This quarter, I am also taking the class MUSIC 122D (Analysis for Performance). That class espouses the view of scores as a “set of structural and emotional potentials that the performer grapples with and fulfills,”¹ and prioritizes the idea that music is as much a performance art as an analytical pursuit. While reading this chapter of *Artful Design*, the discussion about personal music performance reminded me a lot of the Jeffrey Swinkin text quoted above and the principles of MUSIC 122D. In particular, on page 94, there is a quote by Nicholas Cook that says “we seem to have forgotten that music is a performance art at all, and more than that, we seem to have conceptualized it in such a way that we could hardly think of it that way even if we wanted to…” And this is a valid concern! There must be a reason people still go to concerts, though the audio quality is almost guaranteed to be better on a nice set of speakers in the comfort of your own home. There must be some reason we prefer keeping “the human in the interaction loop,” as interview-Ge says on page 89.

Swinkin writes that even if “the digital medium potentially makes anonymous and disembodies the actual performer, it also, paradoxically, potentially creates for [them] a virtual presence; it paints a picture of bodily action.”² This captured my attention; when I listen to music, I rarely picture the singer, instrumentalists, or sound engineers. However, there certainly does seem to be a human element whenever there is music playing, whether for active listening or for background stimulation. If I’m alone and want to feel safe or secure, I’ll put on music, and this somehow serves the same purpose as having another person in the room with me. There are logical extremes to the idea of personification of music. Take, for instance, Vocaloids like

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Hatsune Miku. Vocaloids are essentially singers in a box; a user can input desired text or expressions and a Vocaloid synthesizes the output in the style of a famous voice persona. Hatsune Miku, pictured below, became a particularly famous Vocaloid persona.

She became so famous, in fact, that there were live concerts with her animated persona projected onto a specialized glass screen as the performer. This, then, is the logical extreme of Swinkin’s point: the idea of a persona being constructed in the listener’s mind became a literal persona for visual perception on a stage.

What purpose does Hatsune Miku serve? (And what happened to my life in order for me to write that sentence in a pseudo-essay?) As interview-Ge mentions on page 91, there is a social aspect to music. Concerts are social activities! Music can serve as another person in the room! Hatsune Miku is the embodiment of the mental persona we construct when listening to music! Hatsune Miku is also, in some sense, an expressive toy. All of her fans know she’s not real, but as Principle 2.7 on page 99 emphasizes, Hatsune Miku is designed to lower inhibition. Like auto-
tune, Vocaloid music isn’t to be taken extremely seriously, and users could synthesize anything they wanted with the software as an inhibition inhibitor. Miku’s youth also adds to the levity of the experience. Something about her being frozen in her age (not unlike the inhabitants of Aaru in the video essay) makes the audience embrace their inner innocence and harkens back to more idyllic days. Perhaps her concerts, like Aaru, are a space to escape the harrowing and serious nature of everyday life.

Somehow, Hatsune Miku manages to both demonstrate and flout the point of Swinkin’s Performative Analysis: there certainly is a mentally constructed persona, but whether that persona can be considered a performer is not so clear. However, as good design principles suggest, she is a logical extreme: she, just barely, keeps the human in the loop.