SUBJECTIVITY AND HYBRIDITY IN THE AGE OF INTERACTIVE INTERNET MEDIA: THE MUSICAL PERFORMANCES OF CHARICE PEMPENGCO AND ARNEL PINEDA

Christi-Anne Castro

They are modern because they have been marked by their hybrid, creole origins . . . because they have struggled to escape their status as commodities and the position within the cultural industries it specifies, and because they are produced by artists whose understanding of their own position relative to the racial group and of the role of art in mediating individual creativity with social dynamics is shaped by a sense of artistic practice as an autonomous domain either reluctantly or happily divorced from the everyday lifeworld. – Paul Gilroy[1]

ABSTRACT

This paper examines hybrid subjectivity in the performances by and in the reception of musical artists utilizing the technology of interactive Internet media. It focuses on the career trajectories of the popular Filipino music performers Charice Pempengco and Arnel Pineda, taking into account how their transnational presence and dissemination through internet media communities affect perceptions of locality, nationality and race.

Keywords: *Philippines, popular music, hybridity, subjectivity, new media*

More than forty years ago, Umberto Eco speculated in *Travels in Hyperreality* that the United States was a country "obsessed with realism, where, if a reconstruction is to be credible, it must be absolutely iconic, a perfect likeness, a 'real' copy of the reality being represented" (1967, 1986:4). Though the focus of his interest was holography, his observation applies remarkably well to the age of

digital consumerism in which reproductions replicate endlessly with no corruption of the perceived original. More significantly, the marketplace for these reproductions is global in scale. The technological cloning of digital bytes, accessible anywhere with computer portals and network infrastructure, allows for an unprecedented circulation of audiovisual artifacts among millions of worldwide users. The social experience of hyperspace is indeed Eco's hyperreality evolved several times over, and the impact of the internet age on music is nothing short of a global marvel.[2] As Michael Ayers cogently declared regarding music on the Internet, "There is a unique relationship that has been forged within cyberspace surrounding this art form, and no other art form to date can claim having as much of an impact on as many social spheres" (2006: 2).

In beginning to understand how popular music is produced, received and comprehended in the age of hyperspace, Appadurai's well known theorization of various "scapes" is appropriate to consider—in particular the technoscape and mediascape, fused together and inextricable from one another (1990). If these "scapes" are understood as theoretical vantage points for analysis, as well as the theoretical infrastructure for the circulation of digital replications, then one may be in a better position to understand the behaviors of hyperspace citizenry. The present audiences for popular music in the digital realm—a substratum of the mediascape whose culture is dependent upon the spread of peer-to-peer technology—are also active participants who both consume and produce sound and imagery (read media) through the use of technology. The users of "new media" (i.e., Web 2.0—a descriptive term for the highly interactive stage of internet use that is typically characterized by sites with user-generated content) belong to different classes and races, and they use the internet to gain access to a global mainstream constructed from the many interlaced subcultures of hyperspace.[3]

Extending from a supposition that subcultures on the internet parallel those in physical space—as virtual communities with their own value hierarchies and their own modes of cooperation and opposition to perceived mainstream culture (Hebdige 1979)—I think it useful to adopt Peter Webb's theorization of "milieu cultures" (2007: 30). Internet milieus extend from traditional notions of subcultures to encompass the "fluid, and changing nature of particular types of music making and associations with it" (ibid.). However, "milieu" is less specifically descriptive and more flexible

than subculture or even "scene" (Cohen 1999), in that it gives more weight to process and to the movement between cultural rootedness and the conceptual spaces of "in-between." Homologies of the physical world, such as modes of dress and other markers of appearance, become irrelevant, and Internet milieus are less distinguished by a recognizable membership. The milieu is an ambiguous space into which people venture virtually in order to participate in a shared culture, but the users may have no other relationship with one another, may participate or view sites in the milieu once or several hundred times, and may count in the millions (cumulatively) when all is said and done. The milieu may be defined by one heavily used site, such as Facebook (www.facebook.com) or YouTube (www.youtube.com) or it may include dozens of sites devoted to a particular topic or activity.

Building from this foundation, in this article I propose that the musical circuitry, found in the matrix of "new media" (Web 2.0) and traditional media (television and recording artifacts), represents an interactive milieu culture that is significantly different than previously theorized techno/mediascapes in its scope, speed of transmission and accessibility.[4] By its very nature, this Internet milieu is constituted by and constitutive of hybrid subjectivities, a condition that is very much a continuation of the past, but that is altered—even furthered—by the changing possibilities of mass communication. As Néstor García-Canclini remarked in regards to Latin America, with its long history of mixing, "We have had the pride of being postmodern for centuries" (1995: 6). Likewise, global participation in various Internet milieus reveals not a revolution of hybridization through technology, but, rather, the very inherent nature of hybridity in everyday life.

Hybridity as a term acknowledges the mixing of race and/or culture fundamental to formulations of syncretism, *mestizaje* and creolization. While earlier understandings of hybridity were tied to the biological mixing inseparable from colonialism, and so were viewed as largely negative, newer uses of the term locate agency and power inversion in hybridity, where subjugated peoples appropriate facets of colonial culture for their own ends and change that culture through their own insertions (Bhabha 1994, Young 1995). García-Canclini describes hybridization as the result of three processes: "The breakup and mixing of the collections that used to organize cultural systems, the deterritorialization of symbolic processes, and the expansion of impure genres" (1995: 207). These

processes are certainly facilitated by the technological and social makeup of the Internet milieu as much as with other modes of mass communication, but I will argue that Web 2.0 pushes much further as a result of the fragmentation of subjectivity which accompanies more democratic usage.

Whose subjectivities, then, are represented? As a result of the convoluted and prolific history of global contact, hybridity seems applicable to a variety of "unbound serial subjectivities," including the postcolonial cosmopolitan, the globetrotting diasporic, the commuting worker, the militant nationalist and even the suddenly enfranchised indigenous (Anderson 1998). These liberating archetypes are fleshed out on the Internet by actual users posting their own recordings, connecting with others, and presenting their subjectivities through streaming clips of audio and video. Their subjectivities—as self-representations and as text for others to decipher—stem from avatars that are something in between the uncountable (unbound) ideations and countable (bound) physical bodies of Anderson's imagined community (1991, 1998). We may not see and hear the world through their eyes and ears, but away from the obvious boundaries of the physical world, we have unprecedented access to their points of view as mediated by multiple technologies of recording, processing and diffusion. While it is clear there are countless users (and subjectivities) one can examine, this paper will focus on endemic hybridity in the Internet age as readable in the sounds and images of transnational artists Charice Pempengco and Arnel Pineda and speculate on whether this hybridity can transcend long-held perceptions about nationality and race.[5]

Though Web 2.0 is an inherently hybrid space, nationality and race remain important facets of identity, as well as theoretical lenses. Despite the user-end architecture that gives cohesiveness in appearance to social networking sites and music/video viewing sites, the value-laden content is cobbled together by millions of different users for whom national identity is still relevant.[6] Further, multiple nationalities, languages and cosmopolitan users are not the only aspects of the hybridity of global interactive sites. The milieus also exhibit multiple levels of subjectivity—another kind of hybrid subjectivity that results from how information about the self proliferates through the Internet. When people are physically apart and their interactions temporally different (as is always the case outside of live online chat), subjectivity is presented and read as

dependent upon media. Contributors are avatars who present their positions vis-à-vis photos, videos, music, and typed/spoken commentary. Their subjectivities are pushed squarely to the forefront as personal experience translated into digital bytes, and the modes of recording experience are often equally highlighted. Cellphone pictures are grainy, and their video is low quality, dimly lit, and quite shaky. Videos shot of television programs often reveal the television itself. However these artifacts are gathered, they are always edited in some way, sometimes by the original user, and sometimes by others. From the receiver's end these artifacts are framed (literally in hypertext frames) by a website's interface or by their own personal computer software, but the framing is only the uppermost level of subjectivity imposed on the digital artifact. There are various scenarios, but all involve multiple mediations that impact the reading of subjectivity. Internet content jumbles perspective in ways that the products of industry and government do not, precisely because the viewpoints of users are so varied, their modes of presentation are so mixed, and they themselves do not operate under the same hegemonic conditions of profit and/or nationalism. Hence, viewers read hybrid or multiple subjectivity in the quality and appearance of the product, the obvious editing of the product, the attribution of the product to a particular username or avatar, and the knowledge that emailed links and links posted on social networking sites are not portals to an originary source, but rather connections to a representational iteration. Media and multiple mediations are foregrounded in every interaction.

Along with a consideration of hybridity in subjectivity, I build on earlier scholarship about Filipinos, popular music and globalization.[7] In a panel at the Society for Ethnomusicology Conference in 2001, Arlene Chongson interrogated mimesis as a theoretical framework for understanding Filipino music artists who became popular among Filipinos as imitators of famous American stars like Elvis Presley and Perry Como. In the same panel, I explored the productions of *Miss Saigon* in London, New York City and Manila as transnational performances, where Filipino artists like Lea Salonga enacted hybrid identities, and race and ethnicity were loosed from their essentialist moorings. I reengage with these realms of inquiry, asserting that the performance of American popular music in new media by non-American artists is a byproduct of hybridity, and, sometimes, an act of strategic mimesis in a dynamic milieu culture. Two Filipino music performers, Charice Pempengco and

Arnel Pineda, owe their launches to videos posted on user-generated content sites on the Internet.

Though Pineda and Pempengco began essentially as traditional performers—plying their trade before live audiences —their success stemmed from videos on the site YouTube that accumulated millions of total hits (viewer connections).[8] While Charice Pempengco had already had television experience before she became a global star, the public for the ABS-CBN network was limited to the Philippines. Her videos on YouTube gave her access to an Internet audience that eventually numbered in the millions, which then translated into a global television public (as a result of globally franchised and other internationally aired programs) and an even greater proliferation of Internet videos that replicated her television performances.

Television has long been discussed as a medium of globalization and mediator of performances. Through the franchising of programs overseas and international channels that cater to expatriates (for instance, the subscription-based Filipino Channel or the U.S. Military Television Network), globalization is evident in the heterogeneity of consumers of U.S. programs (though many of these programs may be dubbed in local languages). Television tenders a one-way transaction with centralized production and a passive consumer public. In comparison, the Internet is less easy to generalize from a performance and reception standpoint, since source and simultaneity of viewing are relatively irrelevant, and production is literally scattered throughout the globe. Yet the Internet can build what Boyd calls "networked publics" through the mediating properties of persistence, searchability, replicability and invisible audiences (2008:126). The material persists over time, is searchable by those with intent, is infinitely replicable and allows for nontraditional reception. Hence, audiences accumulate over time rather than gather for an event. Moreover, the networked public has greater power of choice and greater potential for participation. With a webcam and an Internet connection, not only can anyone respond to performances, but they can also create their own in specialized arenas like YouTube and in social networking sites.

The ability to freely participate in a global site like YouTube has been crucial for both Pempengco and Pineda, though neither is responsible for the posting of their own videos.[9] Both artists were vocalists with a performance history before they became Internet

celebrities, but their trajectories were limited. In late 2005, when she was only thirteen years old, Pempengco appeared on a Filipino television talent show called Little Big Star. She placed third in the competition, but her career stalled. Her website offers a quaint encapsulation of how she became internationally known:

> Thinking her singing career was over, a discouraged Charice set her sights instead on becoming a nurse. Ironically, a nursing student with the online name FalseVoice stepped in and resurrected her career. The videos he posted on YouTube of her performances on Little Big Star and other shows received millions of hits and made Charice an Internet sensation.[10]

As a result of this exposure, in 2007 Pempengco received an invitation from Ten Songs Productions to record several songs and another to compete in the South Korean talent show Star King. It was her bravado performance of "And I Am Telling You" from the musical *Dreamgirls* in South Korea, uploaded to YouTube and viewed millions of times, that caught the attention of U.S. talk show host Ellen DeGeneres and music producer David Foster. DeGeneres introduced Pempengco as a guest "found on YouTube." Her encore of "And I Am Telling You" evinced a rousing standing ovation. In 2008, Oprah Winfrey, on her internationally franchised talk show, included Charice in a segment on talented child performers; she stunned the audience with her rendition of Whitney Houston's "I Have Nothing." A variety of live and televised appearances followed, including concerts with David Foster, Andrea Bocelli and Celine Dion. She even appeared at a professional soccer game in the Netherlands to sing Feyenoord Rotterdam's theme song, "You'll Never Walk Alone." She capped off 2008 with a performance on the U.S. television program *Good Morning America,* and by singing on a float during the nationally televised Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York City.[11]

Arnel Pineda served as lead singer in a band called the Zoo, whose bread and butter were performances in smaller venues in Manila and in Hong Kong. The band often played covers of popular U.S. song hits, including some by the band Journey. Again, YouTube became a conduit to fame. According to Pineda in a *Rolling Stone* interview,

> When me and my guitar player went back to the Philippines from Hong Kong to form the Zoo there was this guy who remembered me singing Journey songs in the Eighties. So he yelled out the song "Faithfully," so we [played it], and then they recorded it, and those were one of the videos that were uploaded on YouTube . . . . When Neal Schon discovered the videos on YouTube, he tried to find my friend's e-mail address, so he found it and he sent him an e-mail claiming that he's Mr. Neal Schon and he's from Journey and he's serious about getting me to San Francisco to try out as their frontman (Greene 2008).

Pineda's ability to imitate the timbre and vocal inflections of former Journey lead singer, Steve Perry, along with his own musical artistry, snared him the job of lead singer in 2007. Through a worldwide concert tour and television appearances on *Ellen* and the 2009 Super Bowl pregame concert, Pineda earned a notable measure of fame, but was more highly visible in his home country and throughout the Asian region than in the United States.[12]

Not surprisingly, Pineda's live concerts with Journey and his television performances, recorded by fans, made their way back to YouTube. Likewise, the videos of Charice Pempengco on *Ellen* and *Oprah*, along with her live shows with David Foster, Celine Dion and others, also became Internet hits. Hence, the career paths of these two artists vividly illustrated the synergy between new media and traditional media. But television did not merely provide material for uploading to the web, for I would argue that television retains its power and its cultural capital as a vehicle for defining "exceptional" people. The recorded television appearances validated Pempengco and Pineda as international stars and strengthened the mythology that Internet stardom is not an end in and of itself for music performers, but rather a means toward gaining more traditional cultural capital.[13] Yet, in the same vein, Gracy asks with some idealism, "What would happen if cultural institutions were bypassed, allowing others the opportunity to identify, manage, and preserve cultural objects of value without having to go through an intermediary?" (2007:191).

Indeed, the question provokes another observation about the current state of affairs. The belief in traditional media institutions as bestowers of cultural capital contrasts sharply with the milieu culture of YouTube, where videos of popular musicians sit

alongside home-made soliloquies and cover tunes, effectively purveying a sense that the confluence of technology and performance is a revolutionary democratization of cultural production. How do Pempengco and Pineda fit into the dialectic of industry and individualism, and how have their negotiations of new and traditional media reconstructed the identity narratives of international performers? Of primary importance, clearly, is the ability for performers of any nationality to use current technology to their advantage.

TECHNOLOGY, POWER AND PERFORMANCE

Technological advances have had much to do with the shape of media globalization, from the increasing efficiency and speed in the mechanics of migration and commerce to the explosion of communications media. Yet it would be a mistake to view technology as the sole actuator of drastically changing social relations in a globalized world. Rather, technology facilitates the expansion and, perhaps, the efficacy of already extant modes of interaction. Humans verbally communicated with one another before the telephone and performed their identities before the webcam. Yet, in the same breath, it can be said that both the telephone and webcam allowed for new subjectivities made possible through a depersonalization that still felt deeply personal, since distance and presence were obfuscated by the power of realistic reproduction. Still, with all due respect to Eco and Marshall McLuhan, the medium is only part of the message. What is presented through the medium is not merely grist for the proverbial mill. An examination of musical performers, for instance, reveals signifiers of contemporary identity, confounds essentialisms about nationalities and speaks to ruptures in social and economic hierarchies that allow "upward mobility" for individuals, as well as a rehabilitation of Otherness on a grand scale. Millions are watching, listening and making choices everyday.

Who controls this media flow—users, private industry or governments? One of the complex facets of Internet music production and dissemination is that control is exerted, shared and thwarted on an everyday basis, such that power cannot be easily surmised. Much as radio, television and the recording industry are under the aegis of institutions, such as governments and private companies, the Internet is also subject to regulation. Individual users must obtain access, and even with this access, must negotiate rules

and censorship designed to benefit the large institutions. Hence, while digital reproduction is theoretically limitless, in practice, it may be subject to regulation. As propagators of culture, however— when ownership is either clearly in the hands of the individual or out of the ability of institutions to control—individual users are able to shape subjectivity and representation in ways that traditional media do not allow for by virtue of their tightly controlled modes of production.[14]

Still, one cannot overlook the particular problems of accessing the net, for they are arguably more difficult to overcome than other technologies. For instance, computers are far more expensive than radios and cannot run constantly on disposable batteries; neither are they well suited for multiple users at the same time. Moreover, while infrastructure may consist of existing phone cable, those lines must be equipped with a dial-up or DSL service before they are usable as conduits to the web. Among other issues, it is apparent that the Internet is not easily accessible to everyone and is only an everyday technology to those who can afford it.[15] This "digital divide" is still apparent in the Philippines, where a smaller percentage of the population has access to the Internet than in more developed countries, and where the available bandwidth is also relatively less (Sy 2002). Yet there is another side to the issue of access. In reality, individuals do not need the knowledge or the technology to have a web presence. Neither Pineda nor Pempengco posted the videos that led to their fame. Instead, the possibilities of access are extended immeasurably by the ability of anyone with a camera or even a cellphone to digitally capture a performance and then post those videos. Hence, capability and even volition are not requirements for cyberspace presence. Performance and ownership of that performance are not easily controlled, as attested to by the thousands of clips from live concerts, television programs and even cinematic films currently floating around the web. In turn, the obstacles to viewing those clips may also be overcome by third parties, for instances schools, libraries or Internet cafés, where computers and connections are available for free or for an affordable charge. In poorer countries, public terminals are the primary means for gaining Internet access (Wahid 2006:278). As a result, the proliferation of computer and Internet technology has actually expanded the opportunities for individuals and groups to see and be seen (to hear and be heard) on a global scale, democratizing to a certain extent the power of media.

Beyond the countless possibilities for communicating (and the communication of data), the web is an arena not only for cosmopolitans to connect with one another, but for the democratization of cosmopolitanism itself. There are many that view the web as a tool that may balance "information asymmetry" and allow the Third World "entry into hitherto prohibited spaces" (Wahid et al. 2006:278; Sudaram 2000:280). At the very least, it is already clear that the Internet does provide voice to the world's youth who make up a majority of the users of social networking, video upload, and other interactive sites (Stern 2008:104). Appadurai also explored the possibilities of democratization through globalization, crediting mass media with giving "more persons in more parts of the world" an "ever-changing store of possible lives, some of which enter the lived imaginations of ordinary people more successfully than others" (1996: 53). In reference to the consumerization of the Internet, but appropriate for a discussion of a global cultural movement, Miller surmises, "The prospect of everyone becoming a performer, of all hybridities being referenced, is the utopia on offer" (Miller 1999:42).[16]

Marketing and technological optimism aside, the interactive digital age certainly has had notable effects on performance and reception. If the technological growth curve from radio to television led to an ever widening collective of people sharing a simultaneous media experience— including the knowledge of that simultaneity— the spread of record and playback devices for music and video, as well as music and video on demand, from the Internet represents a breakdown of shared temporal space as integral to media culture. Instead, the media culture of individual prerogative, or the ubiquity of choice, shows its dominance on Internet sites like YouTube. This does not mean there is no shared culture; it just means that present-day communalism no longer requires temporal coincidence.[17] In fact, much like youth subcultures, the ability of the Internet to facilitate communities of shared interests seems a natural utilization of technology. Further, the phenomenon of "viral videos," such as those that brought Pempengco, Pineda and the orange-clad dancing prisoners of Cebu to a global mainstream, allow millions of people to share a multimedia experience in staggered time.

Performing through the mediating qualities of the Internet—even constructing identity through the possibilities offered by digital media on the web—is not only a matter of technology. On either end of a network connection, there are people performing

and people interpreting; there is still dialogism.[18] Hence, in one sense, traditional discussions of the generation and perception of meaning in performance are still valid, if one simply considers the images and sounds as reproductions of reality. Images can be read as text, extrapolating from the idea that all performances may be read as a kind of text; however, the ethnographic and, therefore, interpretive, project is thwarted by the medium itself. A primary idiosyncrasy of user-generated content on the Internet is that it is not a physical object (i.e., a CD/DVD), and references to the context of image-making and the historicity of presence are not only ambiguous, they may even be illusory—even fraudulent. Images and sound are completely unanchored to time and place, producing what Poster describes as a kind of systematic misrecognition, where "cultural objects are transported across cultural boundaries" instantaneously and without any vestiges of travel (2006:11).

Pempengco and Pineda are recognizable and yet misrecognized through the Internet. Though labeling of the videos and introductions given by television hosts revealed their Filipino nationality, their omnipresence on the web illustrates Poster's sense of misrecognition, where context is unclear and boundary-crossing leaves little trace. Hybridity, even without the Internet, causes the same misrecognition that Poster describes, where cultural boundaries are obscured or even dissolved in the habitus of any given individual. Even more, digital Internet profusion obviates the necessity of travel of either subject or object, so that the local is a matter of aesthetics that can be represented and understood by citizens of the milieu. Pineda and Pempengco's appearances in the Philippines, Korea and the United States are simultaneously present on the web, and the chronology of their performing biographies is subject to the whims of users who may search and view any video in any order they choose. Therefore, users have more of a role in the construction of Pineda and Pempengco's identities *in their own minds* than passive consumers of industry models, and these same users are subject to the process of misrecognition which accompanies hybridity and Internet diffusion.

COMMUNICATING HYBRIDITY: SOUND AND IMAGE

While globalization of media explains the channels through which media images may spread, it does not account for the success and failure of particular content. Some music videos, like the popular

ones of prisoners in Cebu, who perform group choreography to popular songs (most of which are from the United States), rely on novelty and the trope of hybridity. Those by Pempengco may benefit from a widespread trope of the child prodigy, but they are even more reliant on the familiarity and value afforded to U.S. popular songs that have spread successfully all over the world and are well known even to non-English speakers. She personifies the hybrid native, but she is not alone. Rather, it seems that hybridity is almost inescapable, for it is on the other side of the coin of cultural homogenization. Stuart Hall has observed:

> Global mass culture…is a homogenizing form of cultural representation, enormously absorptive of things, as it were, but the homogenization is never absolutely complete, and it does not work for completeness. It is not attempting to produce little mini-versions of Englishness everywhere, or little versions of Americanness. It is wanting to recognize and absorb those differences within the larger, overarching framework of what is essentially an American conception of the world. That is to say, it is very powerfully located in the increasing and ongoing concentration of culture and other forms of capital. (Hall 1997: 28)

What constitutes this "American conception of the world"? I submit that three important factors are the use of English, the adoption of mainstream U.S. popular music styles and particular songs, and the command of popular music techniques and aesthetics. The foundations for a universal acceptance of popular music sung in English, of course, were established many decades ago through migration, colonization and the transnationalization of the music industry. There may be no lingua franca for the whole world, but if the televised Olympics are any indication, English (and apparently French) is the next best thing to a universal tongue. Certainly, in the music industry, English prevails in U.S. products marketed internationally. As Pacini-Hernández points out, "In the United States, language barriers seem to be even more intractable than racial barriers . . . . Hence, in spite of the United States' long and publicly vaunted history of immigration, musics associated with ethnic minorities remained peripheral to a popular music landscape dominated by English-language rock and R & B" (2003: 14-15). Even when Pempengco appeared on Korean television (the video of which became a "hit" on YouTube), the common language used was

English. Between the hosts, judges and Pempengco, humor regarding miscommunication served as entertainment, but Pempengco both sang and spoke in English. This use of English was predictable, as was her choice of song style. As in many other nations, U.S. popular songs inundate the airwaves of the Philippines and are as natural to many Filipino youth as OPM (Original Pilipino Music).

U.S. popular music styles encompass a plethora of genres, including country, singer-songwriter and hip hop; popular music also includes a vast array of subcultural styles like punk and grunge metal. Any and all of these might be adopted by nationals of other countries, either directly as recordings or as copies that are covered by local artists, sometimes even in local languages (this is common in the Philippines, for instance). As such, mass global culture cannot be characterized merely as invasive, for that precludes any value it may have for populations that find a way to use popular music for their own ends. And what of the historical hybridity of the U.S. popular song; does mixture actually speak against Stuart Hall's sense of "Americanness"? The U.S. music industry's constant mining of African-American styles from blues to hip hop and the incorporation of Latin rhythms throughout the history of U.S. popular music emulate the proverbial "melting pot" even more than the population demographic itself.

This inherent hybridity becomes even more complexly layered when popular music songs are "covered" by singers outside the United States. From the examples of Pempengco and Pineda, songs that were already "hits" served as vehicles for their global success. It is highly unlikely that either would have become so widely viewed if they had promoted themselves only through Filipino songs, even if the lyrics were in English, for the songs that brought them to attention were already mega-hits by famous North American singers. The styles of songs, such as "And I am Telling You" and Journey's "Faithfully," are not incidental to the success of Pempengco and Pineda, for these emotional ballads are designed to be show stoppers: they are designed to showcase the virtuosic singer through the use of a wide pitch range, an intensity of dynamic growth, controlled melismas and the sustaining of power in high registers. These aesthetic markers of talent and skill cross national boundaries along with musical products and become normalized in music culture, such that their successful performance translates to cultural capital both abroad and at home.

From their videos, it is clear that Pempengco and Pineda have mastered many admired aesthetics of U.S. popular music. After all, according to Stuart Hall, "The aesthetics of modern popular music is the aesthetics of the hybrid, the aesthetics of the crossover, the aesthetics of the diaspora, the aesthetics of creolization" (1997:39).[19] From a historical standpoint, there are many prevalent aesthetics of U.S. popular music that relate reveal a history of adaptation and appropriation. Some aesthetics are directly related to the development of African-American music, including melismatic vocal stylings from the blues and gospel singing traditions and rhythmic innovations made in jazz and hip hop music. At the same time, popular music in the U.S. has always been a mix of many different genres and styles, including Latin American music and music from European immigrants. Hence, it is no wonder that irony is absent from Filipinos adopting U.S. popular music as quite naturally their own. The music is already a hybrid, already an appropriation and already an established tool of cultural hegemony. And the Filipino nation, too, is irreparably hybrid through its history of cultural contact, colonialism and the mass migrations of a huge work force. Again, I invoke Stuart Hall who proclaimed, "The primitive has somehow escaped from control" (1997:39). It seems we are all hybrids one way or another, a condition just made clearer in the interconnected cultural milieu of Web 2.0.

CONCLUSION: IS THERE SUCH A THING AS POSTHYBRIDITY?

If we were to take the notion of hybridty in identity, representation, and even subjectivity to heart, then its very prevalence might negate its value as an analytical tool. We might then postulate on what a theory of posthybridity would look like. It might have, as a strong component, the notion of "neo-eclectic consumption" in which hybrid subjects and hybrid objects need not be subject to the litmus test of authenticity or the weight of prescribed localism (Middleton 2002:159).[20] The massively diverse global audience of digital media is made up of chronic samplers whose own hybridity can be more realistically attributed to the context of contemporary life than to agency (subaltern or otherwise). Beyond theorizations of hybridity then, posthybridity sees mixture as so much a part of everyday life as to lose meaningfulness. Hyperinterconnectivity allows for even more mixing of mixed cultures, so that strangers from different nations may communicate subjectivities that are marked

much more by commonalities than differences.[21] Yet, even though Internet technology, the spread of U.S. popular music (that is as close to a universal music form as the world has ever experienced), and even the fusions that mark much of the aesthetics of so-called "world music" seem to point toward posthybridity as a useful concept, certain persistent essentialisms inhibit the optimistic perception that we all belong to a unified and hybrid human race. As in world music—certainly in marketing, if not as pronounced in sound—"local" still retains symbolic power, and difference (in its broadest sense and not only as "Othering") provokes interest.

While bodies seem to be irrelevant in a virtual world, the presentation of music on the Internet in sites like YouTube continue to join voice and physical images. Similar to the television music videos that revolutionized the industry, singers on the web are, with rare exceptions, promoted as performers who emote, dance and otherwise physically enact representations of themselves. As Elias observed, "Web converts' utopian claims for inherent digital meritocracy, democratizing virtual space, or compensatory politics are weak given the evidence that rather than being a classless, raceless, 'neutral' space, the Web is a space of constructed identities and political affiliations that carries all the baggage of the real world" (2008:721). Racialized bodies and accompanying essentialisms are still a significant part of music performance on music and video sites, just as much as they are a part of reception and the construction of meaning by audiences.[22]

This racialization is equated easily with nationality to the extent that one can stand in for the other. Charice Pempengco's performances for global audiences on *Ellen*, *Oprah*, the U.K. *Paul O'Grady Show* and a host of other appearances generally include references to her Filipino nationality as well as her tender age, both of which differentiate her from other singers and serve as marketing advantages. The surprise for the uninitiated occurs when she sings, for the contrast between her appearance as a petite Filipina teenager and her mature voice, with barely a trace of accent, is absolutely striking. Because the hybridity evident in this contrast is such a large part of her representation as a performer, its viability as an identity construct, as well as a theoretical angle of analysis remains assured.

Still, to complicate matters, this kind of race or nationality-based novelty seems to have had little place in Pineda's success, where there has been at least a partial erasure of racialized body

through sonic mimesis. The case study of Pineda jibes with García Canclini's observation that neither a cultural "paradigm of imitation" nor a "theory that attributes everything to dependency" can explain the nuances of hybridity (1995:6). While the narrative of his unorthodox "break" into stardom provides some interest, Pineda's role has been to try to recreate the sound of the band from its most successful period—the late 1970s and 1980s. If anything, his biography and his race is a distraction from the mimicry of Journey's former lead singer—Steve Perry. I found interesting the comments of a blogger for *Entertainment Weekly*—who encapsulated the major debate among fans by asking, "Arnel Pineda Fronting Journey: Genius or Blasphemy?" (http://popwatch.ew.com). The pointed question of the title refers to the failed attempts of Perry to reunite with the band, and their decision to go with a copycat voice; it was not, refreshingly, about Pineda's race, and none of the comments that followed referenced tired clichés regarding Asian copies of Western models.[23] Further, returning to Eco, criticisms that Pineda's mimetic performances are inexact replications of Perry—primarily that they are not "good enough" in sound—may be an opportunity for Pineda to deviate even more from the "original." There is room to grow as an artist in live performance, even as his hyperspace images circulate limitlessly on the Internet. Will Pineda's role be able to accommodate the creativity of apl.de.ap of the Black-Eyed Peas, for instance, who was able to compose and record songs that alluded to the Philippines, to the local and even to his own hybridity (racial and cultural)? As a lead singer in an established band that relies much more on its older material than on anything new, Pineda has fewer opportunities to express himself than Pempengco. Coupled with the deliberate downplaying of his race and national origins in marketing that have actually been beneficial in differentiating Pempengco in the marketplace, Pineda represents a different case scenario of performance in new and old media where posthybridity may better represent a postracial world. He is simultaneously freer in the sense of reception and more constricted in the sense of artistic expression.

Hence, the possibilities of hyperspace continue to tantalize, and the rapidity of change promises even unforeseen shifts in subjectivity and perception. Charice Pempengco's rendition of "God Bless America" at the 2009 Martin Luther King Jr. Awards Ceremony in Washington, D.C. underscores the remarkable power of technology for musical performers seeking global stardom,

while, at the same time, it reifies the hegemony of the United States as the center of global media production. The digital representations of performances by Pempengco and Pineda continue to multiply, proving that hybridity can have great popular appeal. Simultaneously, this same pervasiveness marks hybridity as an everyday phenomenon. For Pempengco and Pineda, at least, hyperreality is the miracle of the mundane in an age when the obstacles of time and space present less adversity than they ever have before.

ENDNOTES

[1] 1983:73.

[2] What constitutes the Internet, or the World Wide Web (www), does not bear explanation in this article for reasons of space; it is assumed the reader is aware of the basics of how "the net" works or at least how it can be accessed through the computer or any such device.

[3] I borrow the often-used term "subcultures" from Hebdige (1979).

[4] Under the umbrella concept of a Web 2.0 milieu culture are numerous subentities, some of which stem directly from traditional subcultures and others that have been made possible by the proliferation of the media and technology matrix.

[5] Charice is a combination of her given name—Charmaine Clarice.

[6] Although most of the content is created by users, sites like YouTube are still profit-centered businesses. In 2006, the company Google purchased YouTube for 1.65 billion U.S. dollars (Keen 2007: 131).

[7] Depending upon your point of view, globalization may be either the miracle or the curse driving Internet technology and creating the hyperspace conditions for heretofore unheard of media proliferation. Yet, the very broad term "globalization" likely has attained far too much exegetic power—on the one hand, encompassing the teleology of the West as colonizing bogeyman over the world; and on the other, as the inevitable process of growth determined by and determinative of our times.

[8] The popular site is located at http://www.youtube.com. "Launched in 2005 and purchased by Gooogle in 2006, YouTube now supports local sites in Brazil, France, Ireland, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands,

Poland, Spain, and the United Kingdom, and quantitative research on it is starting to appear, though its cultural impact has been apparent for some time…YouTube has built global access into its very platform" (Elias 2008:714).

[9]The unauthorized posting of music and music performances is another notable aspect of the interactive Internet site milieus. While copyright infringement is the main issue of many music content sites (see Gracy 2007:194), the invasion of privacy and ownership of one's own images are important as well.

[10]http://www.charicepempengco.com

[11]There are a variety of stories about and fansites for Charice Pempengco available on the Internet, but I have chosen to summarize her biography from her own website. It seems appropriate, since this article concerns the construction of identity through Internet media, and her website is a selective representation of self. The website is http://www.charicepempengco.com.

[12]The Internet debate in the United States over the choice of Pineda as lead singer is noteworthy. Many comments on Journey fansites focus on Pineda's inability to perfectly channel Steve Perry rather than on his merits as a performer. Some diehard fans feel that he is simply not as good as Steve Perry. The majority of Pineda's detractors focus on their desire to see Perry and the Journey reunite.

[13]Balmes and Tomboc posit that cyberspace communities develop their own kinds of symbolic capital, including social capital gained through a veteran presence (2002). This line of argument can be directed at specific sites, since different uses of sites give rise to different value systems. For instance, users of YouTube can gain social capital, using a quantitative measurement. Each video tracks how many times it has been viewed, and the larger the number, the more "popular" the video is. Popularity leads to a position on or just several levels below the homepage, providing the video with more chances to be viewed. While this may not provide notoriety to the person who posted the video (indeed, that may be reserved for the primary subject of the video), the system is simple and relatively democratic in nature.

[14]User-produced musical content range from home-made videos to unauthorized reproductions of live events and recordings.

[15]In "An Initial Assessment of the Philippines Preparedness for E-Learning," Arnie Trinidad stresses, among other things, the continuing need to teach "digital fluency" to the student population (2002).

[16]In practical terms, sites such as YouTube and MySpace, have been a boon to indie musicians who can build diverse audiences with relatively little expenditure (Boyd 2008:122).

[17]Technologies like Twitter and the live feed of Facebook harken back to a need for simultaneity of experience as much as they do the obsession with exhibitionism fostered by social networking sites, photo-sharing sites and blogging sites.

[18]Even nonperformance videos might be easily considered as performances. Though there may be a certain normalcy or naturalness in many videos, recording oneself is a heightened kind of reality or performance of self. This construction of identity through Internet media is closely related to blogging, the creation of profiles in social networking sites and other types of Internet self-expression.

[19]This observation meshes with his take on global mass culture, quoted above, when considering that hybridity is not an obstacle toward homogenization and industry, but, rather, a convenient way of packaging localism.

[20]I am extending outward from Middleton and Beebe's sense of "neo eclectic consumption" in which hybrid popular music in the form of rock/rap disengages from discourse on musical authenticity, and loosens cultural and racial anchors in order to appeal to a different audience base. In this way, so-called "musical taste" is far less meaningful, and audiences for music styles far less easy to categorize by the demographics of age, race, ethnicity, class and gender.

[21]Is this allusion to a kind of utopia disturbing in its tendencies toward homogeneity, especially when homogenizing forces are unequally balanced? If so, the myriad analyses of globalization have already shed light on this issue for scholars and activists.

[22]In the past, I have explained how the racialized Asian body is burdened with pernicious stereotypes, followed by an argument of how music performance can play a role in recasting the negative into the positive (Castro 2007).

[23]As an example, during the 1970s oil crisis, a perception developed in the United States that the Japanese were skilled in making copies of U.S. cars and technology, but not particularly innovative on their own. Advances in Japanese cars and electronics, exacerbated by the quality failings of U.S. cars in the ensuing decades, reveal a rare inversion of racial/nationality stereotypes in mainstream U.S. culture.

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Christi-Anne Castro *received her Ph.D. in Ethnomusicology from the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA). Her primary research interests include Filipino, Filipino American, and Asian American music and performance, cultural politics and nationalism. She is currently an assistant professor at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor.*