subservient housewives. Painter posits that this structural discrimination within the workplace contributes to the content of TV programs:

“Although this dominant view of gender is rapidly changing in Japan, the continuing domination


of television programming and production by older males has kept TV firmly on the conservative side in cultural struggles over gender.”

Another important aspect of Japanese television is its use of *seishun*. In “On the Anthropology of Television: A Perspective from Japan”, Painter writes: “Seishun is characterized by freedom and by pure, intense emotion, while adulthood and the constraints that go with it are often described as routinized and monotonous. The attractiveness of seishun is reflected in the large number of Japanese television programs that either explicitly or implicitly use it as a narrative motif.”

*Seishun* is thus used as a vehicle for legitimization when used in tandem with other themes or ideologies; Painter comments that even though the legitimization of such ideologies are not necessarily the result of purposeful or conscious effort, TV nevertheless plays a significant role in “…transforming the representational dynamics of modern societies.”

Though not explicitly related to gender representation, I will argue later that *seishun* (a term that seems to deny the Japanese concept of adulthood) is used as a tool for legitimization of gendered representational dynamics, and will be discussed within the context of my case studies in this chapter.

More recently, however, are modes of representation that may disrupt gender binarisms that seem to be reinforced by Painter’s telerepresentations. My case study of Nico Nico music videos often include, along with the music, accompanying visual narratives that are either drawn or animated. Certainly, a parallel can be seen between these visual narratives and manga, a visual-literary medium probably best known in the US as Japanese comics. In “Busty Battlin’ Babes: The Evolution of the Shōjo in 1990s Visual Culture”, Sharalyn Orbaugh examines the

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31 Ibid., 56-57.
33 Ibid., 81.
phenomenon of shōjo in anime (Japanese-style animation) and manga. When asking what shōjo is exactly, Orbaugh begins by stating that, historically, the female has been used to represent social theories, culture, etc. To Orbuagh, shōjo is this phenomenon of social theories and culture by female iconography within the context of 1990s Japan. She observes that the shōjo phenomenon quite often involves a refusal of heteronormativity and gender binarisms, and may offer as a site of resistance. Orbaugh cites the beginnings of shōjo as related to the rise of the cultural intelligibility of adolescence, during which time magazines for (adolescent) males, called shonen and seinen, were first produced (shōjo followed soon thereafter). From the Taisho Period (1912-1925) to the present, shōjo was marketed towards girls; Yoshiya Nobuko (1896-1973) set the tone for shōjo marketed to girls, where depictions of female characters “were based on a narrative economy of desire and romantic/erotic appreciation.”

A couple of ways that shōjo manga first offered varying degrees of resistance included the following: 1) an expanded role for females, but within normal gendered setting, with traditional ideas of family reinforced; or 2) gender bending/blending, though subordinate to the idea that the biological sex determines the sexual and romantic orientation of the main character (ex. a female raised as a man eventually embraces the natural role of a woman). Despite the insistence of the naturalized sexual/gender binary, by the 1970s, girl readers of shōjo “were invited to identify with characters whose genders and/or sexuality was not that of a straightforwardly heterosexual (or female homosexual) girl. Often they were identifying with characters who were Other to them in terms of sex (male), gender (masculine), national or cultural origin (European), and sexuality (male homosexual).”

35 Ibid., 212.
The 1990s showed the emergence of anime and manga that exhibited a sort of *shōjo-shonen* hybridity. This hybrid was/is consumed by both males and females, and is made by both male and female anime or manga authors. It was a genre that featured both *shōjo* elements (“female protagonists, attention to character development and romance, the breaking of visual frames, and transformations that are innate and/or ontological”\(^{36}\)) as well as *shonen* elements (“action and violence, an emphasis on responsibility toward society, and a tendency toward the eroticized objectification of the female body”\(^{37}\)). Quite often, the female protagonists are sexualized, but are simultaneously depicted as denying this adult womanhood/sexuality. In fact, their sexuality can be obscured or even ambiguous. Yet the females are eventually dominated by their “natural” sex and are depowered; in effect, the phallocentric symbolic order is restored. The tension between sexual purity and power versus pleasure is highlighted. *Shōjo* is thus associated with liminality, signifying the in-between state that is neither girl nor woman. In this context then, women are forced to choose between adult heterosexuality within wife and motherhood OR power within the liminal state of *shōjo*. Additionally, these “battlin’ babes” depicted are usually not human females and more often than not serve a male-creator within the storyline. Orbaugh gives her final thoughts on the potentialities of resistance of 1990s *shōjo* manga, for both males and females: “The cognitive transvestism that is supported by these narratives, allowing boys to become shōjo, at least temporarily, may represent a new and relatively rare paradigm in male audience identification. But these narratives ultimately reinscribe hegemonic and heterocentric sex/gender/sexuality ideologies, obviating much of the promise of resistance or social transformation.”\(^{38}\)

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\(^{36}\) Ibid., 217.
\(^{37}\) Ibid., 217.
\(^{38}\) Ibid., 227.
The representation of gender in contemporary contexts thus negotiates within, between, and beyond fixed gender binary roles. In Japanese popular music, including singers on Nico Nico, this representation is not only achieved through fixed images but also performances and performativity. Therefore, such Japanese musicians and artists are not only situated at the front of a nation’s historical context, but also within the contexts of performance and popular culture.

**Gender Performances and Performativity in Kabuki and Popular Cultural Contexts**

As mentioned earlier, Mezur argues that the onnagata performer in kabuki defies a simple reification of gender binary-derived femininity. Regarding modern-day performances, she points out that “because [present-day] onnagata emphasize that they *perform* female-likeness, their intention is very different from embodying or becoming the ‘essence of femininity.’” Through her detailed analysis on the onnagata’s stylized garments, makeup, facial expressions, and bodily movements, it becomes apparent that this genre-specific representation of gender is a construction that is recognized as artificial, by both the performers as well as the audience: “In interviews, onnagata emphasize the constructedness of their roles. They speak of the stylized acts they perform to produce their onnagata movement, voice, and visual appearance.” In fact, the performers play with this disjunction of the male body underneath the female construction, revealing on stage their performativity on purpose, thus undermining “the idea that they are representing any kind of essential female identity….” Ultimately, Mezur argues that the onnagata is not fulfilling a gender role, but is instead creating one that exists outside of a fixed gender binary:

The onnagata reflection in the kabuki mirror shines back as a constructed image of onnagata female-likeness. But this image is a special fantasy gender, differing from the Western polarized gender roles. Even with the male body in control of

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40 Ibid., 40.
41 Ibid., 43.
the mirror, the onnagata image was gender ambiguous…. What onnagata perform on the stage is neither a representation of actual women, nor an ideal representation of an innate womanliness or female essence. Rather, onnagata are men performing onnagata gender roles.\textsuperscript{42}

In much the same way, I argue that certain J-pop singers transcend the notion of a fixed gender binary as well, not just in terms of visual representation, but also in terms of performativity.

In Japanese popular culture, Morimura Yasumasa’s photographic collages and Mishima Yukio’s photographs engages with gender performativity. In addition to engaging with both Japanese and European traditions, Morimura and Mishima both utilize the performance of the body in order to provide commentary on gendered identities. Their work is a testament to how visual culture reifies and dialogues with models of gendered identity.

Morimura’s work often involves placing himself in front of a backdrop or 3-D diorama while wearing clothes, wigs, or cosmetics. He portrays himself in the contexts of European art history or American popular culture, often masquerading as a woman. Yet, echoing practices of kabuki onnagata, these masquerades are purposefully imperfect, and attempt to draw attention to imperfection and artifice. Morimura’s practice of masquerading as a woman might suggest that men masquerade as men; his gendered masquerades gain meaning from the disjunction between his sexed body and gendered performance. Ultimately, Morimura’s work suggests that gender is citational and constructed: “Gender difference – the cultural construction of masculinity and femininity – is not given or preordained but is produced through the constant repetition and citation of gendered performances.”\textsuperscript{43}

Mishima’s work, on the other hand, explored the field of competing masculinities. Mishima literally transformed his body (through bodybuilding), and through his presentation and

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 37.
\textsuperscript{43} Vera Mackie, “‘Understanding Through the Body’: The Masquerades of Mishima Yukio and Morimura Yasumasa,” in McLelland, 130.
physical changing of the body, he fulfilled and reified traditional ideas of masculinity: “Unlike Morimura, whose masquerades may be characterized as a complex and multilayered form of quotation, citation and transvestism, Mishima [transformed] the physical body itself…. Rather, he needed to make his male body more closely approximate his ideal form of masculinity and maleness.”44

Finally, an example of legitimacy related to gender performativity can be seen in the religious practices of Okinawan shamanism. A 14-year-old male shaman, Akihiro, was seen to adopt the framework, or performativity, of women. Allen notes the way in which Akihiro’s shaman identity was related to his gendered identity: “Akihiro has transformed himself into a performative herself…. By invoking his female-ness in asserting his identity, Akihiro opened himself to the kinds of interventions commonly employed with women, rather than with men.”45 Additionally, the possibility that his gendered performance legitimized his shaman status, and inevitably his business, are issues that must be considered as well. Certainly, one cannot deny the effect of how his gendered performance had buttressed his business as a practicing shaman.

These three specific case studies address gender performativity in a variety of ways. The work of Morimura and Mishima highlights the visual way in which gender can be articulated. This is either through using the body as a screen or a sculpture (i.e. dressing up or physically changing the body). Furthermore, the effect of gender performance on audience building and ultimately business practices is a way in which gender and commercialization intersect.

In the next chapter, I will consider the gendered performances prevalent within the industry of J-pop. Since the industry of J-pop involves more in-depth discussion of globalization and commercialization, however, I’d like to first address the work of a particular singer, 96Neko,

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44 Ibid., 135.
45 Ibid., 121.
in light of these gendered contexts described. Specifically, gendered performance practices are found particularly in two contrasting music videos of the song “Ah, It’s a Wonderful Cat’s Life.”

**Case Study: “Ah, It’s a Wonderful Cat’s Life” MVs and 96Neko**

I would now like to turn to the *utaite* and two music videos (MVs) of the song “Ah, It’s a Wonderful Cat’s Life”. The *utaite* (translated to “singer,” though is specific to the Nico Nico website) is “a Japanese term for people who cover previously released songs and post them on Nico Nico Douga" and YouTube….” This term is thus relatively new and seems to have been used only in such specific contexts. (I am assuming that the main distribution of these MVs is via the internet.) The song “Ah, It’s a Wonderful Cat’s Life”, one that follows a generic popular music layout (verse, verse, bridge, verse), is a song that has been covered multiple times by both male and female *utaite*, with corresponding MVs for each rendition. The song involves two singers, or two voices, with each voice belonging to two different beings (one female, the other male). I say “beings” because the song is technically from the viewpoint of what could be seen as anthropomorphized cats or people dressed as cats. The role that anthropomorphism plays in Japanese representation is beyond the scope of this paper, but should be noted and further explored in relation to representations of gender and sexuality. Finally, the MV is animated and utilizes anime/manga-like avatars. I argue that the usage of avatars, closely related to kawaii culture, may also legitimize gender and sexuality.

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46 Nico Nico Douga was created in 2006. After a sitewide revamp, the website was officially renamed to Nico Nico. Although an exact date of the revamp is not explicitly stated, it is implied that this change occurred during and after the English language beta website “Nico Nico” was launched in 2011.


48 In this particular video, the more likely scenario seems to be human avatars dressed as cats, rather than cats anthropomorphized; the extent of “dressing as a cat” includes the addition of cat ears, a tail, and pointed teeth drawn on human avatars. In either case, the purpose of such feline reference is most likely a bid for *seishun* or passing off as kawaii (or “cute”), a practice is common in contemporary Japanese popular culture. Black (2008) mentions anthropomorphism in passing in his writing on virtual idols. For more on kawaii culture, see Yano (2013).
The first MV and song rendition of “Ah, It’s a Wonderful Cat’s Life” is what one might consider to be the original MV/song.\(^49\) The song is sung by two Vocaloids\(^50\) designated GUMI and Len, with the MV designed with these two Vocaloids in mind. In this MV and song rendition, the two “cats” portrayed are a male stray cat (Len) and a female domesticated cat (GUMI). The narrative of the song begins with the male stray cat; Len admires the domesticated cat’s white fur, and otherwise attempts to court her. In the first part/verse of this MV, Len emphasizes his freedom due to being a stray cat while pointing out the lack of freedom that the domesticated cat experiences. Overall, Len offers GUMI companionship and fun that she otherwise wouldn’t be able to experience in her current status. In this first section, Len is firmly established as masculine within the Japanese context; he is depicted as a sort of rough-around-the-edges, knowing, perhaps anarchical, yet kind-hearted and good-natured anthropomorphized male cat that exhibits agency outside of the domestic sphere.

In the second part/verse, GUMI counters Len’s advocacy of stray status by pointing out all of the benefits of being a domesticated housecat, such as security, safety, and opportunity to enjoy daily comforts of those who live in middle to upper class dwellings. She is established as feminine within the Japanese context; perhaps like the TV housewife described by Painter, she is depicted – in a dress, no less – as unknowing, meek, and otherwise content with her domestic lifestyle, while also exhibiting a certain ambivalence toward Len.

In the final part (the bridge and last verse), Len continues his courtship, citing the wondrous freedom of the stray cat life and offering to share the achievement of his ambitions with GUMI. Yet such advances are continually spurned by GUMI, who now seems to be


\(^{50}\) A vocaloid is a “singing synthesizer application software”; in other words, it is computer software designed to replicate a human singing voice (http://vocaloid.wikia.com/wiki/VOCALOID).
ambivalent toward the uncertainty of the stray cat life, and not so much towards Len himself. Eventually, Len seems to lose patience, for he starts walking away (albeit in a happy, seemingly unaffected way). GUMI, though not wanting to leave the house, asks Len to come back again to visit her and offers a smile of affection.

Throughout the video, the gender binarisms seem to be reified in not only the storyline, but also the visual representation. The presence of Western influence is also prevalent. The dwelling of GUMI, especially, is constructed with Western things (the furnishings, the meal, and her clothes). Indeed, her refusal of what might be seen as “inappropriate” sexual advances recalls Foucault’s conception of middle class sexuality, in which sexuality is highly regulated and controlled. This portrayal of class and sexuality is consonant with Chandra Mohanty’s emphasis of the naturalization of liberalism and capitalism in contributing to oppressive notions of sexuality and gender (this wouldn’t be entirely unrelated to Painter’s description of the TV station workplace).51

The second version of “Ah, It’s a Wonderful Cat’s Life,” is different in both song lyrics and visual depiction.52 This version is sung by the *utaite* 96Neko (an actual person, female) and the Vocaloid Len. It follows the same basic structure as the first video; however, the roles are switched between the male and female. In this video, the dialogue begins with a female stray cat (96Neko) who is courting a male domesticated cat (Len). Aside from various internet references specific to 96Neko and Len, differences in the song lyrics between these two versions do not drastically alter the story. This is basically the same general format for the visual depiction of the first MV. However, Len, as the domesticated cat, does not react as GUMI did in the first MV.

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Len is depicted as completely refusing the advances of 96Neko from the beginning of the MV (he even calls on the police throughout the MV when 96Neko is too forward with her courtship). For almost all of the MV, Len is depicted as explicitly and assertively disapproving and unaccepting of 96Neko’s advances. Furthermore, 96Neko, who is known for her “husky lower vocals,” is also known for her somewhat androgynous avatar\textsuperscript{53}; in the MV, she is depicted as wearing not a skirt, but pants, a black sweater hoodie, and a red tie (similar to Len’s wardrobe in the first video). Many other scenes are depicted slightly different in comparison to the first MV; yet one scene that seems perhaps most significant to me is at the end of the first verse, where 96Neko is shown flying across the screen with her legs open and with the zipper of her pants down; she is exposing her exposed groin directly to the viewer (of course in a non-graphic, anime depiction that is consonant with the fun atmosphere of the MV).

My reading of the second MV, though retaining the main storyline, thus differs greatly from the first. The idea of the domestic housewife is not present here due to the switching of roles between the singers (is Len instead a househusband, or a master of the house?). 96Neko’s androgyyny also seems to evoke a site of resistance that is accessed by shōjo. She is portrayed as neither a housewife nor a sexless child; in contrast, she is depicted as an in-between (or marginal) being with both public and sexual agency. In particular, the scene where she is asserting her exposed groin seems to be an embracing of female sexual agency, and is perhaps reclamation of the Japanese female body.

It would seem, then, that 96Neko’s version of “Ah, It’s a Wonderful Cat’s Life” is, in many ways, a subversion of the gender binary that is hegemonic in Japan. Perhaps the fact that the main distribution of this MV via the internet is subversion on another front; in contrast to a TV station, the websites of YouTube and Nico Nico are, to my knowledge, free for use (though

\textsuperscript{53} More on the significance of androgyny will be addressed in Chapter 3.
there is certainly a business aspect to both, something that will be discussed in Chapter 3). These websites are theoretically open to anyone with the technology to produce such MVs. Though still limited to those with the financial and technological means, it does seem to potentially obviate many of the structural peculiarities found in TV stations.

The 96Neko’s MV also has a more humorous approach than that of the original. 96Neko makes use of serifu, a Nico Nico term which refers to spoken words that are added in order to enhance the atmosphere of the song or otherwise add a comedic element. The dramatic changes of mood and extreme emotional depictions contribute to this humorous element, and are reminiscent of the use of seishun. This use of seishun seems to be legitimizing the reclamation of the female body, as well as the deconstruction of Japanese femininity.

Additionally, Daniel Black writes about the evolution of the virtual body in relation to youth and kawaii culture. Here I interpret the drawn avatars aforementioned as “virtual” not only in the sense that they are presented in a virtual space, but also in the sense of a non-biological body. I quote Black at length:

…the cute body is also clearly a re-imagining of the human body, which seeks to deform its contours into a shape which distills the essence of its appeal; while it makes constant reference to the human body, this reference is nevertheless extremely formalized and stylized. To be cute is therefore not simply to take on the qualities of a human body, but rather to construct a body which exhibits qualities which are considered to be cute. The constructedness of cute bodies relies as much on the absence or disavowal of certain attributes of human corporeality as it does on their presence.54

Black’s full argument implies that the construction of the cute body within Japanese popular culture is largely controlled by corporate logic and commercialized practices. In this case study, however, I contend that such non-biological bodies (drawn avatars), though also informed by

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commercialized practices, actually act as vessels for seishun and further contribute to the legitimization of gender and sexuality.

Thus, 96Neko’s MV seems to offer a newfound mode of resistance on the internet. It would seem that her avatar’s androgyny, as well as the reversal of gendered expectations in her music video, contributes to her disruption of a gender binary. As Orbaugh might put it, 96Neko creates a new, liminal gender that resists fixity and rigidity in this sense, much in the same way as gender in shōjo manga. Yet the fact that her music video (and many other Nico Nico singers’ videos) utilizes avatars may pose a problematization of this assertion: how might the use of avatars be different than a live-action performance with actual bodies? Are the avatars somehow less authentic than gendered performances of living people?

It is at this point where I quote, at length, theater scholar Philip Auslander’s article on performance analysis and popular music, as well as his take on live performance versus a recorded performance. Regarding the construction of performance personae, Auslander asserts the following:

… it seems to me that the fictional body of a musical performer is the body of his performance persona, a body whose appearance is made to conform to the image of that persona…. Popular musicians do not perform their personae exclusively in live and recorded performances; they perform them as well through the visual images used in the packaging of recordings, publicity materials, interviews and press coverage, toys and collectibles, and other venues and media.55

Although he is talking about actual bodies, I would contend that the physical bodies one may see in musical performances (on stage during a live performance or in a music video) are just as constructed as drawn avatars. What draws live and drawn bodies together, then, is the artificiality of these bodies or images, ones that are no doubt related to marketing or branding strategies.

Regarding music videos, Auslander writes that:

While such representations do not document live performances they do provide performers with good opportunities to define and extend their personae. With no obligation to sing or play, musicians are unencumbered and free to focus on performing their personae.\textsuperscript{56}

Again, it is easy to see in 96Neko’s music video of “Ah, It’s a Wonderful Cat’s Life” her focus on developing, solidifying, and “performing” her persona, all actions that require a great deal of intention and forethought compared to live performances where gendered, bodily actions may be unmarked. Finally, Auslander asserts that voices (and, in this case, images) also may be disconnected from the body, the perception of such voices are often associated with bodies:

> Despite the physical absence of the performer at the time of listening, listeners do not perceive recorded music as disembodied…. Regardless of the ontological status of recorded music, its phenomenological status for listeners is that of a performance unfolding at the time and in the place of listening.\textsuperscript{57}

Regarding the fact that it is a music video with avatars, I would assert that few listeners, knowing that 96Neko is singing, would perceive the recorded music as disembodied (indeed, the avatars do provide a source for the sound, albeit one that is artificial). I would extend this argument and say that it is not impossible for viewers to associate 96Neko’s avatar with her actual body. However, further ethnographic research with actual viewers or fans would be necessary to confirm or deny this hypothesis.

It is tempting, and perhaps not necessarily outlandish, to suggest onnagata performers of kabuki and Edo-period gender systems as historical precedents that resist gender binary systems. Certainly the contemporary examples of gender performances and performativities including kabuki, Okinawan shamanism, shōjo manga, and visual representations of Morimura and Mishima offer sources of gender resistance that 96Neko may have drawn from, either directly or indirectly. What is certain is that 96Neko’s performance resists gender binarisms through her use

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 12.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 5.
of her androgynous avatar and reversal of gendered expectations. Yet before continuing with an analysis of other singers’ work, the issues of globalization, commercialization, and the industry of J-pop are other factors that must be considered as informing the expression of gender, and will be addressed in the next chapter.

A Passing Postscript on Sexuality: Sexual Orientation, etc.

While sexuality and sexual orientation are certainly shown to be intricately related to the discourses of gender in Japanese history and performances, I am unfortunately limited in my conclusions regarding my case studies. The simple fact is that I have not been able to find substantial information explicitly connecting sexual orientation to the specific Nico Nico singers I have researched. This doesn’t surprise me, however, as most of the literature on Japanese LGBTQ studies reveal the aversion towards outright acceptance of such communities or identities. For example, Ishida et al. show that, only since around 1995, did Japanese academia begin research on “perverted” communities (read as non-heterosexual). This research shows that after the 1920s and 1930s, non-heterosexual/non-binary understandings were seen as perverse and unacceptable.58 It was only after Japan’s loss in World War II that led to a loss of confidence in conservative sexual morals, which led to a surge in marginalized identities.

Mark McLelland, in his work on Japan’s 1950s “gay boom,” transnational nature of contemporary sexuality: “…I argue that both Western and non-Western cultures of gender and sexuality have been, and continue to be, mutually transformed through their encounters with transnational forms of sexual knowledge.”59 Specifically, he points out the particularities of the Japanese appropriation of the term gay (gei) and the associated identity that developed. He writes the following:

58 See Chapter 3 in McLelland (2005).
Drawing upon previous paradigms of transgender performance developed in the kabuki theatre, there was a tendency to view gei not so much as a sexual orientation but more as a kind of artistic skill…. One aspect of this performance was heightened transgendered behaviour, a trend that accelerated in the [1960s].

In other words, part of the history of the gei identity in Japan involved its development as a transgender as well as a commercial category in Japan. Since the idea of sexual orientation comes from Western-centric discourses, application of such a theoretical framework to non-Western contexts can prove to be nuanced and sometimes problematic, as McLelland’s example shows.

Further, Binnie acknowledges the overwhelming presence of the US in gay and lesbian studies, and addresses the challenges of queer globalization, writing that “Globalizing processes operate unevenly and have differential impacts upon individual nation-states (as well as within them).” He also considers the aspect between the nation and sexual dissidence, noting that “Significant differences still exist between nation-states in the control and regulation of sexuality.” Ultimately, he seems to suggest that there is a certain tension between the theory of nation-states and homoeroticism:

Homosexuality threatens to destabilize fixed categories of identity, which are fundamental to the fixity of identity within nationalism…. Assimilationist politics of gay liberation have meant that lesbian and gay men have gained political and symbolic recognition and have a (limited) place within nationalist politics.

A thorough consideration of the Japanese government in relation to non-heteronormative identity is beyond the scope of this thesis. It should be noted, however, that the hegemony of the heteronormative gender binary remains to this day pervasive throughout Japanese society, and remains to be hindered or deterred by governmental policies.

60 Ibid., 169.
62 Ibid., 12.
63 Ibid., 25.
Perhaps more convincing are several examples that fail to explicitly embrace non-heterosexuality. As mentioned before, Mezur notes the performative aspect regarding onnagata actors: “Certain groups of actors resist any connection with a homosexual image of sexuality, while others offer different and complex explanations of connections between their performed appearances of genders and sexualities.”\textsuperscript{64} In addition, in Japanese culture, it is not uncommon for people to partition their lives off into separate and distinct spaces. In \textit{Making Music in Japan’s Underground: The Underground Tokyo Hardcore Scene}, Jennifer Matsue acknowledges this fact: “Japanese people are particularly adept at compartmentalizing their lives, separating spheres, and playing at one thing one moment, then another the next.”\textsuperscript{65} Wim Lunsing nicely comments on the situation, from a queer theory perspective:

…Japanese society’s homophobia is mostly of an implicit nature. Rather than being aimed at homosexuality in particular, Japanese disquiet over non-normative sexuality is aimed at anything that deviates from a highly limited common-sense discourse (Lunsing 2001a: 2-14), which is inclusive of the heterosexual matrix (Butler 1990: 35-78), and consequently, homosexuality as such is often not even considered (see also McLelland, Chapter 7, this volume)…. This internalization of homophobia can be related to a tendency in Japanese culture to individualize problems people may have, instead of dealing with them on a social level.\textsuperscript{66}

Perhaps most revealing is McLelland’s work on gay salarymen, which notes the distinction between “public” and “private” spaces in Japanese workplace culture. For many (heterosexually identified) office workers, “sexuality…is a purely ‘private’ (puraibêto) or ‘personal’ (kôjinteki) aspect of life which should play no role in ‘public’ spaces such as the workplace.”\textsuperscript{67}

\textsuperscript{64} Mezur, \textit{Kabuki Female-Likeness}, 45.
Yet both McLelland\textsuperscript{68} and Lunsing\textsuperscript{69} point out the role that the internet has played in identity construction, identity disclosure, and the formation of non-heteronormative communities. Romit Dasgupta also notes the increased circulation of non-heterosexual themes in media within the transnational flows between Japan and Asia.\textsuperscript{70} Not to overreach to technological determinism, but it seems apparent that the technology of contemporary 1\textsuperscript{st}-world economies, particularly the Internet and mass media, have allowed expression of identity through mediums that transgress the power of the nation-state and other, more localized power structures.

To return to the question, one must again ask the following: do singers on Nico Nico contribute to the formation of non-heterosexual/heteronormative communities? From what I have seen, it would appear not, at least not directly nor explicitly. The emphasis on performance as just that (a performance), and the strongly-felt separation of public and private spaces would seem to be reasons to contribute. On the other hand, gender and sexuality are not understood by Japanese to be entirely distinct from one another in contemporary Japanese culture. Thus, these potentially transgressive gender performances may provide a cognitive reframing of gender and sexual ideology that may denaturalize gender performativity for the Japanese layperson on a conscious level. In the next chapter, I argue that, similarly, the transgressive nature of the Internet and mass media points to the conclusion that there is certainly potential for the creation of musical resistance.

\textsuperscript{68} See Chapter 7 in McLelland, 2005.
\textsuperscript{69} See Chapter 6 in McLelland, 2005.
\textsuperscript{70} See Chapter 4 in Allen, 2006.
CHAPTER III: GLOBALIZATION, THE INTERNET, COMMERCIALIZATION, AND MUSIC

The nation-state is not the only major actor on the global stage. Other entities, such as international corporations and non-governmental organizations, have been seen to garner varying degrees of influence within cultural contexts. The music industry is no exception, and its reliance on the Internet as a medium for advertisement and product placement is growing along with global internet use. Music culture has become a commercialized product, one that has become an integral part of global commercial exchange.

Japanese popular culture is intertwined with these globalized exchanges, and certainly exists as a transnational product. J-pop music and culture, unbound by national borders, exist not only between and within but also across nations. This form of cultural exchange across nations involves not only Japan and the West (particularly the US), but also other Asian countries. Further, the internet as a tool for communication expedites this exchange in significant ways.

Finally, the expression of gender is closely related to the commercialization of J-pop. This expression is influenced by and manifests itself through companies’ internal corporate structure, the image of musicians, and ultimately the music itself. Thus, the globalization of culture, the internet, and the expression of gender are intricately intertwined, and must be understood in order to effectively consider not only J-pop as a whole, but specifically Nico Nico and ryouseirui singers.

Japanese Popular Culture and Globalization

Chapter II discussed how contemporary Japanese notions of both gender and sexuality were influenced by globalized interactions with Western culture, most notably after the US occupation following World War II. The origins of Japanese popular music as we know it today have been steeped in the influences of Anglo-American popular culture and music, as shown by
both Carolyn Stevens and Michael Bourdaghs. Bourdaghs provides an excellent account of J-pop music from the end of World War II to around 1990 after Japan’s economic bubble collapse. By focusing on a few key artists or songs, from Kurosawa Akira and Kasagi Shizuko to bubblegum pop, Bourdaghs avoids widespread generalizations and instead seeks to explicate the intricate process of musicking within the context of specific case studies.\(^\text{71}\) Stevens, on the other hand, expands her timeline to include pre-World War II times up to the 2000s (going by decade). As the title of her book suggests, Stevens approaches Japanese popular music in a wider breadth, addressing particularly the culturally situated contexts, notions of authenticity, and power dynamics that inform Japanese popular music.\(^\text{72}\) Most notable in both Stevens and Bourdaghs’ works is the emphasis on Japan’s relationship to the West, which is known to historically be predominately towards the US.

Yet globalized influences on Japan come not only from the West, but also from other Asian countries in particular. Koichi Iwabuchi explains in great detail Japan’s transnational relationship with other Asian countries, relating the maintenance and construction of national identity with Japan’s supposedly intermediate position between the “West” and the “East.”\(^\text{73}\) He argues that cultural hybridization and transnational cultural flows, along with Japan’s colonial history, spurred a strong nationalist impulse of superior “Japaneseness”:

> Here, the transnationalization of Japanese popular culture has not simply regenerated a conception of Japan’s leading position in Asia, it is also conveniently regarded as helping Japan suppress and overcome its historically constituted, problematic, and uneven relationship with other Asian nations. In sum, the transnational intersects with the postcolonial under the influence of the media globalization process.\(^\text{74}\)


\(^{73}\) In this section, I refer mainly to Iwabuchi’s seminal work *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Nationalism*. For more, see Chapter 2 in Allen and Sakamoto, 2006.

The notion of hybridity is also integral to the construction of Japanese identity. Hybridization is noted to be strategically represented as a key feature of Japanese nationalism, with Japan idealized as a kind of “living museum”: Iwabuchi explains, “Hybridism…essentializes hybridity and hybridization as an organic and ahistorical aspect of Japanese national/cultural identity.”

These notions of hybridity were (and arguably are still) applied to ideas of race that inform Japan’s continued reluctance to acknowledge its negative colonial past, most notably in the form of revisionist Japanese history books that tend to gloss over Japan’s role in the oppression of Korean people’s before and during World War II.

Japan’s relationship to the US, unsurprisingly, significantly informs its relationship to other Asian countries. Postwar Japan quickly “forgot” its imperial past, since it was defeated by Allied forces and was also (and remains to be) the only victim in history of nuclear weaponry. Since World War II, a major question between Japan’s relations with the US could be expressed as follows: Was Japan a domesticator of the West or was it further colonized by the West?

Regardless of the answer, a binary quickly formed, with the two poles being Japan and the West. As Japan quickly and successfully industrialized and Westernized, the country was seen as a champion of globalization:

…it appears that Western evaluations of the Japanese genius for hybridization have become even more positive along with a new interpretation of the historical dynamic in the age of globalization. This has much to do with theoretical shifts from modern to postmodern, from production to consumption, and from a view of societies as separate entities to one of global interconnectedness.

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75 Ibid., 54. Iwabuchi defines hybridism as the following: “Hybridism might be called a fluid essentialism…. In a fluid essentialism…identity is represented as a sponge that is constantly absorbing foreign cultures without changing its essence and wholeness.” Ibid., 54.
76 Iwabuchi writes: “Discourse on the racially mixed origins of the Japanese was readily appropriated to justify Japanese colonial rule over other Asian nations; since Japan had long successfully assimilated foreign (Asian) races as well as their cultures, Japan was endowed with the capacity to harmoniously assimilate colonial subjects in Taiwan and Korea.” Ibid., 56.
77 Ibid., 62.
Japan’s success as the first Asian country to successfully industrialize and economize to a degree that was competitive with other postindustrial Western nations led to its uncomfortable idolization by other Asian countries, a process Iwabuchi calls the “Japanization” of Asia. Yet the successful “Japanization” of other Asian countries ironically threatens Japanese identity in many substantial ways; I quote Iwabuchi at length:

A cheerful Asian second-order mimicking of Japanese imitation of American popular culture sets up the Japanese unease, an unease derived from a realization that Japan’s mimetic modern experience deeply underpins the formation of Japanese popular culture…. The Japanese observation of the “Japanization of Asia” leads not simply to the problematization of Japan’s authority and originality through secondary Asian imitation. It also articulates a moment when Japan encounters the impossibility of retaining a master position in transnational cultural flows…. Asian imitation of Japan displaces Japan’s hybridism in its construction of an essential national identity by exposing the fact that skillful hybridization is not unique to Japan.\(^78\)

It is within this context of globalization that one should consider not only my case study of Nico Nico singers, but of all J-pop musicians. Japan, in its intermediate position as explicit colonizer and colonized, maintains a delicate balance with other Asian countries and the West. Approaching commercialization with this in mind, one should remember that those audiences to which J-pop appeals not only include Japanese consumers themselves, but also citizens of Japan’s colonized and conqueror nations.\(^79\)

**Gender in J-pop and Commercialization**

It should come as no surprise that commercialization and economic practices are prevalent in J-pop; it is almost certain that these factors are what mainly drive the genre. Yet how might gender play a role in J-pop and commercialization? Brian and Gina Cogan note that, though perhaps unnoticed by most laypeople, gender is a central factor in the J-pop industry: “In

\(^{78}\) Ibid., 83

\(^{79}\) The intertextual relationship between J-pop and other mediums of entertainment, such as manga or anime, has been noted by scholars such as Darling-Wolf, 2004. For more on the globalization of Japanese popular media, see Cooper-Chen, 2010.
addition, gender plays a key role in Japanese pop music as the long history of Japanese female idols indicates, insofar as these well-known women influence notions of what it means to be a woman in Japan.\textsuperscript{80} Two examples in the punk rock and pop genres include Shonen Knife and Puffy, respectively.\textsuperscript{81}

Within the J-pop industry, women’s groups are somewhat expected to be controlled or dominated by a male manager in Japan. The punk band Shonen Knife exhibits several characteristics that directly contradict this practice. For example, they write their own music (i.e. exhibit creative control, which is usually seen masculine), design their wardrobe and construct their own image and gender signifiers (which is seen as subverting hegemonic gender norms while living, to some degree, in harmony with it), and ultimately have more autonomy than most female musicians. In addition to contributing to their punk authenticity, Shonen Knife’s actions are significant in that they directly challenge the gendered practices within the J-pop industry that undermines women’s authority and respectability.

The pop band Puffy, however, exhibits a sense of agency in a similar vein to Shonen Knife, albeit to a seemingly lesser degree. For example, the male producer of Puffy is portrayed as beyond or above them. When the Puffy members are talked about, only their personal lives, hobbies, cuteness, and not talent, are topics that come up in discussion. Yet while the members are arguably seen as commodified objects, they are also in part the band’s producers. For example, they are still responsible for their own visual representations. And although it is a male’s song that is being sung, it is female members that are singing in the tradition of Western rock music, thus giving them power and legitimacy.


\textsuperscript{81} For more examples of scholarship on young female agency, identity, and negotiation of hegemonic gender narratives (within the context of clubbing), see Toth, 2008.
How might these women resist hegemonic notions given the position of power they are in, and how might Puffy members serve as models for more agency and choice for Japanese women? Karaoke, it seems, provides for an alternative expression of gender, one that ultimately allows transgression of traditional gender norms:

This juxtaposition of girl and song occurs as well in karaoke, where women sing their favorite songs, perform them as they perform their gender in miniature, and yet, while they can choose a Puffy song and choose to collaborate with [the male producer], that song, with its musical references to the history of Western rock, puts them, like [the female members], in a masculine position, while the cuteness of the…singers prevents this assumption of masculinity from being total or threatening.82

It should be noted that the relationship between J-pop music and karaoke is very interrelated. In discussing the Japanese practices of karaoke, particularly when singing music of enka balladeers or Western-style Japanese pop stars, Rob Drew points out the importance and function of song in Japanese culture:

The song confronts people not as an inviolate object but as a cultural resource; the recording artist stands less as an author or owner, more as a teacher of the song. In Japan, songs are for singing, the tools through which one learns to sing, displays singing competence, adopts singing roles.83

It would seem, then, that J-pop music is directly related to the karaoke industry, and as such may commercialize accordingly. The particular singers of my case study (called utaite), who post music videos on Nico Nico, sing covers of songs. There certainly seems to be a connection between the social dynamic of karaoke and the social dynamic on Nico Nico: while karaoke singers at karaoke bars perform before an audience in real life, Nico Nico singers “perform” (via music video) before an audience in virtual space. I assert that Nico Nico may have the potential to function as a virtual karaoke bar that may provide space for gender transgression.

A final example of possible modes of resistance is SMAP, an all-male Japanese band.

82 Ibid., 86-7.
In “SMAP, Sex, and Masculinity”, Fabienne Darling-Wolf notes the ways in which this group has garnered popularity, as well as some of the ways that the group has contributed to a redefinition of Japanese masculinity. Darling-Wolf points out that SMAP members are sexualized, with extreme androgyny in direct correlation to sexualized status (i.e. the most androgynous are the ones most seen as sex objects). In fact, this practice may be traced to the gender bending tradition of shōjo manga or visual kei, and such androgyny may suggest moving beyond gender roles (or compulsory heterosexuality) and providing a sort of romance (to both heterosexual females and homosexual males) that is more egalitarian and outside of the traditional gendered expectations of the gender binary. It also recalls the status of the wakashu, the pre-modernized gender that was the object of desire of both men and women. Other ways that SMAP challenges traditional notions of masculinity include their publicized lifestyle that includes cooking, caring for younger children, and other activities that otherwise portray SMAP members as men in touch with their “feminine side”.

The ideas of hybridity also contribute to a newer construction of masculinity. The band is often seen interacting with a variety of other musical genres; moreover, it’s not uncommon to hear English used in lyrics of their songs, too. SMAP members are also known to have adopted various racial identities. In effect, SMAP brings to the forefront a multiplicity that is a staple of Japanese popular culture. The singers’ multiple personae help define Japanese masculinity (as opposed to Western masculinity), where Western masculinity is seen as violent, or as a “Black Other.” Darling-Wolf suggests that these reconstructions of masculinity are also reactions to the somewhat ambiguous Japanese racio-cultural status within a black/white duality. SMAP seems to offer a redefinition of traditional gender roles, as well as modes of resistance that counter

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84 For another similar example on visual kei music, performers, fan culture, gender identity, and hybridity,
gender and sexuality binarisms: “Through their hybrid identities as male/female, macho/sensitive, Asian/western individuals, SMAP helps deconstruct essentializing notions of masculinity.”

The expression of gender, thus, plays a crucial role in the commercialization of J-pop. It is not only present in the way companies are structured and run, but also in the selling of the music, image, and group to the consumers. These relationships are, in part, similar to those within the practices of the ryouseirui, although the more egalitarian nature of their advertisement medium may prove to undermine gendered hierarchical structures. Therefore, before we consider the ryouseirui and their music, we must first consider such central medium that is the main conduits for ryouseirui popularization: the Internet.

**Japan and the Role of the Internet**

Despite hopes for global social change and the significant rupture of global hierarchies, it has been noted that the Internet is not the great world equalizer as once expected. In the more local contexts of Japan, though, the Internet is seen to display significant influence in a variety of ways, including the formation of identity, the creation of communities, and resistance against societal restrictions and hierarchies. Nanette Gottlieb and McLelland refer to these virtual spaces as cybercultures:

> We understand a cyberculture to come into being when like-minded individuals meet online in order to pursue a common interest or goal irrespective of whether the “community” that develops through this interaction maintains an offline presence.

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Gottlieb and McLelland identify three broad contexts regarding the efficacy of the Internet: mobile phone usage in Japan, commercialization and business, and government. Obstacles that prevent the Internet from maximum utilization include accessibility (being online versus offline), computer literacy, and discrimination that may still exist in Japanese society. Indeed, the authors point out the many challenges that cybercultures may still experience. In commenting on timidity aggravated by the aggression towards cybercultures of normally marginalized peoples, Gottlieb and McLelland stress that the presence of regular society is not completely avoidable:

This cautious approach to the new technology has severely limited the potential of these groups to develop fully functioning online communities, suggesting that the digital divide is perpetuated as much by psychological as economic factors. This means that interaction via the Internet does not take place in some disembodied cyberspace, but is still tied up with local understandings, interpretations and prejudices that mean events can have quite different meanings to participants on different sides of the modem.

Additionally, in Japan the Internet itself is a business where users often pay for the amount of time spent online as well as for the amount of information downloaded. In the context of government, cyberdemocracy is often presented as the ultimate goal, while in reality the aim is to portray specific images of officials that are unmediated by potentially critical press commentary or dissent.

Overall, government and big business are best able to exploit the power and internet, while structures of social exclusion seem to be unavoidable despite the creation of virtual space. On the other hand, previously silenced minorities have utilized the Internet as a new way to assert themselves, creating cybercultural communities which, while not overturning social oppression, transgress such spaces and provide for dialogue in ways never achieved previous.

88 Gottlieb and McLelland note that private and commercial usage began in 1993.
90 Ibid., 10.
Concerning Nico Nico, it is possible that the activities of certain singers, particularly those that use both “male” and “female” voices, are able to create a cyberspace in which gendered norms may be transgressed and resisted. Nico Nico (and YouTube), however, should first be considered in terms of what seems to be the main motivation for the maintenance of the websites: business prospects and commercialization.

**Case Study: (Ryouseirui) Business via Nico Nico and YouTube**

*Ryouseirui* music videos are prominently featured on two different websites: Nico Nico and YouTube. While both are video sharing websites, each functions very differently in terms of revenue and monetization. However, both ultimately serve to further the popularity and presence of *ryouseirui* and their music videos.

Created in 2005 and purchased by Google Inc. in 2006, YouTube’s revenue information is not released officially by Google; figures are thus limited to estimates and reports. Additionally, at the time of writing this document, limited official information was found on exactly how YouTube generates income. Several ways identified by non-official sources include revenue from bidding keywords, from sponsored partnerships, and advertisements. Addressing the exact sources of revenue is beyond the scope of this paper. What’s directly relevant to video uploaders, however, is the advertisement business of YouTube, which is thoroughly explained on YouTube’s “Creator Academy” webpage. Monetization of advertisements seems to be the central (if not only) revenue option through YouTube for video uploaders. It’s notable that such uploaders are encouraged to develop their own channel “brand”, which in turn presumably affects their choices on the type of ads they choose to enable. Of course, the number of viewers (of the ad) is paramount to the revenue generated. Thus, being able to grow and maintain an
audience, as well as creating new videos, seem to comprise the main factors for maximum income.

Nico Nico, formerly known as Nico Nico Douga, was created in 2006 in Japan. It is a video sharing website, and is managed by the Japanese company Dwango. It seems that Nico Nico, along with many other Japanese websites, effectively utilizes the freemium model for gathering revenue. This method of payment, along with other sources of revenue featured on the website, does not seem to directly compensate video uploaders. However, in 2011 Nico Nico launched an English language beta website which allowed users to share videos from a wide variety of websites, including YouTube. Information on whether monetization of YouTube videos transfers over to Nico Nico seems unavailable at the moment, though reports prove this to be unlikely.

Videos that are uploaded to Nico Nico are divided into various categories and subcategories. The utattemita subcategory (translated literally as “tried to sing”) is where singers (from amateur to professional) upload covers of songs. These singers who upload videos in the utattemita are called utaite. The cover songs that are uploaded are usually Vocaloid covers, though they may include songs from anime or J-pop.

Although it seems that utaite do not make money directly from Nico Nico, many generate revenue through live performances or traditional media, such as music CDs (either during conventions or through official labels). Thus, it would seem that for an aspiring utaite, engagement with Nico Nico is mostly for advertisement purposes. Indeed, a point system is used in order to effectively rank videos; videos with more points are advertised more than others.

As mentioned before, ryouseirui is a term that designates an utaite that utilizes both “male” and “female” voices. There are many ryouseirui active on Nico Nico, mainly exhibited
by the number of music videos present that feature such singers. As one might expect, an online sub-community is felt within Nico Nico (as well as on the internet outside of Nico Nico) that supports and engages with ryouseirui. This ryouseirui fan culture not only comments on various ryouseirui music videos, but also consists of conversations between the members themselves about ryouseiruis’ gendered voices. Overall, the ideas of gender and voices of ryouseirui are topics that beg further investigation, for such articulations of gendered identity may be expressed in more fluid, unexpected, and exaggerated ways due to the commercial nature of the context.

Case Study: 96neko’s Record Brand New… in the Context of Popular Music Frameworks

As demonstrated, popular culture and music around the globe, far from benign, is riddled with numerous aspects and articulations of capitalistic ventures, aesthetics, and identity. Japanese popular music, influenced by Anglo-American popular music, is no exception to this. Having considered J-pop in terms of globalization, commercialization, and the Internet, I will analyze the ryouseirui 96Neko’s (pronounced “kuroneko”) record Brand New… within relevant theoretical contexts related to popular culture.

Not only capitalizing on her status as a ryouseirui (a singer that sings both male and female voices), 96neko includes numerous other covers of songs, covering a wide range of musical and vocal styles. Her record as a commodity seems to branch out of what one might consider a “standardized” musical venture, yet in many ways align with popular musical characteristics articulated by Theodor Adorno. I consider 96neko and her record Brand New… in the context of capitalism from a Marxist viewpoint, aesthetics, and dialogue as expressed by Theodor Adorno.
As expressed by Qureshi, the relationship between music and social theory cannot be
ignored in the consideration of *Brand New*...  
Qureshi identifies four directions regarding music
and social theory, of which three I’d like to point out: musical thinking or theorizing relating to
commodification and fetishism; music-making processes relating to feudalistic and capitalistic
means of production; and poetics of musical form and genre relating to capitalism. 96neko’s
record and status as a singer touches on all three of these points significantly. She seems to
commodify and fetishize her status as a *ryouseirui*, using her vocal ability to “sell gender” in the
form of both “male” and “female” vocality. The music-making processes seem to align with
capitalistic means of production as well, since she sells her music through a label. However,
more ethnographic research is needed to ascertain the status of the record label, as well as her
relationship with the record label. It is quite possible that the record label that she is associated
with is an “indie label”, and may try to resist activities practiced by hegemonic record labels
(however, this is beyond the scope of this paper). Finally, in terms of musical form and genre,
96neko’s recording is primarily covers of songs. Her essentially laissez-faire attitude towards
form and genre seems to ultimately reify such genre and form distinctions, and does not appear
to challenge popular music song form.

Peter Manuel’s work on song form addresses a neo-Marxist perspective on song form in
*Modernity and Musical Structure*.  
He writes of the sense of individualism that arose with
capitalism, as well as various themes associated: self vs society; realism and a focus on the
everyday (especially in the bourgeoisie); and, regarding lyrics, a lack of embeddedness in a
social situation. On this last point he writes the following, where protagonists’ “depiction

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rigorously eschews any reference to time, place, watchful in-laws, or sociohistorical grounding of any sort.”93 Indeed, this lack of grounded-ness in social situations is further elaborated by Manuel:

Urbanization and capitalist modernity brought not only dislocation and alienation, but new sorts of opportunities, especially in the form of the unprecedented personal freedom from family and community constraints….the use of formal structures must be seen not as a slavish imitation of contemporary Yankee trends, but as an abstract musical expression of a new worldview conditioned by new lifestyles and modes of production.94

This separation from specific social situations seems prevalent in 96neko’s record. Throughout, themes addressed are posited as ahistorical, general, and perhaps universal, such as themes of love, teenage crushes, pregnancy, and adolescent angst.

To Manuel, this pervasive song form in Western popular music culture (and in the case of Brand New…, Japanese popular music culture) marks the triumph of global (Western) capitalism. New musical aesthetics are created, ones seemingly conditioned by non-class-based sensibilities. These new musical sensibilities are resistant, to some extent, though whether such resistance will prove useful or significant is not expounded by Manuel: “…the new musical sensibilities can be seen to reflect a critique of modernity and of capitalism, but not in the form of a headlong confrontation from an external, liberated zone (whether geographical, social, or attitudinal).”95

Perhaps it is too soon to know of the effects of these new aesthetics. However, it is not too soon to analyze aesthetics themselves, as well as the problematic nature of such analysis.

As pointed out by Susan McClary and Robert Walser, pleasure is often the politics of rock, despite the desire by some to find explicit political agendas or complexity in appropriate

93 Ibid., 54-55.
94 Ibid., 55.
95 Ibid., 59.
genres, and not just physical pleasure.\textsuperscript{96} While pleasure alone may not be the main theme of \textit{Brand New...}, it certainly plays a major theme throughout many of the tracks. However, the way that pleasure is addressed is often at odds with societal norms or customs, or responsibilities of adulthood. For example, 96neko’s rendition of “Plus Boy” deals with the social awkwardness of one-sided love at a pre-teen age, while “Seisou Bakuretsu Boy” addresses the tension between teenage pregnancy and pleasure of (hetero-) sexual encounters.

McClary and Walser also point out the need for new modes of analysis of popular musical aesthetics, ones that depart from traditional musicological thought and instead address the usually different aesthetics of popular music: “What musicologists can contribute to the discussion of the politics of popular music is some way of explaining how the powerful moments in music are accomplished, without discrediting the impression that they are exciting, disturbing, or pleasurable.”\textsuperscript{97} Not only both analysis and semiotics are important, but also the consideration of text, performance style, video imagery, commercial production, distribution, imagery, history of singer’s career, and political issues. Beyond such categories, though, exists the musical energy that may give pleasure or the power to threaten, and it is certainly these two ideas that should not be ignored. In 96neko’s album, some music videos are created in tandem with certain songs, such as “Plus Boy” or “Seisou Bakuretsu Boy.” 96neko also brings her own performance (vocal) style to the songs, and may on occasion add spoken word or slightly change lyrics (not enough to change the meaning of a song) for a humorous effect or an individual stamp on her work. Finally, the production, distribution, and commercial imagery would be further issues to consider, in light of the fact that 96neko is associated with a label. More in-depth analysis of \textit{Brand New...} would certainly address these facets of popular cultural music production.


\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., 289.
It would seem appropriate to address the variety of songs on 96neko’s label through the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu comments on the distinction of popular aesthetics, asserting that each work of art imposes its own aesthetic rules on itself and the viewer, whether deliberately or not. Again, the theme of pleasure is addressed by Bourdieu, in opposition to bourgeois morality and aesthetics:

This barbarous reintegration of aesthetic consumption into the world of ordinary consumption abolishes the opposition, which has been the basis of high aesthetics since Kant, between the ‘taste of sense’ and the ‘taste of reflection’, and between facile pleasure, pleasure reduced to a pleasure of the senses, and pure pleasure, pleasure purified of pleasure, which is predisposed to become a symbol of moral excellence and a measure of the capacity for sublimation which defines the truly human man.98

Again, the idea of pleasure and inter-meshing between ordinary and aesthetic consumption can be experienced in 96neko’s record, primarily through the themes and lyrical content of the songs that were chosen to be covered.

96neko’s record certainly seems “mainstream” as well. To Sarah Thornton, subcultures and youth culture serve as a foil to “the mainstream.”99 This dichotomy involves a division between the work world (mainstream) vs subculture: “Young people, irrespective of class, often refuse the responsibilities and identities of the work world, choosing to invest their attention, time and money in leisure.”100 This youth culture is used as a buffer against social ageing, acting as a liminal stage between those younger and those older than themselves. This idea is particularly important in Japanese culture, where many activities, events, and aspirations of popular culture often seek to provide an escape from the hegemonic traditions of Japanese society (e.g. salary-man husband, housewife, children, appropriate manners according to age and

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100 Ibid., 101.
social class). 96neko’s album, however, while certainly providing an outlet for entertainment, reinforces this cultural mainstream in many of these songs, mostly by referencing and “resisting” (more accurately, emotionally dreading), though never questioning the power and continuity of heteronormative narratives of hegemonic Japanese expectations and life.

Yet it might be argued that 96neko’s album provides a temporary release from the less-than-satisfying reality of Japanese listeners, albeit not in a way that directly challenges dominant narratives of Japanese life. 96neko’s existence as an icon and singer may in a way provide a “subcultural” capital, in the way that Thornton addresses: “Subcultural capital is the linchpin of an alternative hierarchy in which the axes of age, gender, sexuality and race are all employed in order to keep the determinations of class, income and occupation at bay. Interestingly, the social logic of subcultural capital reveals itself most clearly by what it dislikes and by what it emphatically isn’t.” Further, it is interesting to consider 96neko’s status as a ryouseirui and the possible LGBTQ associations with her “playing with” gender. Although Japan has made many strides towards understanding sexual orientation as separate and distinct from (trans) gendered identity, there are still remnants of confusion and misunderstanding regarding these issues. I bring this up in reference to Thornton’s conclusion on the relationship between youth subculture and gay culture: “The refusal of parental class and work culture goes some way towards explaining why young people seem to borrow tastes and fashions from gay and black cultures.” Of course, I do not wish to assert an ahistoricity to Thornton’s culturally-specific conclusions, but instead suggest possibility. Additionally, as stated before, more ethnographic detail is needed to ascertain any definitive conclusion. And yet, it may not be terribly far-fetched

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101 Ibid., 105.
102 Ibid., 105.
to suggest that 96neko’s specific vocality plays into youth subculture by referencing a non-hegemonic, non-normative articulation of gendered vocality.

More ideas in Thornton’s work resonate when considering 96neko’s record’s place in popular culture. 96neko’s record is distributed not only via record label, but also on video sharing websites, particularly YouTube and Nico Nico. This intersects with Thornton’s idea that the media disseminates culture for those who consume media as a leisure activity. In this way, such video sharing websites have the power to influence culture, both deliberately and accidentally (not just with the uploading of videos, but also the comments and dialogue amongst viewers and fan groups).

96neko’s record does not seem to be particularly political. There isn’t any outright rhetoric regarding rights, freedom, equality, and unity, and is in a sense mainstream, pro-status-quo. Also, her record does not seem to be striving to be rejected or condemned by media. Yet despite these characteristics, themes in 96neko’s songs do seem to evoke a sense of classlessness, perhaps in order to transcend class divisions, and thus seem to provide preconditions for the status of effective subcultural capital.

The status of 96neko’s record may be seen as one that is both in agreement with and contradictory with Adorno’s arguments. Brand New... seems to try to appeal to the buyer with a slew of multiple-styled musical tracks. The theme that seems to be prevalent throughout the record is related to adolescent or pre-teen life and issues. This not only includes songs previously stated, like “Plus Boy” or “Seisou Bakuretsu Boy,” but also tracks like “Kinyoubi no Ohayou” or “Junjou Fureba.” Otherwise, what exactly binds these tracks together seems to ultimately be 96neko’s appeal of her flexible vocality and her ability to cover a wide range of songs. Yet her vocality ranges from very “female” to very “male,” as indicated by her status as a ryouseirui. In

“Junjou Fureba,” 96neko utilizes a very high-pitched, energetic, “bouncy” female voice, while in “Seisou Bakuretsu Boy” she seems to emulate a lower-pitched, teenager male voice. Perhaps this use of her voice harkens back to the kabuki theater, in which certain members of the all-male cast would play women’s roles and vocalize accordingly. If this historical precedent serves in any way to buttress familiarity to the listener, it might be appropriate to apply Adorno’s use of “kitsch” in this particular instance. According to Adorno, in music, kitsch is seen as an illusory model or outline, one that “…has its own objective origin in the downfall of forms and material into history” and is a “receptacle of mythic basic materials…transformed…but…otherwise lost.”104 Perhaps in this way, 96neko is utilizing her multi-gendered vocality as a way to quietly reference transgendered kabuki performances that are possibly unconsciously present in the Japanese cultural memory. It is here that one should note Adorno’s asserted function of kitsch: “For kitsch precisely sustains the memory, distorted and as mere illusion, of a formal objectivity that has passed away.”105

Also to consider is Adorno’s ideas of differences between popular music and “serious” music. Although such terms and their connotations are problematized,106 what should be considered in this case is the difference between such categories. For Adorno, the fundamental characteristic that separates the two is standardization, in terms of style of popular music (e.g. dance types, mother songs, home songs) as well as harmonic cornerstones of popular music (emphasizes the “most primitive harmonic facts”). He asserts that, contrary to what some may think, simplicity and complexity are not the determining factors that differentiate popular and “serious” music. He writes that standardization of details is not overt but hidden behind

105 Ibid., 501.
“effects”: “This contrasting character of the standardization of the whole and part provides a rough, preliminary setting for the effect upon the listener.” Adorno further explores this idea regarding effects, framework, and form.

> The primary effect of this relation between the framework and the detail is that the listener becomes prone to evince stronger reactions to the part than to the whole….But no stress is ever placed upon the whole as a musical event, nor does the structure of the whole ever depend upon the details.  

Popular music, then, is supposedly opposed to serious music, where the parts are integrated in the conception of the whole. The issue with *Brand New*... is that while the record is a conglomeration or mash-up of different songs and styles, the songs and styles themselves are very much standardized. Further, records of conglomerations of different types of songs are nothing new, and seem to be especially prevalent in the context of singers like 96neko.

Although 96neko may change very small lyrics occasionally and provide spoken word (often for humorous effect), Adorno would point out the fact that the form of the song is not changed, and that standardization of this popular music is not challenged or altered. Indeed, such improvisation is also thought to be “taken over” by standardization as well. Adorno claims that the improvised detail remains connected with underlying scheme and reassures the listener (into, among other things, a complacent proletariat). Improvisation is also seen as divorced from form and character, aspects of the music that are standardized in popular music: “The other is the function of ‘substitution’ — the improvisatory features forbid their being grasped as musical events in themselves. They can be received only as embellishments.”

While I have not heard all of 96neko’s songs with spoken word, the spoken word heard in the song “Plus Boy” seems to

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108 Ibid., 5.
109 Ibid., 25.
have a comedic effect that involves intertextual dialogue with her other work, a trait that is actually very common in her spoken word moments.

In furthering the systems of luxury production, taste, style, and free choice must be alive, while such standardization must be hidden. As throughout his work, Adorno again highlights the relationship between (pseudo) individualization, commercialization, and capitalism.

By pseudo-individualization we mean endowing cultural mass production with the halo of free choice or open market on the basis of standardization itself. Standardization of song hits keeps the customers in line by doing their listening for them, as it were. Pseudo-individualization, for its part, keeps them in line by making them forget that what they listen to is already listened to for them, or “pre-digested.”

Adorno emphasizes the role of popular music in appeasing the masses, especially relevant in the context of pseudo-individualization.

Popular music becomes a multiple-choice questionnaire. There are two main types and their derivatives from which to choose. The listener is encouraged by the inexorable presence of these types psychologically to cross out what he dislikes and check what he likes. The limitation inherent in this choice and the clear-cut alternative it entails provoke like-dislike patterns of behavior.

In a way, 96neko tries to provide all of the choices of the questionnaire! Brand New... tries to appeal to the purchaser with a conglomerate of musical songs and styles, covers of different works. However, being produced, marketed, and consumed at a mass level, one can only come to the conclusion that this record nicely fits in Adorno’s grumpy, pessimistic, yet perhaps insightful claims about the relationship between popular music, standardization, and commercialization. In the next chapter, I take a closer look and examine the vocality that ultimately informs the creation of these commercialized products found on Nico Nico.

110 Ibid., 23.
111 Ibid., 27.
CHAPTER IV: VOCALITY OF RYOUSEIRUI

Nico Nico, which features countless music videos uploaded by a plethora of mainly Japanese users, offers virtual space to singers known as ryouseirui, who use both “male” and “female” voices. At first glance a commercialized spectacle, I argue that these singers’ vocal performances provide a means to destabilize notions of gender fixity and rigidity. The voice itself – an utterance that occupies a liminal space between the self and the air of one’s environment, yet is dependent on the existence both – is the key to this destabilization.

Ideologies of gender and sexuality factor in the legitimization of countless aspects of people’s lives. The vehicles through which these ideologies are transmitted are innumerable, occurring around us, towards us, from us, and within us. The voice is one example of such a vehicle, and plays an important part in identity formation. Further, the voice is a mediated site of enculturation, a site that serves as a space for the negotiation of gender and sexuality ideologies. In this chapter, I investigate the nature of the voice within the context of gendered identity, concerning its various uses, interpretations of it, and its overall malleability. In addition, how might notions of race, ethnicity, or sexuality inform vocality, and hence gendered identity?

The Voice as Queer, a Potential Site of Resistance

The voice is a paradox concerning both its definition and function. The fact that it is both a thing that comes from the body while at the same time is not of the body (which “goes into” the air) contributes to this strange feature of the voice. In *Queer Voices: Technologies, Vocalities, and the Musical Flaw*, Freya Jarman-Ivens comments on this particularity: “Specifically, I would argue, the detachment of voice from body renders unstable the signifiers at play here in such a way as to make the voice itself a space highly productive of the queer.”112 Put another way,

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Jarman-Ivens further distinguishes the voice into two different aspects: bodily materiality of the voice as well as the immateriality of the voice. She identifies the bodily aspect of the voice as referring to all aspects of vocalization, including not just language or music, but also sounds. Jarman-Ivens heavily emphasizes the close relationship between the body and voice, noting how each one informs the other in a relationship not unlike Fausto-Sterling’s Mobius strip of her developmental systems theory\(^{113}\):

Thus, the body-voice relationship is a looped one, a matrix in which body and voice each produce the other… the voice has an inescapably bodily nature both in its production and its reception.\(^{114}\)

She also touches on how the voice is able to ascend above gendered divisions of signification (one of her examples is the gendered division between word (male) and music (female)). To her, the voice isn’t necessarily consonant with the logic of signification. Although one may hear the (gendered) body in the voice, Jarman-Ivens argues that it is not the voice that is inherently gendered, but that we as listeners “hear” gender. The voice contributes to our experience as subjects, and helps in our self-actualization of our identity. The control that vocal beings can exert is thus a potential site of resistance of gender binarisms: “Herein lies a potential in the material voice to act as a boundary figure, an agent of disruption to the semiotic.”\(^{115}\)

It is this potential site of resistance that gives the voice potential for queering gendered vocality. (Jarman-Ivens comments on the usage of the word queer, saying that “…it has become tied to sexuality, but it has long since been a word that denotes the unusual, the strange, the odd, the bizarre.”\(^{116}\)) Theoretically, the voice functions in between body and language, and can be used to not deconstruct gendered relations, but to instead “…dramatize incoherencies in an

\(^{114}\) Jarman-Ivens, Queer Voices, 8.
\(^{115}\) Ibid., 12.
\(^{116}\) Ibid., 16.
already tenuous set of links…which brings the precarious nature of the [gendered] relations to the foreground.”117 Thus, to Jarman-Ivens, the voice is ultimately genderless and performative. It is not fixed in its alleged gender, but instead actively interacts with gender ideologies, reinscribing them or disrupting them to various degrees. And it is various technologies, internal (ex. the throat), external (ex. a recording), and power technologies (ex. language), by which the voice is governed. Jarman-Ivens concludes that the inherent liminality of the voice is the key to its queer potential: “Built into the very fabric of the voice, materiality and immateriality, is queer potential, through the physicality of its production and its being-listened-to, genderedness, genderlessness, and performativity.”118 Thus, I approach my case studies and their articulations of gender with this theoretical framework of the voice as queer.

Gender and the Voice, Performativity and Performance

Judith Butler’s work Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Gender brings to the forefront the theory of performativity. Seeking to deconstruct sex and gender, she asserts that sex is actually a discursivity of gender that is established as a prediscursivity; this elevated status of prediscursivity legitimizes the propagation of gender. Butler writes of how the construction of these sexual hierarchies and gender categories are related to the performances of the bodies. As pointed out by Annette Schlichter in “Do Voices Matter? Vocality, Materiality, Gender Performativity”, however, Butler’s theory of gender performativity seems to account for visual bodies, but not voices. Schlichter, like Jarman-Ivens, also investigates the nature of the material voice, positing that song, too, is subjected to intelligibility:

So, while the speaking, and particularly the singing voice might transcend socio-material boundaries, join and simultaneously separate bodily interiorities and

117 Ibid., 17
118 Ibid., 162.
exteriorities, the act of producing a song should not be fully detached from the messiness of the social and cultural regimes it is embedded in.  

Indeed, Schlichter looks to the work of Suzanne Cusick, work that identifies singing as performative culture. Cusick similarly relates that while the voice, relating the body’s interior to its exterior, is very much connected to biological sex, vocal utterances are culturally constructed. For example, she points out that speech is the point where gender and sex begin to form, and, more broadly, the medium where one learns what is and is not intelligible.

The material multiplicity of the body is addressed in Butler’s work; one might wonder how the multiplicity of the voice might be applied to performativity. Yet, it would seem that Butler is under the metaphorical thumb of logocentrism in her focus on visualization and the overall legibility of the body. Schlichter highlights Butler’s problem with dealing with the voice:

Voice, however, cannot be clearly positioned as either sensible or intelligible; it is not necessarily contained by culture or nature. A consideration of the vocal body will therefore allow us to re-open the question of the relation of the biological and the cultural, the somatic and the symbolic in the production of bodies and subjectivities.

Yet Schlichter holds fast to applying Butler’s theory of gender performativity to the voice. She asserts that “…Gender differences in the use of the voice, such as pitch and timbre, are rather socially formed than anatomically determined.” Additionally, Schlichter acknowledges that racial essentialism is furthered by a combination of visual and acoustic perception (I will come back to this point later in the paper). Schlichter then turns to Butler’s analysis of drag (as a disruptive site of resistance against gender performativity), but addresses voice within the context of drag as well. She notes that often in drag performance the voice is dubbed or lip-

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121 Schlichter, “Do Voices Matter?”, 43.
122 Ibid.
synced with recordings; in this context, she again points out the disruptive potentiality of the voice, where gender is simultaneously naturalized and denaturalized, this time via technology. Schlichter also expresses the idea of multiplicity through the voice, noting, for example, that the speaking voice and singing voice are often different enough to denote a change in either identity or positionality (however subtle). Ultimately, Schlichter expresses a disappointment with Butler’s missed chance of addressing voice within the context of performativity: “That the machinic voice as the supplement of the drag scene does not have a place in her theory is unfortunate since the voice of the machine lends itself so obviously to a denaturalization of gender by implying that (gender) identity depends on discursive, material, technological prosthetics.” Schlichter offers a final question regarding voice technologies in asking what happens when a machine is playing (singing) as opposed to the actual person: Can this lead to a further deconstruction of the naturalized voice, and to an investigation of the denaturalization of the voice in the 21st century?

In “Queer Voices and Musical Genders,” Judith Halberstam investigates the vocal innovations that may be used to queer gendered performances. One of her examples she uses is the relationship between the artists Big Mama Thornton and Elvis, as well as the role that blues played in both a racialized and sexualized context. Halberstam writes:

However, the drag king performances made explicit what histories of the blues tend to repress: namely the very queer and specifically masculine or butch personas of a large number of female blues artists. Halberstam proceeds to examine the American drag king subcultures that arose in 1930s Harlem, focusing on Willie Mae Thornton’s performance of “Hound Dog” (1953). She contrasts this with the performance adapted by Elvis, which sky-rocketed him into superstardom. Despite

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123 Ibid., 48.
Thornton’s originality in the creation of her masculine persona, Big Mama Thornton’s construction of masculinity was seen as something made by white men; she effectively became a passive, discursive site for culture.

In addressing her “Big Mama” status, Halberstam identifies Thornton’s identification as “Big Mama” as an unconventional gender and queering of the family: “In the post-slavery era, as Davis argues, black women, like black men, articulated complex understandings of freedom in relation to mobility, sexuality and gender and in opposition to domesticity, marriage and family.” The gender mobility in Big Mama Thornton’s song “Hound Dog” is another example cited by Halberstam as queering identity. Yet this appropriation of gender mobility by Elvis unfortunately reifies one of the meaning of the blues, which is closely related to racial oppression:

Thornton’s complaint should be heard here as an extension of the blues experience: this absorption of black cultural production into white performance is the blues...The blues theorize what has been lost, what remains irretrievable, what constitutes the self in terms of lack.

So what might Elvis impersonations mean in light of this context? If taking into account Willie Mae Thornton, “we can reread drag king performances of Elvis, particularly Black drag king performances, as a way of imagining the lost circuits of influence within which Elvis and other white male rock heroes are merely echoes of the forgotten Black butch musicians who preceded them and who were hounded from history by them.” Thus, this is a prime (albeit American) example of how race, class, and gender intersect to form uniquely oppressive systems of discrimination.

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125 Ibid., 187.
126 Ibid., 189.
127 Ibid., 190.
The second example that Halberstam uses is the queering voice of Sylvester’s falsetto and the gender ambiguities and queering that disco offered. Sylvester queered gay masculinities and managed to participate in the donning of feminine roles. Concerning falsetto, Halberstam addresses the diversity of its sound and performance: “The falsetto, of course, takes multiple forms and plays a different sound in every throat: as the male diva strains to find the upper reaches of the male voice, his falsetto also cuts him loose form his anatomy and takes him into a sorority of female singers.” So, depending on the context, falsetto can indicate a new space for masculinity or a queering of gendered identity. Yet any queer, non-normative acts of the voice that offer a new view on femininity and masculinity are stopped short by normative masculinity that may be asserted in queer communities.

Despite the fact that these subsequent examples were contextually situated in US culture, they adequately demonstrate that the voice is not necessarily an inherent and immutable aspect of a person, but can participate in a highly performative context. One last point to make involves the relationship between timbre and gender: studies show that timbre, more so than pitch (though pitch is related), is closely related to perceptions of gender (more on timbre is in the next section). As shown in chapter 2, numerous instances of gender performativity can be found in Japanese culture. Research regarding the vocality of the gendered voice in Japanese contexts, however, seemed to be lacking. The natural conclusion would be that queer potential for the voice is not only confined to American contexts, but to Japanese contexts as well (perhaps they already are present, but are not researched or published!). In any case, the performative nature of the voice is expressed not only in terms of the gender binary, but also in terms of race, ethnicity, and sexuality.

128 Ibid., 191.
Ethnicity, Race, and Queer Voices

In “Covering Disclosures: Practices of Intimacy, Hierarchy, and Authenticity in a Japanese Popular Music Genre”, Christine R. Yano writes about the covering of the Japanese popular music genre enka. Yano comments about the lifespan and development of enka within the context of Japanese culture:

In enka, a sentimental Japanese popular ballad form, cover songs perform the work of promotion, hierarchy, tribute, instruction, and intimacy…Authenticity here does not dwell within the singular moment or as individual authorship, but accrues over time amidst a group context.  

The genre of enka depends on re-releases of songs on “Best of” and “Greatest Hits” record marketing practices. The success of these re-releases, in contrast to covers of songs in the West, depends on the similarity (and thus familiarity) to the original. This expectation of familiarity is a part of the marketing strategy for enka, and ultimately shapes “…the genre’s links to tradition and the nation-culture.” Thus, Yano considers enka to be a genre that upholds musical tradition and avoids change. Related to enka is kata, a term that refers to the specific traditions (musical styles) of original artists, and thus refers to an upholding of musical tradition:

“Furthermore, kata becomes important in the process of evaluation: knowing the kata makes one an expert audience, judging a performance by its proximity to the ideal.” Yano observes that kata is a way of garnering cultural prestige and also by respecting one’s elders. This notion of kata extends to a very detailed replication and mastery of the vocalization of the original artist. The more that a cover artist is able to produce the vocalizations of the original artist, the higher level of authenticity is attained.

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131 Ibid., 195.
132 Ibid., 195.
The repetition of a familiar tune performed in a familiar way becomes part of the musical landscape of Japanese popular music culture; this familiarity operates in Japanese society as a sort of comfort, one that satisfies aural expectations. Repetition (not only in terms of style, but also in terms of the number of times played) is used as a method of promotion for cover artists; again familiarity to the public ear increases the song’s popularity, a popularity that manifests itself as the song being played on the radio or being sung at a karaoke bar.

But what cultural meaning is related to this practice of covering? Yano offers the idea that the act of covering becomes an intimate practice that not only establishes respect for one’s elders, but by doing so reinscribes Japanese culture:

But what sets enka apart is the degree to which even upper-level singers continue to sing covers throughout their career, as a sign of their interconnectedness within the enka world, as a gesture of respect to past singers, and sometimes as a challenge to add prestige to their own reputation.133

Again, this practice of covering is kata-driven, which is a practice that differs greatly from Western practices. In Japanese enka, a better, more authentic cover is directly proportional to the similarity or familiarity to the original. In contrast, Western practice of covering expects a certain degree of departure from the original song, which may be characterized or supplemented by a certain degree of individuality; in the West, redundancy is considered inauthentic and otherwise holds little cultural capital.

Thus, the act of covering in Japan, which expects a strict use of vocalization, is ethnicized in that it is informed by Japanese culture. One might say that, within the context of comparing Japan and the West, covering is, in general, ethnicized. (Perhaps this kind of performance is also racialized; however, the possibility of Japanese covering being a racialized performance is beyond the scope of this thesis.) Japan’s practice of covering seems to be specifically reliant on a

133 Ibid., 201.
certain type of performative vocalization, in that one must perform within tradition (i.e. the original artist’s vocalizations) in order to gain authenticity.

In addition to ethnicized vocal practice, voices can also be racialized. In “Synthesizing Race: Towards an Analysis of the Performativity of Vocal Timbre,” Nina Eidsheim discusses the construction of Vocaloids in relation to the construction of racialized voices. She reflects on the relationship between timbre and race, and asks to what extent is the voice immanent or encultured. Eidsheim seems to answer this question by indicating that difference in voice can be (and is often) used to reify notions of racial differences; at the same time, she also points out the performative nature of the voice: “This study reveals two crucial points: that a person’s vocal timbre cannot be entirely unmediated; and the (many possible) meanings we derive from any given vocal timbre are not immanent.”

Eidsheim talks about the construction (and marketing) of the Vocaloid; she points out that Vocaloids are often created with the intention of imitating either a specific, real-life singer or a “genre” of a singer. These genres can be further expanded and developed into fictional personal profiles. Yet, depending on public reception of such Vocaloids, the theorized perception of racialized voices may be misinformed indeed; such was the case with the Vocaloid Lola: “It is this gap between expected and actual experiences of Lola which points to a non-essential and constructed relationship between vocal timbre and identity.” Eidsheim attributes the negative public reception of Lola to a flawed conception of the racialized voice. She points out that the selling of Lola as a soul voice was ultimately rejected due to the lack of vocal delivery and


timbre which is associated with soul. Such an association was not considered by the creators of Lola, who simply thought it sufficient to supply the voice databank with vocalizations of a dark-skinned person.

Concerning vocal timbre, Eidsheim asserts that timbre is carefully constructed. Eidsheim uses the term “performed articulation”, where a performed articulation is considered as a connection between two things (in this instance, a connection between a soul sound and a black body). It is timbre, though being internal of the body and supposedly inherent, that is a performed articulation, according to Eidsheim: “That is, the correlation of such vocal communities with race, ethnicity or class is not inherent; instead it is a symptom of the divisions that are important in the society – and it is the performance of these divisions.”136 Eidsheim states that such people can effectively undergo the process of performative listening, in that people find and hear racialized vocal timbres. However, the concept of articulations in performance settings may prove to be potentially disruptive. In a similar fashion to Foucault’s concept of discourse, performance articulations may reify or subvert existing power structures or power discourses.

Eidsheim suggests that when analyzing music, one should focus on the production of timbre, not just timbre alone. In considering the body, Eidsheim seems to address the same issue regarding the paradoxical nature of the voice as observed by Jarman-Ivens and Butler. Eidsheim writes: “Instead, both body and timbre are shaped by unconscious and conscious training practices that function as repositories for cultural attitudes toward gender, class, race, and

sexuality.” She refers to a sonic “color line”, another way of illustrating the potential for racialized voices. She suggests that a systematic deconstruction of racialized vocal timbre is necessary for the denaturalization of such performed articulations, from being recognized as essentialized characteristics to performed articulations.

Languages and Cosmopolitanism

Moody explicates the usage and importance that English has in Japanese popular culture and Japanese popular music, citing the connection between English usage and the “sociolinguistic and attitudinal changes underway within the community of J-Pop listeners…” Language, he points out, is intricately related to notions of ethnicity and race. The idea that one’s ethnicity “explains” why some are able to speak a certain language is particularly strong in Japan. Many Japanese people seem very open to the idea that their ethnicity is the main reason for being able to speak the “difficult” Japanese language, and for being less than proficient at speaking the English language. According to Andrew Moody, this has caused many to be reluctant in speaking Japanese to non-Japanese peoples.

Yet this leads to the topic of the prevalence of loan words in Japanese popular culture. Foreign loan words are related to product advertising as well as a sense of Japanese cosmopolitanism. This sense of cosmopolitanism is furthered by language entertainment shows, in both children’s educational/entertainment programs and adult programs. In the children’s programs, inter-ethnic communication takes place in both English and Japanese, with

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139 Moody is quick to point out the limits of these borrowed words within regular Japanese communication: such words don’t lead to code switching or language mixing, and usage of words in the context of popular culture tells little about the function of such language in Japanese culture.
loanwords fully nativized within dialogue. Adult programs, on the other side of the coin, seem to use Japanese as sufficient for inter-ethnic communication:

‘Language entertainment’ programs respond to a popular desire to see Japan as a cosmopolitan culture, and to see the Japanese language as a language of broader communication. In this way, these programs do not simply model English, but they model attitudes that are not frequently encountered in everyday Japanese life.¹⁴⁰

In J-pop music itself, four roles for English usage are identified: musical filler, single words phrases, clauses and sentences, and code ambiguation. This last trait, where English words may also have meaning in Japanese or Japanese words may also have meaning in English, is identified by Moody as the most innovative function of J-pop English. These four roles for English ultimately seem to contribute to J-pop’s relationship to language and cosmopolitanism:

In the case of the ‘language entertainment’ television genre and J-Pop music, it seems that the use of English responds to a desire to question the domains of the Japanese language, and to extend the use of Japanese to inter-ethnic communication…. Instead, it seems that the image of Japanese language and ethnicity presented in popular culture express the desire for a more cosmopolitan and globally influential language.¹⁴¹

Thus, the Japanese language is intricately tied into a sense of a Japanese ethnolinguistic identity, where language is closely related to a sense of ethnicity. For the most part, English is used more as filler in J-pop music contexts. Code ambiguation, however, seems to offer a break in this ethnolinguistic identity. The status of English as a “cosmopolitan” language seems to also be a model for Japanese speakers, in the elevation of the Japanese language to the status of “cosmopolitan.” It would seem fit to say that both Japanese and English are prevalent in J-pop music (including the music of those on Nico Nico), and that while notions of ethnicity may be closely related to identity of ethnicity, such notions are seen to be eroding in the wake of the desire for the Japanese language as cosmopolitan.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 220.
Language in the context of J-pop is a topic that has the potential to be another rabbit hole. The Japanese language is certainly overflowing with hierarchies based on gender, class, and, as just indicated, ethnicity. Certainly, blackness, race, and language politics are prevalent throughout the scene of Japanese hiphop.\textsuperscript{142} Also, a plethora of articles are available on the Japanese language and gender.\textsuperscript{143} I did not pursue these avenues for several reasons. First, the case studies that I focused on did not engage with the hiphop aesthetic. Second, I am not a native speaker of the Japanese language, nor is my proficiency close enough to such a level. I soon realized that my knowledge of the Japanese language was not at a high enough level where I could confidently analyze the language, including nuances, grammatical transgressions, and other subtleties that I might miss. Such a project would be for another time in the future.

\textbf{Nico Nico, Utaite, and Ryouseirui}

The covering practices of the \textit{utaite} seem to generally contrast with those of \textit{enka}. In my experience of listening to various \textit{utaite} (although I have not, by any means, listened to all \textit{utaite} on YouTube or Nico Nico), I have not (yet) encountered a noticeable assertion of \textit{kata}-esque practices. In fact, the \textit{utaite} covering of songs seems to have more in common with Western ideals; it is not unusual for an \textit{utaite} to change the words of songs, to change the musical key, or to change an associated music video. For instance, the practice of adding \textit{serifu} (spoken words used to add to the general feel of the song or for comedic affect) is not uncommon at all. This type of covering, in contrast to \textit{enka}, thus seems to avoid Japanese cultural sentiments in the way that \textit{enka} embraces those same sentiments. However, it should also be noted that Vocaloids are the performers in many of the original songs. Thus, the original singer is not actually a person; it

\textsuperscript{143} See Benor et al., Gendered Practices in Language (2002), or Okamoto, Japanese Language, Gender, and Ideology (2004).
may be because of this that *utaite* do not have notions of authenticity relatable to *enka* cover artists.

The term *ryouseirui* applies to *utaite*; it is a term that “literally translates to ‘both vocal species’, and is a Japanese term to describe people who are able to sing both genders.” The implications of this definition is an area that should be explored further. To being, this definition could be either a descriptive definition or a prescriptive definition. In other words, the definition could be a description of the fact that certain people use two voices (of men and women) or, on the other hand, is an assertion that people are limited to two voices (of men and women). Either way, the idea of the *ryouseirui* reifies the gender binary by its use of the phrase “both genders.” While acknowledging the potentialities of queer voices, it limits such voices within the gender binary. Indeed, it seems to be dependent on the binarisms associated with gender, and ultimately asserts a modernized, medicalized Western understanding of gender and sex; there seems to be no suggestion or hint of a possibility of an in-between, liminal state. Thus, while offering a limited site of resistance, it theoretically marginalizes those outside of the gender binary and, considering the context, implies essentializing notions of masculinity and femininity. It would seem that purveyors of *utaite* cover songs are, as Judith Butler pointed out in her work *Gender Trouble*, subjected to the domination of cultural intelligibility. Thus, the *ryouseirui* would seem to essentially support Butler’s theory of performativity, in that the gender binary is continued in a state of discursive propagation.

**Case Study: An Example of Binary Reification in Senka’s Record *Time for Heroes***

Although the main topic is on female *ryouseirui*, I would like to turn to the male *ryouseirui* Senka as a case study that very clearly allows us to focus on the implications of the doubly-voiced *ryouseirui* singer in relation to gender binary reification. Looking at specific

musical examples from the *ryouseirui* singer Senka’s record “Time for Heroes,” it could be said with a degree of certainty that the role the voice plays in gendered reification and identification is undeniably illustrated in Senka’s vocal performance. Ultimately, it seems that the *ryouseirui* designation, in its gendered invasion of vocal space, theoretically reifies notions of the gender binary, while the vocal performance of it is a potential site of queer resistance through musical means. Later, we will see how 96Neko and Kiisuke no Yuujin reinforce and depart from Senka’s gendered expression.

Senka is “known most prominently for his extremely flexible voice, easily being able to produce a male and female voice without using a voice changer or editing his voice…His male voice is smooth, mid range…His female voice is high and clear, and is easily one of the most outstanding of the community.”¹⁴⁵ Senka is easily designated as a *ryouseirui* within the *utaite* community.

Despite covering various other songs, Senka’s discography is comprised of only one record. It is on this record that Senka utilizes his *ryouseirui* voice in order to perform songs that feature either the male voice only, the female voice only, or both voices within the same song. The songs I’d like to focus on are “Heart Rate #0822,” “Doomsday Clock,” and “World’s End Umbrella.” Of the five songs, only “Heart Rate #0822” utilizes just the female voice. “Doomsday Clock,” on the other hand, utilizes only the male voice. “Blind Astronaut,” “Astronaut,” and “World’s End Umbrella” are all songs that utilize both voices. However, of these, “World’s End Umbrella” is the only one that substantially utilizes the female voice; both “Blind Astronaut” and “Astronaut” barely utilize the female voice (ex. less than a verse, a short line of lyrics).

“Doomsday Clock” begins with a rhythmic, rough-sounding electric guitar rift.\textsuperscript{146} Senka’s male voice then begins shortly thereafter. After a verse of singing, a drum set enters, contributing to the song a type of sound that I would relate to as a type of “metal/rock”. Overall, the song seems dominated by the rough-sounding guitar, a sound to which seems to be contributed by the drum set. To me, this sound seemed just as prominent as the voice.

In “Heart Rate #0822,” the song begins with piano, with the sound of a heart beat pulsing in the background.\textsuperscript{147} After a short introduction of chords, Senka enters with the female voice; about a quarter of the way through, percussion (what sounds like a drum set) enters, giving the music more of a sense of forward motion. It also sounds like a synthesizer is in the background, entering at various points during the song. Overall, despite the drum set, the song seems dominated by either the piano (which plays melodic material or countermelodies to the voice) or the voice.

“World’s End Umbrella” is different from either of the two former songs.\textsuperscript{148} It begins with the sound of what may be chimes or bells along with the tick-tock of a clock. A piano, a synthesizer, an orchestral sound, and a drum set are shortly thereafter added to the texture. Senka enters with his male voice for the first verse, with the orchestral sound gone. The orchestral texture comes back only during the musically informed (not lyrical informed) chorus, and is absent from verses. During the second verse, the sound of an electric guitar can be heard in the background. The third verse is characterized by a thinner texture (i.e. less instruments are playing); also, Senka continues through the song with his male voice until the end of the third


\textsuperscript{147} Originally I found this video on YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0O9QFGRYHns), which currently seems to be unavailable on YouTube due to licensing restrictions. I managed to find a clip of the song on Nico Nico, which will suffice for this discussion: http://www.nicovideo.jp/watch/sm20811220, from 2:28 to 2:59.

verse, where the music comes to a decrescendo, seemingly to an unfulfilling end. It is during the chorus which follows this sudden grand pause that Senka’s female voice is utilized. The texture changes dramatically; the orchestral sound seems to dominate this part, somehow capitalizing on the change signaled by the voice. Senka sings one more verse with the female voice with a thicker texture (including the drum set, piano, and chimes). He then reverts back to the male voice; he stays in this voice until the very end of the song, where a coda-like verse is sung with his female voice. In this last coda-like section, the texture is reminiscent to the opening texture, characterized by chimes/bells accompanied by the tick-tock sound.

Listening to these three songs, it struck me how the instrumentation and texture seemed to play an explicit role in the accompaniment of the voice. As evidenced by these songs, the female voice seemed to be associated or signaled particularly with a thinner texture. The male voice, on the other hand, seemed to be associated with a rougher-sounding instrumentation (“Doomsday Clock”). Overall, the male voice seemed to be associated with thicker textures, and although the male voice was heard with thinner textures as well, the accessibility to both thick and thin textures didn’t seem to apply to the female voice. The area of gender representation in accordance to instrumentation and sonic texture is shortly addressed in McLeod’s article about visual kei culture. A key characteristic of visual kei music is the gendered associations to instrumentation and musical style:

The visual and gender fragmentation of visual kei bands is matched by a similar variegated musical approach that reinforces the hybrid visual image and vice versa. Furthermore the combination of stereotypically masculine coded sounds (heavy metal or punk) and feminine (classical and pop) creates a hybridized cross-performance of gender both musically and visually.149

It is quite apparent that Senka’s cover of “World’s End Umbrella” fits into this musically gendered paradigm. In this specific example, we have not only gendered vocality, but gendered

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musical symbols permeating throughout the entire song. Certainly, hybridity that is often encountered in visual kei is now present in terms of gender binarisms:

Perhaps even more indicative of the hybridism at work in visual kei, however, are the fluid gender identities that juxtapose heavy, typically aggressive masculine sounding music, against a stereotypically feminine appearance and emotional lyrical content.\(^{150}\)

Of course, applying the concept of a queer voice to Senka’s music is somewhat problematic in other ways. For example, Halberstam’s analysis of Sylvester’s falsetto was supplemented by information that was available to the public eye, perhaps in large part due to Sylvester’s performing career. In this way, Halberstam was able to come to many informed conclusions about the role Sylvester’s voice had in queering gendered identity. In stark contrast, the public life of the utaite is not as rich or as varied as it ideally could be (from the perspective of a researcher). Many of these utaite are quite young (even as young as a late high schooler) and most likely live lives quite different from that of Sylvester. Very little information is known about Senka’s life; in fact, Senka is considered to be an inactive utaite, yet before such status, he was said to be a very private utaite. Little to no performance information, aside from his covered soundtracks, is found. Most of the literature on queer voices puts the voice into a much more descriptive context. The queering of voice is quite often associated with not only (auditory) performance practice, but also lifestyle, identity, and visual representation, all of which, regarding Senka, are currently unavailable to the public eye. Finally, most of the literature on queer Japanese vocal practice is linguistically oriented and not focused specifically on vocal timbre or pitch (although, admittedly, it is problematic to describe timbre with the descriptive words at our disposal at this point in history). This is another area that warrants deeper

\(^{150}\) Ibid., 320.
investigation, an area that would be described as a power technology by Jarman-Ivens and thus plays a role in the governing of the gendered voice.

Another area that could be further explored involves the ethnicized or racialized voice. Although breaking tradition with enka, one must ask the question to what extent these voices and vocalities are ethnicized. To my ear, the female voice is the voice that particularly stood out as being potentially racialized. The female voice portrayed here is very high in terms of pitch, and has a thin timbre compared to the male voice. It sounds like a head voice to me (perhaps it actually is Senka’s head voice), and seems reminiscent of a "kawaii-ized", Japanese girl stereotype.\footnote{For more information on kawaii culture, see Yano’s book Pink Globalization, 2013.} Certainly, I do not think of a mainstream, female, U.S. popular music idol when I hear this. If it is indeed a “kawaii-ized” female voice, then it would suggest that the voice may be ethnicized (again, the possibility of a racialized voice looms in the background). Then again, this is very problematic as demonstrated by Eidsheim. She points out the idea that people can “hear race” simply by expecting it to be present. In effect, the listener (in this case, me) is undergoing a sort of “performative listening.” Like “hearing” gender, I am “hearing” race. Yet at the same time, it is not completely untrue that females within Japanese culture aren’t portrayed as consciously or actively pursuing “kawaii-ized” vocality. One must consider who perpetuates gendered and ethnicized vocality, and to what extent publicized depictions of people are indeed an accurate portrayal of the people concerned.

The term ryouseirui, as discussed previously, seems to reinscribe the gender binary as well as essentializing notions of men and women. At first glance, the implications of an actual performance of the ryouseirui might seem quite threatening to scholars such as Jarman-Ivens and Schlichter. The performance of a two-gendered voice undermines the queering capacity of the voice, and might eventually invite gender power structures to the vocal space, structures that...
some consider to be oppressive. One might wonder, as was the case with Elvis’s appropriation of Big Mama Thornton’s masculinity, what possible appropriation might *ryouseirui* be making when constructing these gendered voices.

On the other hand, one should consider, as Jarman-Ivens does concerning the queer voice, the technologies used in this analysis or that otherwise might be available. The fact that for this analysis an external technology (i.e. a recording) was used leads to the conclusion, to a certain degree, of a denaturalization of the voice. And, since this record is sung by an actual person, another aspect that should be considered is the effect a live performance of this might have. If performed with only an internal technology of the voice (for example, Senka singing the *ryouseirui* without the use of an electronic mediator, or an external technology), a further denaturalization of the voice may occur, perhaps to a degree greater than that posed by the record. Perhaps it wouldn’t be a far cry from Butler’s observation of drag’s subversion of the gender binary; to Schlichter, it might be said that Senka’s performance of the *ryouseirui* is a prime example of the subversion of Butler’s theory of gender performativity and the denaturalization of the voice. Yet we are at an impasse, unable to make any further conclusions, mainly due to the lack of information (and possibly performance) regarding the performer.

Katherine Meizel talks of approaching vocality from a more holistic viewpoint: “Were all of its applications to be integrated, the idea of vocality could offer a way to talk about the voice beyond simply language or timbre or practice, and encourage us to consider *everything* that is being vocalized.”152 Again, this idea of pursuing vocality as comprehensive, including everything from language to sound produced by the voice, is a somewhat overwhelming goal for which to aspire. Yet the role that the voice plays in our society, the paradoxical and subtle nature of the

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voice, almost demands such an approach. Meizel writes: “Discourses about the singing voice have long been tied up in discourses of power, within a set of interlaced histories – of European modernity, imperialism, and the institutionalized study of humanity.” Citing an example, Meizel relates vocal imperialism to the expansion of the British Empire. She asserts that, much like race, vocality is socially determined. Meizel offers the idea of multivocality, where many social voices used by an individual are vital to the individual’s identity. I would argue that Senka – and perhaps to a further extent other ryouseirui, as I will show in the next couple sections – has created a new vocality in order to better fulfill his internet identity. His presence on the internet seems to have allowed his development of another social voice and ultimately his own development of multivocality.

Other ryouseirui, however, may be even more subversive than Senka. For example, the utaite 96Neko, known for her low-ranged vocals, has been considered to be a ryouseirui “trap” as opposed to a ryouseirui like that of Senka. This status as a “trap” indicates the fact that her vocalizations are not always clearly “male” or “female”. Her vocals are instead sometimes identified as a peculiar “in-between”, where listeners are not sure of her gender. This is further compounded by the appearance of her androgynous avatar. Thus, this type of vocality which is neither distinctly a “male or female voice” may prove to be even more subversive than Senka’s performance as a ryouseirui.

**Case Study: 96neko**

A relatively established utaite, 96neko has multiple albums released and is known for her live-stream web shows via Nico Nico. She is a ryouseirui that is well known for her lower vocal range, and, indeed, it seems that she markets her status as a ryouseirui to appeal to audiences old and new. The song “E, aa sou! (Ib version)” is an example of her ryouseirui voice(s). However,

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153 Ibid.
perhaps more noticeable is the way she is visually depicted in certain videos. Her avatar is seemingly androgynous, perhaps contributing to her *ryouseirui* persona as an embodiment of both “male” and “female” voices, and thus both genders (or, in another sense, neither genders). Her music video “Ah, It’s a Wonderful Cat’s Life” (“Aa, subarashii nyansei desu”) is an example of this depiction. A parody of the original, 96neko’s avatar greatly contrasts the feminized depiction of the original woman role, not only in terms of appearance, but also in their depicted actions.

To what extent is this identity or persona a construction based on the premise of capitalistic ventures? Perhaps this would indicate a lack of authentic identity: 96neko’s gendered performances are possibly only present and active within her online or singing activity, and may be otherwise absent in all other aspects of her life. More detailed ethnographic research would be necessary in order to ascertain this possibility. However, it might be best to resituate these gendered performances within the context of what I would call a “business personality.” Although they may not be present and part of her “authentic” identity (assuming one exists), 96neko’s activity within her singing career may be seen as a very specific part of a multiplicitous identity. It is perhaps not very difficult to accept the idea that all people form “business identities”, or behaviors and personas contingent on a work environment. Certainly, changes in environment and/or social position make the idea of multiplicitous identities possible. Thus, 96neko’s gendered performance and identity might be best thought of as an identity constructed within her singing context, informed by factors of video popularity, advertisement, and global capitalism. Especially in the contemporary world, it seems difficult to imagine social contexts completely divorced from auspices of capitalistic practices.
Case Study: Kisuke no Yuujin

Another *ryouseirui*, also known best for her “male” voice, is the *utaite* Kisuke no Yuujin. Kisuke no Yuujin is known to be a particularly good example of a female *ryouseirui*, due to her flexible voice and ability to sing many different characters. The music video "Tokyo Dennou Tantei Dan" exemplifies this ability very well, where seven different character voices are depicted. Yet this status of *ryouseirui*, while no doubt integral to her singing success, may not always be received positively. Specifically, the extent to which Kisuke no Yuujin’s identity may be threatened or impacted negatively is called into question in her cover song of “E, aa sou!” The version she sings is actually a parody of the original, and while it maintains many musical similarities, the subject matter of the lyrics are changed to address the gender obscurity experienced by those who hear her voice. This has led me to believe that her most natural vocalization is actually more akin to a “male” voice, and not a “female” voice as some may believe. This seems to contrast with 96neko, who, as far as I can tell, has not responded in a way at all comparable, but has instead seemingly embraced her *ryouseirui* status wholly. It would seem that 96neko’s most natural vocalization is “female” enough to not bother her.

Thus, how might we read Kisuke no Yuujin’s proclamation of being female in “E, aa sou!” as a response to audiences’ reading of her gender? It would seem that the voices she produces as a *ryouseirui* is, to some degree, connected to her gendered speaking voice and gender identity. The way that this is shown is through the dissonance that audiences identify between her voice and her gender. It could then be argued that a very real presence of non-commercialized gendered identity is possible in the voices of *ryouseirui* regardless of monetary incentives offered by a niche market. A direct link to identity can thus be made between Kisuke
no Yuujin’s gender and her *ryousetrui* voice, and the idea of what might be considered non-commercialized gendered identity is possible within 96neko’s music as well.
CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS

Vocality: Further Considerations

While I feel that I have adequately investigated the realm of vocality for the purposes of this document, many more avenues of scholarship should be pursued. For example, language in general is an area of study that should be further pursued. The Japanese language (perhaps one of many languages that is explicitly demonstrated as a power technology) is hierarchized, containing built-in expressions and grammatical forms that are used depending on social status (this social status may be affected by age, gender, or work position) as well as various social settings. Inoue addresses the role that Japanese schoolgirl speech had in relation to (male intellectual) Japanese anxiety of a rapidly modernizing (read Westernizing) society, as well as the type of resistance it offered in a male-dominated society.154 Indeed, phallogocentrism is a topic of study that should not be overlooked, especially within the context of the Japanese language. And although these particular examples did not involve explicit changes to lyrics in order to reinscribe gender hierarchies, this potential issue should be considered in the analysis of ryouseirui performances. More generally, the study of vocality as an intricate part of identity and culture should be further investigated: “In sum, vocality encompasses the act of vocalization and the profoundly complex social world in which it resonates – it is a set of vocal sounds, practices, techniques, and meanings that factor in the making of culture.”155

Another area of study that should be pursued is that concerning the difference between major record labels and YouTube or Nico Nico. While it is true that popular utaite may release their records through a major record label, it should be questioned to what degree of influence such labels may have on the utaite, in terms of image, sound production, and marketing

155 Ibid.
techniques. The influence major record labels have on the construction of gender ideologies should not be underestimated, and should be accounted for in terms of the utaite music distribution. Certainly, Foucauldian thought would contend that sexuality and gender are inextricably intertwined in the reification of socio-economic class; in what ways might this be different or similar within the contexts of Japanese culture and conceptions of socio-economic class? On the other hand, perhaps the fact that the main distribution of these songs was/is via the internet; in contrast to a recording studio, the websites of YouTube and Nico Nico Douga are, to my knowledge, free for use (though there is certainly a business to both that is beyond the scope of this paper). Though still limited to those with the financial and technological means, the Internet does seem to potentially obviate many of the structural peculiarities potentially found within major record label companies.

**Reflections and Directions for Future Work**

Mezur’s conclusion on kabuki suggests the efficacy of resistance of gendered performance:

> Using the theory of the performativity of gender acts, I suggest that onnagata perform ambiguous, multiple, and transformative roles that have the potential to subvert the idea of a fixed and abiding gender identity.\(^{156}\)

Similarly, I have argued that the performance of Nico Nico players have the capacity to also be ambiguous, multiple, and transformative, and to subvert fixed notions of gender identity. Additionally, instead of necessarily subscribing to and reinforcing a fixed gender binary, I suggest that, like Mezur’s onnagata performers,\(^{157}\) **ryouseirui** create their own range of genders through visual representation and vocality. Mezur points out the fluidity of gender and flexibility

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of the marked body: “...I suggest not only that onnagata gender performance is ambiguous, but also that the human body is gender ambiguous.” To sum, it seems apparent that in the case of ryouseirui, the body, through both vocality and visual representation, has the potential for ambiguous gendered performances and thus gender ambiguous bodies.

These case studies show that ideas about gender, ones that have followed the development of Western thought, are not necessarily universal or modern in the Hegelian sense. Increasingly, gender binaries are seen to be slowly deconstructed, such as through Germany’s inclusion of a third gender option on birth certificates. This unraveling of the Western binaries is slow, though, and only shows a relatively limited space that has been initiated by one Western government. This study of the ryouseirui hopefully contributes to some degree such initiation of non-Western societies, albeit through popular culture scholarship and not bureaucracy.

Japanese notions of gender that the ryouseirui draw from are clearly based on ideas of the gender binary. The very fact that a ryouseirui uses “male” and “female” voices reifies the idea that one has only these types of voices at their disposal, or that these are the only voices that should be used. This gender binary is further supported by the presence of strongly felt Japanese traditions in Japanese society, where men and women are seen to occupy discrete gender roles and cultural spheres. Although spaces have always existed for non-mainstream gender expression in Japan, the hegemony of the idealized, heteronormative ideology continues to pervade.

However, the gendered performances of the ryouseirui could indeed be considered as queer (in the broadest sense of “deviating from the norm”) and thoroughly disruptive to gender binaries. Using “both voices” is not, as far as I know, a normal trait that is expected in everyday life, and is not consonant with heteronormative ideology. This vocal performance clearly

158 Ibid., 47.
undermines essentialist notions of the gendered voice, and contributes to existing scholarship’s conclusions on the performativity of the queer voice.

Although the ryouseirui themselves are seemingly central to these music videos, they are not the only key players that contribute to the finished product. Often, the singer, songwriter, track mixer, visual artist, and producer are all roles fulfilled by different people. Continued investigation on the relationship between ryouseirui and the others involved in the finished product would be paramount to understanding any structure experienced in the industry.

The role of the video sharing websites should be further explored, too, especially in terms of their respective online communities. Demographic information on users would possibly shed light on the type of people that comprise such communities. Further ethnographic research is necessary for a better understanding of online communities’ discourse within the context of the ryouseirui, with a distinction between English speaking communities and Japanese speaking communities addressed as well.

Ultimately, these case studies of the ryouseirui show how culture, as well as gender, sells. It is not, though, a performance that strictly fulfills traditional notions of the gender binary, but also serves to disrupt purportedly naturalized articulations of gendered voices. It could be seen, then, that globalized commercial practices contribute to and legitimize gender transgression. However, only time will tell whether ryouseirui singers are selling gendered performances or if their gendered performances are selling.
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{Words of Songs} translations of anime & game & doujin lyrics. “Vocaloid Original Song –


