

POSTHUMAN IN JAPANESE POPULAR CULTURE: VIRTUAL IDOL HATSUNE MIKU

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Abstract

Idol is a popular young entertainer in Japan. The development and changes of idol's generation are pretty fast because of the fan's demands for perfect idols that meet their desire. The strategy to fulfill the demands of the idol which have deficiency (as a human) is to make virtual idols. Their presence started to replace idol, which means virtual idol is part of the product of Japanese's popular culture. This research is intended to describe the virtual idol's posthuman value as a virtual product that mixed with human reality. The object of this research is Hatsune Miku's concert Magical Mirai 2016. She is one of the virtual idol who is still developing until now. This research used cultural studies approach and cybersemiotic method (Piliang, 2010) to read Hatsune Miku's posthuman value. The result of the study shows Hatsune Miku has posthuman value manifested on her appearance and voice. The posthuman values illustrated on Miku are her appearance that shows Japanese young women ideal body and her voice which can be controlled by anyone who has the software.

Keywords: posthuman, virtual idol, hatsune miku, Japanese popular culture.

Introduction

Virtual idol is one of idol's developments in Japanese popular culture. The Japanese idol agency spent a lot of time and money to produce an idol because the agency has to train them in ways to sing, dance and speak to the public and media. But the agency need to keep their idol young and submissive to them and the fans, so they have to renew their idol by producing new younger idols almost every year. In case of virtual idol, the creation saves lots of time, because the agency doesn't need to train them at all. The agency only has to create them however they want and in no times they can makes an ideal idol. Another advantage of virtual idol is that she is an animation character. According to McLeod (2015) fictional character like Astro Boy, Sailor Moon, Hello Kitty, and Gundam are more long lasting than human celebrity in Japan.

Since the first three-dimensional virtual idol's creation in 1995 by one of the biggest idol agency in Japan, another agency or producer tried to develop their own virtual idol. Until now, one of the long-lasting virtual idol is Hatsune Miku. She stays in the entertainment world longer than her predecessors. Hatsune Miku was born in 2007 as

Crypton Future Media Inc. voice synthesizer software avatar. Miku was drawn as a two dimensional 16th year old young girl weighing 42 kg and heighten 158 cm. In the next development, Miku' fans were getting creative and made her as a three-dimensional character, with the intention to make her sing and dance in virtual world. Looking at this development, Crypton decided to take a new step to popularize Miku, which was making Miku appeared as a guest singer in a Japan's big anime concert. In the concert, Miku was the only virtual singer present (anisama). The good response the audience gave makes Crypton step on to the next step. Together with Bandai, Crypton held solo concert for Miku which started in 2009 and they still held the concert until 2017. They not only held the concert in Japan but also in other regions in Asia and America.

The solo concert made for Miku who is a fictional character illustrates one of the human's efforts to create perfect human or other creatures, which are free from physic limitation or weakness that a human has. In this case is changing idol that need renewal every year with virtual idol which last longer than idol. This effort shows that virtual idol, especially Hatsune Miku, has posthuman values in her.

This paper explained Miku's posthuman values using cybersemiotic disclosed by Piliang (2010). Hatsune Miku Magical Mirai 2016 concert is the object in this paper and the values are seen from Miku's appearance and stage action.

Literature Review

Semiotic explained us the relationship between sign with the meaning of something (Danesi, 2011). That is when the sign is within the real world. But within cyberspace, sign manipulation happened a lot which means a sign is not representing or indicating reality, but becoming the reality itself (Piliang, 2010). Therefore, sign readings in cyberspace is called cybersemiotic.

Within cyberspace, according to Piliang (2010), there are seven signs that can be read; *creative sign*, cyberspace provide spaces where sign, symbol, and image are developed independently, unbound, relatively free, where it is possible to spill every fund, capacity, and individual or group creativity. *Sign multiplicity*, signs (index, icon, symbol) within cyberspace tend to develop limitless, because technology system's ability to create artificial form. *Ironic sign*, within internet features and facebook, people displayed their identity as if it is the truth when they actually using other people's identity. *Anonym sign*, the nature of anonymity of this sign is probably because within cyberspace anyone can display themselves as character(s) that portray a chosen role close to their own selves or not close all. *Floating sign or signified*, because of the wide space and possibility provided to limitlessly create a character and identity, signs and identity within cyberspace is very fluid, dynamic, wild and floating which makes it possible to move around wildly. *Simulation sign*, a sign is simulative because it is not referring to a reference outside itself but referencing itself. *Schizophrenia sign*, within the language of cyberspace schizophrenia, unstably, nonstop, and irregularly, every signifier can be used to state a concept or signified.

When some of the signs can be seen in an object, then the object is within cyberspace and cybersemiotic approach can be used to analyze it.

One of the topic discussed within cybersemiotic is about posthuman. Posthuman discuss about things related to the human and technology's relationship. According to Pepperell (2009) the line between machine and human has become blur because now human depends do much on machine. This can be seen especially in medical development with the use of pacemaker, gen manipulation, and many more. This means a machine can be used to resolve human organs problem, in this case by prolong life with the help of machine.

Posthuman is one of the step the human do to create a creature higher than the human. According to Piliang (2010) a posthuman can resolve the biologic, brain, mental, dan psychic limitation. He also mentioned one of the method to resolve the human body limitation, especially death, is by replacing the body with another body or artificial body which cannot get old or die.

Research Method

In this paper Hatsune Miku Magical Mirai 2016 concert is used as the object of the analysis. First I read the cyberspace signs disclosed by Yasraf Amir Piliang that can be found within the concert. The result of the reading is that Miku and the concert has some signs that can be found within cyberspace, which means cybersemiotic can be used to analyze the concert. The reading of the signs is done by looking at Hatsune Miku's appearance and stage actions. After I found the cyberspace signs, the next step is finding the posthuman values manifested within Miku by reading her appearance and stage action in the concert.

Discussion

Cyberspace signs can be found within Hatsune Miku Magical Mirai concert. First, *creative sign*. Miku is a virtual idol which lives within virtual world and has no body outside her world. To make her appeared in the concert, which is having a body in reality world, is making her appear as a hologram with a transparent glass as the container. Miku is a three dimensional character in this concert, so instead of watching him inside of the screen, the audience was made to see her standing on the stage without any screen standing side by side her band. The transparent glass worked so well to make the line between virtual world and reality world blur.

The creative idea of making Miku as three dimensional character came from the Miku fans community within internet world. At first the songs made by the user (Vocaloid producer) of Miku's software are uploaded as video with Miku's illustration or two dimensional animation. Not long after the release of the software, Yu Higuchi create software named Miku Miku Dance (MMD) at 2008. MMD is a free software where anyone who has it can make Miku dance and sing in three dimensional style. That is how Miku started to appear as three dimensional character.

The next cyberspace sign that can be found is simulation sign. Miku's identity is not referred to anyone in reality world. Even if Miku is getting her voice from a voice actor donator, she has no relation with the voice actor anymore because with the hand of the software user she can speak and sing anything without the need of having the voice actor saying or singing it. In fact, it is possible that her voice actor cannot sing the songs made for Miku. The inability to sing it can be seen from two sides, first is that some of Miku's song has very fast tempo or high pitches that a human cannot reach. Second is the voice donated to Miku is now fully Miku's own. Even if the voice actor donated her voice, after the process they have very different character of voice and they do not sound the same at all.

From all the cyberspace signs found within Miku's concert, some of the posthuman values can be seen. Another posthuman values is coming from Miku's body. She was created with some additional information which are her age (16th year old) and her height (158 cm). Even if she is a fictional character, to be an ideal idol or young Japanese female it is one of the important point.

Idol is created to have ideal body that is acceptable in media, it is also the reason why an agency have to change their idol periodically. The average age of female idol can be seen from AKB48 all female idol group (AKB48 member). They started from the age 14th until 26th, where there are 37 members with the age of over 20 years old and 57 member under 20 years old. Comparison of the numbers shows that the media prefer the under 20 years old idols. The underage girls have myth about purity and virginity in female which the media need. An idol needs to be pure and virgin. With this, I can conclude that Miku has the ideal age of an idol which is 16th years old, and what more is she will never age.



Picture 1. Miku's costumes

Another thing to be noticed in the concert is Miku's costumes shown in picture 1. Within the concert Miku wore six different costumes. Five of them are top with short skirt and top knees shock, top knees leather boot, and long pants. Two costumes are school girl model clothes shown in the bottom part of picture 1. School girl clothes bring the image of underage girl which means pureness and virginity as mentioned above. The image is highly related to idol. Short skirt is also one of the costume an idol

often sees wearing on stage because long legs is also one of the ideal part of idol or young girl in Japan.



Picture 2. Miku's costume changing

The costume changing for an idol and especially for solo idol needs some times because they need to go backstage and changing as fast as they could but it needs to be perfect. An interlude is needed in a concert to do that. Miku as a virtual idol, didn't need much time to get her costume and make up change. All she needed to do is stand still on the stage and with the help of visual technology she could get change in a blink of eyes. She got changed her costume and make up in a way that any idol cannot do. This could happen because Miku is made by the computer bits and in no time changing can happen to her.

The last thing that needs to be noticed is how Miku sang and danced without and interlude in the concert. In *Magical Mirai 2016*, Miku started the concert by singing seven songs nonstop, even just for taking a sip of water. Her voice didn't crack at all. Miku is an empty body, a body without organs that couldn't make her tired or dripping a sweat. Her body was free from the weakness a human have. With that, there was no worries of something bad happen to her body in the middle of the concert.

Conclusions

Technology advancement makes the line between reality world and virtual world blur. Both of the worlds have similarity because virtual world was made by imitating the reality world. Even if they have similarity, within virtual world anything can get manipulated. When virtual world imitates the real world, they spice things up in the virtual world that made whatever appeared in the virtual world exceeds the reality.

It is the same with virtual idol Hatsune Miku. Miku is a fictional character which got manipulated many times in the virtual world so she could resemble an idol. Miku as a creature made in virtual world and made by computer bits does not have body organs which in posthuman views are seen as problematic things. Things that can make a human get sick and die.

Miku is free from any of that. Free from anything that makes every idol agency never stop looking for younger idols. The aging and rebelling of the idol are the things that make them never stop looking. Miku will always be a young pure and virgin female virtual idol. Moreover she cannot be touched so she will always be clean. The young pure, virgin and cleanness are the ideal that an idol has to have. Miku also does not

have her own mind so she will never try to rebel to the agency. She also has a fictional or animation appearance that in Japan is her fame will be long lasting than any human celebrity. By Miku's character and appearance she is the perfect or ideal idol every idol agency wants.

Miku's concert also shows that she was not only able to stand in the virtual world but also in the real world, standing in front of thousands of the audiences mediated by a transparent glass which blur the line of their world. The analysis of the concert shows that Miku has posthuman values that show her advantages from the idol that she imitates. Miku can be an ideal idol easily, which is an idol that never ages and rebel on anyone. She also can compete with idol with her concert that periodically held every year in Japan or outside Japan. Miku is a posthuman virtual idol which exceeds those she imitates.

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