

## Theatre, Entrapment, and Globalization in *Welcome to IntelStar*

**Sir Anril Pineda Tiatco**

University of the Philippines Diliman

### ABSTRACT

This essay reflects on globalization as a phenomenon that connects and influences the world's socio-cultural and political spheres, similar to how some academics explore the nature of the global. In particular, the essay interrogates how globalization is mediated in the theatre. The motivation in the inquiry is based on a presumption that theatre artists are also actively participating in defining what globalization means. At the same time, it comes from an assumption that theatre artists are also actively performing what it means to be global. Many artists engage with the global by either collaborating with artists of different nationalities or using globalization as a central theme in their theatre works. In reflecting on globalization, the essay analyzes Chris Martinez's monodrama *Welcome to IntelStar*, staged at the Studio Theatre of the Cultural Center of the Philippines in 2006. This play proposes that globalization is a trap. In this alignment of globalization and "the trap," the entrapment brings forth a dichotomy: the global and the local. This dichotomy is strongly imagined in the staging of *IntelStar*, where the local is presented as the prey or the victim in the entrapment. But in the final analysis, the performance mediates the sociality between the local and the global and ultimately performs an entanglement of the local and the global as a reference to an attraction and repulsion to globalization. However, in such treatment of globalization, the Studio Theatre also becomes a model of the trap where artists become the hunters and the audience members, the victims.

*Keywords:* Theatre, entrapment, globalization, call center, *Welcome to IntelStar*

In 2012, the Yale Center for the Study of Globalization launched an e-book entitled *A World Connected: Globalization in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, edited by Nayan Chanda and Susan Froetschel. This compilation of essays connects the concept of the global with various topical issues such as economy, trade, diplomacy, security, society, culture, health, environment, population, and migration. In an online review, Tracey Keys implies that globalization changed our world into an interconnected one. In addition, she writes,

With the notions of interconnectedness and interdependence as its lenses, the book not only explores these topics, but also the many ways in which globalization touches all of our lives and interweaves communities, countries and continents – including how cultures and societies develop, how we seek security, how ideas moving around the world are impacting creativity, how rising inequalities are changing societies, how China’s rise is impacting the world, and how we as people interact around the world. (Keys)

Keys suggests that the book covers an array of meanings associated with globalization as discussed by thinkers from various disciplines. Nonetheless, the contributors agree on underlining one thing about globalization: that it is a social and political phenomenon, which connects and influences the world for good and bad.

Earlier, Hans Peter Martin and Harold Schumann in *The Global Trap* wrote about the negative influences of globalization on the world. Martin and Schumann argue that globalization is a trap (as implicated in the title) where human individuals find themselves imprisoned in a corporate cage. And as a consequence, democratic principles are vanquished. Martin and Schumann explain that globalization is not entirely about multiple or plural attachments as indicated by the term global. They argue that it is “one consciously driven by a single-minded policy” of corporate capitalism (8). Humans are entrapped because the historical trajectory of the phenomenon brings forth the end of humanity and begins the era of the machine. As such, Martin and Schumann equate globalization with the destruction of jobs for humans. As a consequence, the world embraces global poverty. As democratic principles are shelved, Martin and Schumann note that globalization undermines “democratic stability” by what these authors call “market dictatorship” (9). In this dictatorship, corporate capitalists become by default world leaders.

In this essay, I will interrogate how globalization is mediated in a Philippine monodrama entitled *Welcome to IntelStar*, written by Chris Martinez. More particularly, I will reflect on what this performance has to say about the globalizing phenomenon of the call center industry. Generally, the monodrama presents globalization as a phenomenon that connects and influences the world’s socio-cultural and political spheres, similar to how Chanda and Froestschel explore the nature of the global. Staged at the Tanghalang Huseng Batute (Studio Theatre) of the Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP), *Welcome to IntelStar* proposes that globalization is a trap in a way similar to how Martin and Schumann view the global. If in Martin and Schumann’s book, the discussion of trap is via the entrapment of human individuals and democratic principles, here, I will illustrate how entrapment brings forth a dichotomy: the global and the local. This dichotomy is strongly

imagined in the staging of *IntelStar*, where the local is presented as the prey or the victim in this entrapment.

*Welcome to IntelStar* touches the global by, at least, representing and interrogating the phenomenon. At the time of writing, the piece is so far the only production in Manila (or in the Philippines) exclusively about the call center institution. Other than a trap, globalization is proposed in this play as a phenomenon that produces dislocation and alienation. Maria Rhodora Ancheta explores such experiences in the play as the creation of social fragmentation in Philippine society caused by its neocolonial status and born out of the need for global competitiveness ("Phantasmatic Constructions" 4). In this regard, Ancheta suggests that the political anchor of the piece is a call for de-globalization: treating globalization as a substitute for imperialism.

Set in Makati, the central business district of the National Capital Region, *Welcome to IntelStar* satirizes the call center industry in the archipelago. The monodrama begins with a call center trainer (Chelsea) welcoming and congratulating the interns (audience members) for making it to the first phase of being hired at *IntelStar*. Acting as the company's spokesperson, she enumerates all aspects of *performing good* in this global enterprise. As this monodrama is an imitation of actual training for incoming call center agents, Chelsea gives valuable advice regarding how to interact with clients, especially those who may be rude at times. At the end of the training session, Chelsea bids farewell to all interns and sits on her desk. She takes her tumbler and pours some local rum into it. Chelsea checks the time and realizes how late it is. She begins cursing her work and after a long monologue in the English language, speaks in Tagalog.

Originally staged in 2005 during the Awarding Ceremonies of the Carlos Palanca Memorial Awards for Literature at the Manila Peninsula,<sup>1</sup> the performance being scrutinized in this essay is the commercial run at the Studio Theatre of the CCP a year later. Playwright Martinez directed the piece with popular film and television comedian Eugene Domingo, who performed the role of Chelsea. In the play, the set represents a training room in a call center institution. Onstage are a desk, an ergonomic chair, a wall clock, a laptop, an LCD projector, and a white projection screen. The script states: "Tonight is the night Chelsea welcomes IntelStar's new batch of call center trainees. For their orientation, she has prepared a PowerPoint slide presentation to illustrate the different points of her speech. From time to time, she clicks on her mouse to change the slides" (Martinez 3). Since audience members are imagined to be Chelsea's trainees, active participation from the members of the audience is required once in a while.

With this as background, I will illustrate how the performance mediates the sociality between the local and the global and ultimately performs this entanglement as a reference to an attraction and repulsion to globalization. However, in such treatments of globalization, the Studio Theatre also becomes a model of the trap where artists become the hunters and the audience members, the victims.

### **ENTRAPMENT OF TIME AND SPACE**

Translated as *patibong* in Tagalog, *lambat* and *bihag* are other common terms associated with trap. *Lambat* is loosely translated as “net” in English. As a noun, it is an entangled material made of twine, cord, rope or anything similar, typically used for catching fish or other small animals. In the Philippines, the term is more commonly used in the coastal areas of the archipelago as a primary instrument used in the fishing industry, one of the major contributors to the national economy.<sup>2</sup> In this regard, the term *lambat* has a functional description associated with consumption and nourishment especially since fish are caught in a *lambat* for these reasons.

While *lambat* is commonly used to trap fish, *bihag* has a more conceptual connotation. Although in its literal sense it is more loosely associated with being taken hostage, the term is also used as a reference for enchantment, fascination, awe, and captivation. As used in this sentence, “*Binihag ng iyong ngiti ang puso ko*” (literally: “your smile preyed on my heart”; figuratively: “your smile captivated me”), *bihag* is used as a metaphor. In arguing for entanglement, I am intending to enmesh these Tagalog counterparts in discussing the connection of trap to globalization in the monodrama.

Anthropologist Alfred Gell’s study of art and artifact in his seminal essay “Vogel’s Net” inform this particular intersection of the *patibong*, *lambat*, and *bihag*. Gell explains that any trap should be read as representing the “mind of the author and the fate of its victim” (26). In this way, a trap is an instrument that does not only feature a function to entrap prey, but is more of an entanglement of the creator and the prey. Hence, the trap “is particularly clearly a model of its creator [...] a substitute for him; a surrogate hunter, it does its owner’s hunting for him” (27). As Gell illustrates, the trap is a “working model” of the person substituting the creator’s actions of catching a victim. As a model of its victim, a trap “may more subtly and abstractly, represent parameters of the animal’s natural behavior, which are subverted in order to entrap it” (27). Gell adds that a trap mimics the victim’s behavior. With this, traps bind the creator and the prey together.

Gell proposes that the entanglement between creator and prey must be treated as a social one. As he points out, the very nature of trap “transformed [the] representation of its maker, the hunter, and the prey animal, its victim, and of their mutual relationship, which among hunting people, is a complex, quintessentially social one” (29). More importantly, traps “could be made to evoke complex intuitions of being, otherness, relatedness” (29). In this regard, *patibong* as a model of entanglement via its other connotative associations of *lambat* and *bihag* transforms globalization on the stage of Manila as a model of the hunter and at the same time that of the prey or the victim. To illustrate how this transformation is manifested in the play, I turn my discussion on how *Welcome to IntelStar* proposes globalization as a trap via a close reading of the performance and its text.

At the start of the play, Chelsea welcomes the interns (audience members) by stating “IntelStar gives one of the best compensation packages in the industry. Aside from regular salaries, bonuses are given to those who perform beyond what is expected of them” (Martinez 4). Towards the end of her opening salvo, she exclaims: “*Bongga*, you are now part of the global world, *say niyo? ‘di ba?’*” (“Wonderful, you are now part of the global world, what do you say? Isn’t it amazing?”). This exclamation is nowhere to be found in Martinez’ published script. I believe this line was adlibbed during the night I attended the show. Having seen the performance one more time, this particular line was once again exclaimed. Either this line was an adlib or Martinez himself added it during rehearsals, maybe because it worked the first time.

Nonetheless, there are some points that are crucial in this additional line alone. First, there is a suggestion that the call center experience is a global encounter. Secondly, the interns, once hired, are participants in what Chelsea calls the global world. Finally, connecting the earlier lines (in the published script) with this additional one, the relevance of globalization is seemingly more manifest in the embrace of market forces. These points are the key concepts in how *Welcome to IntelStar* performs and presents globalization. As will be presented here, the performance is not entirely enthusiastic about the global despite Chelsea’s celebratory tone but, similar to Martin and Schumann, instead treats globalization as a *patibong*. However, in contrast to the destruction of humanity argument of entrapment by Martin and Schumann, the play suggests that entrapment lies in the loss of identity, just as local cultural studies scholars and sociologists such as Walden Bello (*Deglobalization*) and E. San Juan (“Globalized Terror”) often associate globalization with the demise of the nation-state and the continuation of American imperialism.

In Chelsea's opening statement, the global experience is framed as a necessity. The use of *bongga* in this additional line is significant because in Filipino slang it denotes extravagance. Sometimes, it is an exclamation of grandiosity. Here, it is a statement of wonder and awe. In this way, Chelsea defines working in a call center as a global enterprise to be something necessarily wonderful, extravagant, and grand. However, as the play progresses, the whole connection becomes otherwise—a mockery of the call center situation vis-à-vis the place of agents as Filipino citizens. For instance, Chelsea remarks that working in the call center is a great place to avoid the hassle of the metropolis—referring in particular to the annoying traffic along the city's busiest major streets EDSA and Taft Avenue: "But looking on the bright side, at least you don't get stuck in stupid Metro Manila traffic, right?" (Martinez 12). The context here implicates more than the issue of the traffic in the metropolis: Chelsea is telling her interns to prepare themselves for alienation, especially from the concept of daytime and nighttime.

As an actual agent admits in her blogpost, these concepts of day and night are adjusted to Western time zones: "Everyone is on their way home and off to bed, but not me, I actually just got out of the shower, getting ready for work. While everybody else calls it a day, I'm just starting mine" (Sky). In the play, Chelsea explains that the "day" of the agents begins when everybody else's is ending and even remarks that when your shift ends, your loved ones are already off to their work or school (if the agent has kids). Also, she explains that the agents should no longer follow Filipino holidays. But as a consolation, she adds that, as agents, they will be celebrating American holidays, followed by another exclamation of *Bongga, hindi ba?* ("Wonderful, isn't it?").

What we can make out of Chelsea's welcoming remarks is that attaining the global self is equated with losing the local self. Interestingly, the many descriptions of the call center in popular culture also profess the same sense of the global. For instance, in the indie film *My Fake American Accent* (Ned Trespeces 2008), the supervisor welcomes the newly hired agents with the announcement that they (the agents) are finally participating in the global enterprise. One agent remarks, "*Hindi na tayo Pinoy, global citizen na tayo!*" ("We are no longer Filipinos, we are now global citizens!"). There is definitely mockery in this commentary. In the film, for example, another consequence of being an active participant of the "global," is heartbreak. Because time is different between the call center world and the outside world of the company, this causes estrangement in the agents' relationships with family and friends.

*Welcome to IntelStar* scrutinizes this loss of the local in the embrace of the global. While the play acknowledges how these enterprises provide economic opportunities, the piece exposes the cultural exploitation experienced in the call center environment. Working in such an environment is a subtle manifestation of such exploitation. Ancheta is even more explicit in her reading of such exploitation. She posits that the piece reveals the alienation of the Philippine space in a call center complex:

As Chelsea puts it, “centrally located—whatever that means” is as much a strategy for cloaking that we shall speak of when we refer to pronunciation, as it is a tactic of neutrality in maintaining the illusion of homogenized, “neutral” space. This is not so much just an erasure of the Philippines as alien place [...] as it is the maintenance of the illusion that “we are centrally located in the US.” The world, therefore, is one humongous United States. (“Phantasmatic Constructions” 8)

Continuing such an exposition of exploitation by the global, there is a stark image at the end of the monodrama, which in my view implies a more blatant claim for this exploitation. Chelsea pours some local rum into a Starbucks mug and sips it while cursing her work a dead-end. The piece ends by leading its audience to believe that globalization via the transnational context is a trap that destroys national sensibilities, as exemplified in the concepts of daytime/nighttime, plus which country’s holidays are being celebrated. Here is a moment of interrogation as the play criticizes the exploitative nature of transnational networks. Ancheta calls this as an awakening from deception. She argues that the call center institution deceives the Filipino individual with dreams of a better life but, once immersed, the self realizes a form of tyranny, a linguistic tyranny, and the only way to avert this is to go back to the sense of (Filipino) identity.

Postcolonial critics may argue that Chelsea’s gesture at the end of the play is an embodiment of agency because it is an act of defiance. Ancheta explains that “Chelsea’s act of cursing her work in Tagalog/Filipino is a subversive entry into many levels of cultural atrophy that marks the apparently beneficial BPO [Business Process Outsourcing] job” (“Phantasmatic Constructions” 26). Bringing alcoholic beverages to an office building is an act of defying workplace rules. This way, there is a rendering of performance of agency because the individual (Chelsea) performs/ envoices her anxieties about the company. Also, the performance and polemics of anxiety against the institution is not a total act of defiance since no one from the institution is there to witness the performance or hear the anguish. The gesture is a cowardly disposition more than a postcolonial outcry of pushing the self out of

the margins. Besides, Chelsea has surrendered to the hyper-globalist account of the world and even to a skeptical sense of globalization. Chelsea's gesture is surrender to globalization based on the market system. At the same time, it is surrender to homogeneity, with a tumbler from a multinational coffee house from the United States (Starbucks) substituting for a bottle of local rum. Following this image of surrender and grounded in the opposing views of hyper-globalist optimism of homogeneity and the skeptics' pessimism towards the phenomenon, there is a suggestion that the local is not the only thing being surrendered; agency or subjectivity is also surrendered if not dismissed.

### **FROM TIME AND SPACE TO IDENTITY IN *PATIBONG***

As initially explored, the concept of the local in this monodrama is entrapped in globalization. But as the play proceeds, the same can also be said of personal identity and subjectivity. In his online review, Resty Odon affirms this, remarking that the play "manages to bring home the minimum message of identity crisis, or the relevance of identity, in the onslaught of globalization." In invoking "home," Odon suggests that *Welcome to IntelStar* is instrumental in waking up local audiences about the loss of identity in the continuing presence of globalization in the archipelago as represented by a call center enterprise managed and owned by foreign investors. In this way, Odon illustrates how the trap works in the case of *Welcome to IntelStar*—the institution, which is also located in the country, abducts the call center agent's identity as a Filipino.

Nonetheless, the play features several scenes where this conception of entrapment is strongly felt. For instance, after introducing the mission and vision of the company to the trainees, Chelsea focuses her training on the proper way of answering calls from customers:

As you can see, it's very important that we have – what? (Pauses.) Correct! *An American-sounding name*. Like Chelsea! I mean, what can be more American than Chelsea, right? It is mandatory that we have an American name here at IntelStar. Just imagine if I start all my calls using my real name. It would sound like this: 'Hi this is Ma. Leonora Teresa Grabador-Bayot. City and State please?' (Martinez 6, emphasis added)

And then, Chelsea shifts the attention to someone in the audience:

You! What's your name? Teodoro Albarillo? You can be a Teddy. Or a Ted? No, this is much better: Todd! Todd! That's it! Todd! Not Toad, Todd! (She singles out a girl this time.) You, Miss, what's your name? Jennilyn Grace Humbrado?



Jennylyn Grace. To me, Jenny is okay. Lyn is okay. No offense, but when you put them together you sound like a Pinoy taxicab. [...] For you, let's use Grace instead. Is that okay? You like that? Uh-huh! Good for you, Gracie! (She singles out another man from the audience.) You! Please? Ime Isuekpe? Ime Isuekpe? What kind of name is that? I beg your pardon. Oh, you're half-Pinoy, half-Nigerian. Oh, I see. Ime Iseukpe. (Pauses to think.) Boy, this is a tough one, huh? Ime, do you want to be called George? You don't like the name George. (Pause.) Okay, how about, Scott? No, you don't. Well . . . (Pauses.) What about Tyrone? (Martinez 6-7)

All call center agents—especially those with Filipino-sounding names—have to change their names to more American-sounding names. This name changing may signify two points. First, it is a strategy done in the name of corporate rules. Second, it is one sign of privileging Western identity over local identity. In her analysis of this name changing in the play, Carina Chotirawe argues “the act of naming and renaming people, structures or places has always been a common practice throughout the history of colonization” (71). Chotirawe asserts this name changing as an illustration of colonialism, a destruction of identity. Moreover, she adds that this act of name changing in the monodrama expresses a blatant destruction of identity because it “functions as a conceptual weapon of destruction, as a kind of wage war or a contest between old and new identity layer. Taking the liberty of naming or renaming someone is tantamount, therefore, to denying them their historical and cultural identity” (Chotirawe 71). I sense this reading is suggestive of the call center’s neo-imperialist strategy over postcolonial and poor nations (such as the Philippines). At first glance, this assertion is seductively favorable to reading the loss of identity in the play, especially in the context of de-globalization or towards the aim of decolonization. Names are usually linked to cultural identities. This identity marking is also useful in the identification of ethnic origins.

On the other hand, this assumption of “conceptual destruction” in the name changing vis-à-vis the call center institution raises some issues. Chotirawe implies that it is the institution that changes the name of an agent even though Chelsea herself announces in the play, “Oh yes, you get to choose your own name” (Martinez 7). On a surface level, this name changing is similar to what popular actors in movies and television call a stage-name or a screen pseudonym, but, of course, the motivation to take on a stage-name is far different from the necessity for an Americanized name of the call center agent. Nonetheless, there is a sense of anonymity in these modes of name changing. If Chotirawe views this name changing as a weapon of conceptual destruction, within the context of anonymity it is more likely a conceptual shield. Just like when Chelsea says, “Just imagine if I start all my calls using my

real name. It would sound like this: 'Hi this is Ma. Leonora Teresa Grabador-Bayot.'" (Martinez 6). She is calling for protection—in performance, Domingo's voice was hesitant in stating her entire name, providing the subtext of "Do not be idiotic, why would you give your name to your callers who are unknown to you. Worse, why would you give your complete name?!" The name chosen by the agent is his or her shield against racist slurs, arrogant customers, and the like.

Chotirawe provides a glib picture of identity by implying that a name is the totality of identity. She also implies that the politics of identity has a wide range of dimensions including cultural and historical ones. However, being and becoming are two different modes of identity formation. Subjectivity is a matter of becoming. A name may be assigned to a person, but his/her becoming is not locked into the name assigned to him/her. For instance, in *Welcome to IntelStar*, being Chelsea is different from becoming Chelsea. Becoming Chelsea is part of her task or obligation as a manager-trainer in IntelStar, but it is not entirely the total polity of her being. Besides, Chelsea became Chelsea by her own becoming—by her own subject position. As she points out, the agents choose their own names. Of course, there is a condition: the name should sound American. What options do they have in this situation when the company is in fact an American one? In this instance, changing one's name is not necessarily the privilege of having a Western identity but a necessity that is being asked of the call center agents by the instrumental condition of this global institution. Generally, to state that identity is destroyed by this act of name changing is a misrepresentation, if not an over-representation, of the call center experience.

In her doctoral thesis, Aileen Olimba Salonga calls this process an identity masking, a process in which agents "change their names to Western ones" (180). This masking of identity, more than the avoidance of racism, is geared towards making customers feel safe and secure so that business can go on as usual. Although name changing is practiced in various call center institutions in the Philippines, it is not as common as in India, the closest competitor of the archipelago in this global industry. Salonga adds that this is probably linked to the Filipino people being more attuned to American culture, "having been an American colonial subject, names of Filipinos tend to be already westernized, or at least, western sounding" (180). An example is the case of Jennylyn in *Welcome to IntelStar* to which Chelsea implicitly points out the Western attribution of the name of the trainee.

Neutralizing the English accent or "sounding right" (Salonga 181) is another manifestation of the issue of subjectivity and locality. After Chelsea indicates that the name changing policy is an important rule in the institution, she clicks on her

mouse and there appears on the screen the slide: “Accent Neutralization Program.” The changing of names is the first instance of becoming American, and neutralizing the accent is the next: “You see, if you can’t ‘be’ an American, you can always sound like one!” (Martinez 7). Like the name requirement, the accent requirement is a “way of catering to the great majority of US-based and some UK-based customers, and of appeasing whatever negative feelings these customers may have about offshore work and workers” (Salonga 180). Selma Sonntag sees this as a syndrome for linguistic imperialism or “the dominance of English worldwide and efforts to promote the language” (7). In addition, this linguistic imperialism marches “toward global and linguistic homogenization” leading to “linguistic and cultural genocide” (Sonntag 8). In short, Sonntag suggests that this frame of imperialism is equivalent to the Americanization of the world’s languages.

But sounding American or English is not enough. Midway through *Welcome to IntelStar*, a map of the USA appears on the screen. There are vertical lines dividing the time zones of the US. Chelsea, upon showing this map, points out: “You should know this map by heart” (Martinez 13). Near the end of her piece, a trainee (or an audience member—but I think this person was a plant) asks Chelsea if they should be memorizing the “Star Spangled Banner.” Instead of replying, Chelsea simply laughs at the question indicating stupidity on the part of the trainee. Chelsea also tells the trainees to watch CNN and read various US newspapers regularly. In other words,

They should be able to understand English idioms and know how to use them correctly. They should be able to recognize sarcasm and/or humor and respond to it accordingly. They should know about the different states and places in the source countries that they are servicing, and be able to pronounce each one properly. They should know about British or American holidays, current events, sports, and celebrities, and engage their customers in a conversation using these topics. (Salonga 181)

This dismissal of both agency and locality is a protocol that Chelsea posits as a very important aspect of the work: “We never ever give out information about our location. So we should always be ready with a standard answer such as—” (She clicks on the mouse. The following sentence appears on the screen: The agent answers, “We are centrally located.”) “*We are centrally located,* always keep this in mind” (Martinez 14, emphasis added). The agents cannot disclose their actual locality. In a way, call center agents deny their actual geography when working in a call center institution.

Chotirawe asserts that this utterance of “centrally located” is the “rude truth that speaks to the literal dislocating of identity of the differently-colonized 21<sup>st</sup> century Filipino youth” (74). Skeptics like Paul Hirst (qtd. in Held and Hirst), E. San Juan, and Walden Bello argue that globalization is a continuation of imperialism as it is the imagination of the Global North (read as the First World). In this regard, globalization is perceived as a continuation of an imagined center and periphery. It seems that the performativity of the utterance “we are centrally located” affirms the Global North’s position as the center of globalization’s geography and the Global South (in this case, the Philippines, where the offshore call center agency IntelStar in the play is actually located) remains in the periphery. In this conception of globalization, the Global South is thought of as being in captivity. As Odon’s review states, the play made the audience see “the awful prism of global trade.” As implied by the readings of Ancheta, Chotirawe, and the online review of Odon, the Philippines is perceived as being manipulated by the Global North by making Filipinos believe that economic gain is the most important aspect of humanizing the work-force. In this regard, despite exploitation (long shifts, short breaks), the call center is a necessary tool for survival. Working in a call center institution, therefore, is not a liberating experience even though agents are able to pay their bills. In this case, the institution is really one huge *patibong*—a trap with no exits.

With all these circumstances, the entrapment in this global model, as presented by the monodrama, suggests that absurdity and alienation are necessary consequences of globalization. As a summation of this, Chelsea curses the kind of life she has been living within the walls of the institution. She curses her work but knows that, in a few hours, she will be doing it again: the same lecture and training activity. Nonetheless, the absurdity of her condition is worsening because she surrenders instead of defies. She takes a sip of rum from her Starbucks tumbler as if there is no longer any way out. Chelsea complains even as she is talking in English. She asks herself why she is not resting when everyone else around her is supposed to be resting. She is distanced from her geography: “Just when everybody’s going home, that’s the time you’ll be going to work. While everybody is sleeping or spending time with family and friends, you’ll be working on the floor. And when you get home ready to hit the sack, everybody else is up and about, ready to start the day” (Martinez 12). In the manuscript, Chelsea is supposed to giggle. But in the performance at the Studio Theatre, Eugene Domingo (as Chelsea) paused and looked at the wall clock before continuing her lines.

## PERFORMING THE HUNTER AND THE PREY

Having identified these salient illustrations of globalization, characterized by the *patibong*, some questions are left unanswered. In this entrapment of the local in globalization, who is the hunter? Is the local really the prey or victim? Is globalization really a model representing someone greater than the prey? What mechanisms of the prey are imitated in the trap? What is the shape or the structure of the model? How can it guarantee that the prey is entrapped?

From what I can gather from seeing the production twice, the model of globalization as a trap is something conceptually fixed, an end-state and a singular monolithic entity. This, in my reading, is a view of the world as being manipulated by an authoritarian figure commonly linked to the Western superpowers. Hence, these superpowers are the assumed hunters. As a trap, globalization becomes a reference to the Westernization of the world as global culture (the homogenized world). In local scholarship, this Westernization is equivalent to the Americanization of Philippine cultural, political, and economical life. As Jagdish Bhagwati explains, anti-globalization sentiment is also a statement of anti-Americanism.

In connection, it makes sense that *Welcome to IntelStar* is a monologue. Here, then, is the identification of the mechanisms of the prey. In this monologue, a singular entity is also in control: Chelsea. Her character exemplifies this establishment of an authority, especially since she directs audience members to pay attention to what she performs. She is, in fact, trying to make her interns (audience members) be like her—to be “American” in order to play their part in this global identity. In terms of the theme, the monologue is directed towards a point-of-view where the character of Chelsea is inviting her audiences to admit the logic of following the singular route to this idea of the global. In particular, her aura of an English-speaking Filipino national invites her audience to follow the path of speaking this language—despite not being fluent, in order to participate actively in this globalizing world. In short, Chelsea is telling audience members that there is no other route to reach the destination of the global if you cannot meet the imperative of English as the language of the global world.

The setting is also related to this singularity. The office setting is analogous to one way globalization is perceived in Philippine society—a claustrophobic space manifesting the homogeneity associated with the corporate domain of globalization: computers, LCD projectors, projection screen, desks, conference tables, swivel chairs, and the pervasive English language. In this case, the agent of the office is also

exhibiting some characteristics of the corporate world: proficient in the English language and, most importantly, market driven.

As Chelsea enumerates the rules of the institution, she also describes some fundamental characteristics of transnational capital accumulation based on this drive to be part of the world market:

Number one on the list is the dress code. You are expected to come to work professionally attired. No leggings, no sleeveless tops, no tank tops, no open-toe sandals, no clothes with holes, no T-shirts with offensive, pornographic, alcohol or drug-related prints, and strictly no jeans allowed. [...] Number two on those rules list is this: everybody is required to use only English in any form of communication, verbal or written—that includes E-mail correspondences [...] Third on our list is no eating in your work areas [...] Coffee, which is available freely for all employees, can only be brought to work areas if it's contained in a spill-proof mug (She shows off her mug.) Just like this mug which I got from Starbucks. [...] Fourth on our list may just be the most important of all, punctuality. (Martinez 12)

Here we see the model of globalization as authoritative and homogenized. Chelsea's aura of authority controls the behavior of the interns. She is saying, if you cannot follow these rules, you are not entitled to be part of this institution. Ancheta explains, "the Filipino is fighting against both social and personal fragmentation as a result of an economic/cultural/linguistic neocolonial status, born of the need for apparent global competitiveness" ("Phantasmatic Constructions" 4). The assumption is: because of globalization, the Filipino sense of self is dislodged, fragmented, and trapped in a world market system. This is because globalization and neoliberal engagement are equated with each other. At the same time, globalization is seen as the extension of the concept of franchise—where everything becomes homogenized in this *globalized* market world. But this singularity is a crucial problem in need of critical interrogation towards understanding the global. Bhagwati asserts, "Popular discourse on globalization has tended to blur the line between these different dimensions and to speak of globalization and its merits and demerits as if it were a homogenous, undifferentiated phenomenon" (443).

Chelsea embodies this field of instrumentality marked by the global market system. Thus, the relationship between the agents and the customers is defined by global artificiality and not by any form of human interconnectedness. In *Cosmopolitanism*, David Held presents an optimistic view of globalization through his proposal of a cosmopolitan framework. For him, there are benefits in globalization, especially from its most criticized economic dimension. But the current frameworks—such as

those institutionalized by World Trade Organization—are not helping in the eradication of global problems such as global warming and worldwide poverty. He explains that even if democracy and globalization are conceived as disjointed, there is a possibility of connecting them by a cosmopolitan principle of sameness through democratic dialogue. Hence, his optimism is coming from a belief that democracy may be extended on a global level. While I share the optimism of David Held about globalization, the crucial element which is not touched by his provocation is this question of human connectedness. Held's interconnectedness is a proposal for global democracy embodied in his vision of cosmopolitanism. Nevertheless, human connectedness should not be solely conceived and paralleled within the politics of the state and within the politics of the institutionalization of global democracy. Responsibility and accountability via the relational disposition of individuals are also crucial in the enunciation of human connectedness because the politics imposed by global democracy is also sustained by fields of instrumentality. In a way, global order in global democracy does not surround itself with intimacy, the relational aspect of the human being as a social actor. There can be a transnational connectedness of people, which can be commenced by a conception that the human person is first and foremost an end in itself rather than a means for the cause of a specific nation. In a way, Chelsea is asking the agents to act according to instrumentality as an important dimension of performing globally. The alignment of the market, production, and capital is an important undertaking in accessing the global. In the marking of globalization's geography in *Welcome to IntelStar*, the disposition of the individual is tilted towards the inhuman, attributed to an assumption that these multinational companies mask exploitation as employment opportunities.

### **BUT THE PATIBONG IS EMPTY**

In her blog, Sky comments, “[I] couldn't find any exact word to describe what a call center life is: it's *liberating, challenging, toxic, hilarious and at times luxurious*” (“My Fake,” emphasis added). Sky's description of her work at a call center, an affirmative testimony of her job as an agent, contradicts the mockery and parody of the play. Is this narration only a sugarcoated narrative about the experience to convince the narrator (Sky) that it is better to be enslaved in this call center than to do nothing and contribute nothing to the financial needs of her family? Does the narrative only pertain to a sense of economic satisfaction that anti-globalists normally associate with globalization and neoliberal politics? One cannot simply dismiss these affirmative remarks about call center work, especially since recent ethnographic studies such as Aileen Salonga's thesis on the linguistic performance in the call center and Dina Marie Delias's thesis on the socialization of call center

agents show that call center agents do not consider their work as a site of alienation and exploitation.

Dina Marie Delias interviewed more than 150 call center agents in the Philippines. She also observed their work and socialization experiences. In her study, she argues that the call center as a place of exploitation is a social construct and is based on a surface view of the institution. Her immersion and the narratives of call center agents provide crucial points to counter the claim that these Filipinos are losing their local identity and agency. She also relates (through the narratives of agents) that, contrary to the popular conception that agents continuously desire an imagined “America,” agents maintain a sense of pride about being someone who is not from the US. One example is this narrative:

We cater to the underserved segment of America. These are the people who will beg because their electricity will be cut off, they have a baby and they don't have money for diapers. I really feel bad for them. Their situation is really pitiful, and I start to realize that it's not really that good in America, that people say that is their dream country. My perception about America changed a lot. Before I worked in a call center I would say “Wow, a white person! He must be 'sosyal' [“extravagant”] because the typical things they have there are only for the rich people in the Philippines. Then when I started working in my account and I encountered customers pleading because they were in the middle of nowhere and they have no gas, they're in a gasoline station and they have no money to buy gas. The way I saw them changed, I never imagined that there would be this kind of poverty (in America), poverty which is worse here, at least here in Baguio. (202-203)

Despite the popular conception that members of the Global North are favored and privileged, call center agents in Delias's report feel more fortunate to be in a developing nation even though it is perceived as underprivileged. In this regard, there is a surprising disparity between the representation of misery in *Welcome to IntelStar* and the actual experience of the Filipino call center agents. Here is a narrative where call center agents see the enterprise as a trap—not in the context of *patibong*, but within the fluidity of *lambat* and *bihag*. In short, the agents are entangled with the call center institution via the *lambat* because the enterprise (which is a global enterprise) is seen as a source of consumption similar with how the *lambat* entangles fish in the waters for the sake of nourishment. Agents are particularly attracted to these institutions for the sake of income and, on the other hand, for the sake of experience. As uttered in popular culture, “*Para may pangkain ang pamilya*” (To be able to feed the family).



However, most call center agents are single, in the case of Delias's report. As an agent states, "Working in the call center is to experience the professional and corporate world" (Delias 37). There are also agents, like the blogger Sky, who work in these institutions because of a particular attraction and fascination with the work. Also, one informant of Delias narrated that there is comfort knowing that he does not belong to the United States, as life there could be more terrible than what he is experiencing at the moment. In this regard, there is also a sense of being entrapped as a *bihag*—attracted to and captivated by the enterprise—a particular attraction, which in my analysis is a performance of actively engaging with the global.

These moments experienced by call center agents are not performed in *Welcome to IntelStar*. I am aware that it may be too much to include these implications of the *lambat* and the *bihag* in the play but I can only assume that the framework used in the writing of this monodrama is based on the conception of globalization as singular (manifesting in this transnational enterprise). Hence, this singular entity is based on a globalization that "constitutes integration of national economies into the international economy through trade, direct foreign investment (by corporations and multinationals), short term capital flows, international flows of workers and humanity generally, and flows of technology" (Bhagwati 440). In this way, the conception of the global is a view where social illnesses such as poverty in poor countries are by-products of globalization. But, as asserted earlier, globalization has many dimensions; it is not homogenous but a differentiated phenomenon. Even in the assertion of economic globalization, there is no singular reference about it since,

It embraces trade and long-term direct foreign investment by multinationals as well as flows of short term portfolio capital whose rapidity have caused havoc in places ranging from Bangkok to Buenos Aires. But it also should include now-sizeable migrations, legal and often illegal, across borders. And it extends to the diffusion on transfer of technology (such as AIDS-fighting drugs) among producing and consuming nation. Such economic globalization, in turn, is distant from globalization, say, on dimensions of such as increased international accessibility of print and other media [...] or growing enrollments of foreign students. (Bhagwati 442-443)

In this view of singularity based on the impetus of economics, globalization as implied by *Welcome to IntelStar* and criticisms of it (Ancheta, Chotirawe, and Odon), is accused of causing social illnesses in the world, especially in developing countries such as the Philippines. As suggested in the play, exploitation of poor countries by rich countries is one social illness that globalization causes worldwide. Hence,

social injustices caused by economic inequality are the dominant rhetorical diseases associated with this phenomenon.

In 2003, The Builder's Association of the United States and the motiroti of the United Kingdom collaborated in producing a theatrical spectacle written by Keith Kham, Ali Zhaidi, and Marianne Weems billed as *Alladeen*, which was categorized as a "global theatrical experience" by theatre critic and performance theorist Jon McKenzie. The play also featured the call center phenomenon—only that the setting was in Bangalore, India. In my reading of the performance, this spectacle features an optimistic view of a globalized world. The optimism I conceive may be seen in the construction of human ties by transnational and multinational corporations based on the accumulation of capital in the global market (such as the collaboration between the producing companies as trans-Atlantic and transnational). This optimism is also embodied in the implicit presentation of the world as becoming boundary-less due to the transnational flows provided by modern technology (such as the call center institution), as suggested in the anthology of Chanda and Froetschel.

For Jon McKenzie, globalization in *Alladeen* is presented normatively as it optimizes the performative values of the global: social efficacy, organizational efficiency, technological effectiveness, government accountability, and financial profitability. He adds that the concept of the global in this production is more one of "glocalization" since the performance features a kind of cross-cultural referencing leading to a defamiliarization of some cultural references. McKenzie explains:

Just as important to successful glocalization are shared cultural references that create a sense of commonality. In this same scene, another character, Saritri, gives a presentation about the popular American TV show, *Friends*, focusing on the personalities of each character. Her cross-cultural descriptions of Joey, Rachel, Monica, Phoebe and Chandler got laughs from my American theatre audience: as the *Friends* characters were translated on stage into an Indian frame of cultural reference, they became defamiliarized. (29)

This process of glocalization posits passivity, presenting a particular global framing of integration and assimilation, and a global conception where the First World seems to be at the top of a cultural hierarchy. Nevertheless, Paul Rae explains, the spectacle in *Alladeen* is "emblematic of the kind of stories the First World is telling itself about globalization" (11). As Rae attests, the problem with *Alladeen* is in the eluding of identity, relations, and history. Rae explains that *Alladeen* is a grand spectacle of global capitalism shown to embrace homogeneity but leading to animosity due to the loss of the affective realm based on the relational aspect of

theatre: “Mimicking only the anonymous (and therefore lacking interest) and the ahistorical (and therefore lacking a political edge), it is nevertheless the relational aspect of theatre that is sorely missed in *Alladeen*” (13).

This mimicry of the anonymous and the ahistorical is also reflected in popular conceptions of globalization in social and cultural scholarship in the Philippines. Sociologist Walden Bello is explicit in exposing globalization as the continuation of imperialism, particularly American imperialism, which eradicates national identity. Bello implies that the only interest of the imperial power is in capital accumulation and, consequently, that exploitation is a necessary tool to acquire the agenda of finance. For Bello, the only way to assert subjectivity and avoid the influence of imperialism is through de-globalization—an institutional strategy of removing support from international institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organization (WTO) because these agencies are only substituting the imperialist agenda of the United States. These institutions perform a disposition of *I don't care* towards the particularity of poor nations since what these institutions *do* care about is the accumulation of wealth from these developing countries.

*Welcome to IntelStar* falls short in its criticism of globalization because it isolated the phenomenon within the politics of the market. In accordance with the skepticism of film critic Michael Davidson, it shows the possibility of an interconnected world in which “whatever promises globalization proffers, increased communication and intersection are [...] lost in a confusion of tongues and temporalities” (116). With globalization reduced to homogeneity and the market system, the play fails to notice how developing countries participate actively in world-wide interconnectivity. As globalization is bracketed within the neo-liberal frame, the postcolonial subject position is presented as helpless and powerless, where power, other than being unequally distributed, is not absolute.

But is this accusation not an overstatement? In addition to the criticisms about the play, Odon mentioned that *Welcome to IntelStar* is “seen in the awful prism of global trade (currently unfair) and sense of nationhood (weak to nonexistent).” With this in mind, is the local really the prey or victim in this model of the *patibong*? With this fixation of globalization as a singular entity, as performed in *Welcome to IntelStar*, the local becomes more of the hunter than the suggested victim or prey. As implied in the play, globalization is trapped in this model of singularity in which other dimensions are not allowed to partake.

### **CAPTIVATION AS *PATIBONG***

Earlier, I argued that *Welcome to IntelStar* implied how developed and wealthy countries find ways to captivate developing countries towards the affirmation of globalization. Towards the latter part, I illustrated the dilemma behind this by discussing how globalization is singularized via its economic dimension. Hence, I posed an initial contestation that perhaps it is the local that is in the position of entrapping the global. Hence, the global (as represented by the rich countries) is more of a prey than a hunter. In this final section of the essay, I shall explain how this entrapment materializes by pointing out how the theatre itself becomes a model of entrapment. In particular, I shall illustrate how the theatre artists behind *Welcome to IntelStar* become representatives of the local in this constructed binary of the global-local. In this regard, theatre as a work of art may be likened to a *patibong* where a force of *bihag* is used as instrument of luring its prey (audience members) to fall into the hands of the hunter (theatre makers).

Alfred Gell explains, “Of course, it is not really the case that the trap is clever or deceitful; it is the hunter who knows the victim’s habitual responses and is able to subvert them” (27). This, for Gell, is the beginning of social interaction—the sociality—between the hunter and the prey in a trap. What is important for Gell is what he calls the “dramatic nexus” (27), which binds the hunter and his prey in an alignment of time and space. Hence, this captivation is in itself a mode of entrapment where the prey is unable to resist, to escape and is able to endure the designed instrument of entrapment.

This captivation, which in the Tagalog translation is also *bihag*, could have been used as a creative tool by the artists behind *Welcome to IntelStar* to draw their audience (as prey) into the trap of the theatre. One important signpost here is the use of humor in the play, which for Ancheta and Chotirawe is a significant part of the Filipino everyday life.<sup>3</sup> Ancheta argues, “language of humor and the comic strategies used therein respond to the creation, or to the evolution of a hyperreal Filipino identity, one that complicates the fixing of a national identity in the face of a culture that has long grappled with this question, given the Philippines’ own colonial and hybrid culture” (“Phantasmatic Constructions” 25). In short, this humor was seemingly used to captivate the audience’s attention and establish that something is at stake in this call center phenomenon, which complicates the continuous struggle of identifying a coherent Filipino identity, as suggested by Ancheta. Even the online reviewer Odon found this experience of humor relevant towards understanding Filipino identity. For him, the identity of the Filipino is in

crisis, but it was brought to the attention of the Filipino audiences of the play via its humorous attack and parody.

In another essay about a conception of national humor in the Philippines via popular texts such as Severino Reyes's comedic *sarsuwela* (traditional Filipino musical theatre) and comic strips such as *Kenkoy and Pilar* (printed in *Liwayway Magazine*), Ancheta explains,

While we do laugh because of the obvious remarks that the characters in these popular texts make, or because of the quirks, the accompanying drawn expressions, or because of the inherent incongruous situations operating in these, we laugh at the containment of Filipino life within the textual/visual frame, allowing us to recognize the abnormality of Filipino life, lurking in the absurdity of difficulties met with trivializing laughter or quips, as we find the comic too in seeing our own responses to identical situations. (“Halakhak” 53)

Ancheta emphasizes that Filipinos laugh not only as a response to what they encounter as humorous onstage (if a play), in text (if a literary material), or in frame (if a comic strip) but also at those they recognize as vicarious situations. And here humor is assumed to have the character of forging a community. For instance in the theatre, in seeing *Welcome to IntelStar* with other Filipino audiences, audiences are able to identify themselves as a community with a sense of shared *values* as they identify different *abnormalities* found in the play through their laughter. More conveniently, *Welcome to IntelStar* entraps its audiences by implying a belief that humor is a “Filipino national weapon,” as Ancheta argues, which is used “to reflect social foibles and cultural beliefs [...] as a response to crippling national horrors” and “to train an apparently disparaging look at themselves (Filipinos) as victims of embarrassing, painful historical or political circumstances” (“Halakhak” 56).

The second signpost regarding how *Welcome to IntelStar* drew audiences to the trap of the theatre is the device of including audience members in the performance as Chelsea's trainees. In the script, Martinez writes that Chelsea is addressing the audience “who ‘play’ the part of her new batch of trainees” (3). This participation is what Ancheta notes as an “indoctrination to the alien culture of call centers” (“Phantasmatic Constructions” 26). By this remark, the call center is implied to be a mysterious world—something unfamiliar. But is it really an unfamiliar terrain when Delias explains that one in every four adult Filipinos has been an agent in a call center institution since 2000? And how unfamiliar is this terrain when the Philippines has already overtaken India as the call center hub (or the Business Processing Outsourcing [BPO] hub) in Asia? As of 2010, the Philippine island of Cebu in the

Visayas region was considered the major hub for BPOs, overtaking offshore offices in Bangalore, India. Perhaps the captivation via active participation of audience members is indicative “not only of inclusion, but of the symbolic possibility that every Filipino could be a call center agent, or a BPO worker” (Ancheta, “Phantasmatic Constructions” 26).

Finally, another entrapment that *Welcome to IntelStar* used was the character of Chelsea being played by Eugene Domingo. Odon remarks,

Another thing that makes this show a must is Eugene Domingo's own surreal transformation in the eyes of those who only know her as the character Simang on TV soaps—the alternately street-smart and differently accented house-help. As the ‘officious’-looking trainor and career girl Ma’am Chelsea, Eugene not only “normalizes” her accent like the real thing, she also delivers a tour de force as she ‘shape-shifts’ herself from a nattily attired corporate woman to one vocalizing the stereotype of an irate ‘nigger’-caller. Eugene really does this gender-bending act unbelievably well.

At that time, Domingo, who began her career as a freelance theatre actor (acting for Dulaang UP, Tanghalang Pilipino, and Philippine Educational Theatre Association) was starting to be recognized for her talent as a comedian in television and film. Her role as Simang in one of the prime-time television series was a hit amongst viewers. During the staging, her character of Simang was well-known to many Filipino audiences. And during that time, she was preparing for her first starring film, also under Martinez’s direction. Since she started working for television and film, she has been known to be the confidante or side-kick for other popular film comedians (such as Ai-ai de las Alas). Since 2006, her talent has been recognized by various award-giving bodies such as the Metro Manila Film Festival, where she won Best Supporting Actress for the movie *Bahay Kubo* (2006, dir. Joel Lamangan); the Gawad Tanglaw (of the Tanglaw Foundation), winning Best Supporting Actress for the film *Pisay* (2007, dir. Aureus Solito); and the Urian Awards (the Association of Film Critics of the Philippines), where she was recognized as Best Supporting Actress for her role as a social worker in *Foster Child* (2006, dir. Brillante Mendoza).

With these achievements, she became one of the favorite actors of both independent and mainstream film directors. And in the years after *Welcome to IntelStar*, her name became synonymous with local superstars such as Nora Aunor, Vilma Santos, and Cherrie Pie Picache. In short, the play was a box office success not only because it won the Carlos Palanca Memorial Award for one-act play, but also and more importantly because a well-known actress-comedian who was an emerging *star* at that time performed the role of Chelsea.

With these signposts, *Welcome to IntelStar* becomes what Rey Chow in *Entanglements* calls an “index to a type of social interaction in which one party takes advantage of another by being temporarily preemptive by catching the other unawares” (45). In this regard, one can sense that the play becomes a substitute of the hunter’s power. Without having noticed, audiences are captivated—they are entangled within the play, which snaps close its mechanism of entrapment: the humor, the active audience participation, and Eugene Domingo. As in other forms of entrapment, captivation may lead to catastrophe. However, there is something in this entanglement in particular that does lead towards this catastrophic condition. In short, the *patibong* in the theatre can be viewed more hopefully if we think of entanglement as a complex way of understanding contemporary Manila theatre. The difference between an animal prey and a human prey in this conceptual entrapment is an awareness of the self once entrapped. Borrowing from the Greek tragedy, Alfred Gell calls this *anagnorisis* (literally means “recognition” but also connotes a critical discovery about the self).

I do not deny my own entrapment by *Welcome to IntelStar*. The device of parody and the humorous criticisms of Eugene Domingo captivated me. Together with other audience members, I was laughing out loud at various jokes and punch lines. I honestly enjoyed pretending to be a trainee in this make-believe call center institution at the Studio Theatre of the CCP. At the same time, I do not deny that I also fell into becoming a prey when I believed that the play was telling me about globalization between the sociality of the call center agent and his or her clients; and between the rich country (where the clients are located) and the poor country (where the call center is located).

Rey Chow asserts, “the hunter’s carefully conceived, preemptive plan as embedded in the open trap, is now folded into another space and time that comes into being through entrapment, while the prey’s past and present actions take on, belatedly, a new, additional significance as self-entanglement” (46). In short, with being entrapped, I also became aware of my own entanglement. Perhaps, an illustration of this self-awareness is this reflexive question of “what went wrong?” This self-awareness comes from my own *pagkawala* (“emancipation”) from the *patibong* that the theatre prepared for its audiences.

In his discussion of the “distribution of the sensible” in the *Politics of Aesthetics*, Jacques Rancière suggests that theatre provides a sense of illusion, but that the illusion is, in fact, real since it is distributed in the bodies, images, and other objects implicated in the liveness of a performance. For instance, while watching *Welcome to IntelStar*, my encounter with the performance is distributed via my sensations

and in this distribution, I am reminded about this paradox of real and illusion: the play is an imitation of the call center and that Eugene Domingo is an actor. But at the same time, something in my perception tells me that the encounter was in fact real—that despite this imitation, the illusion was very alive in the presence of the actor and other parts of the *mise-en-scène*.

Broderick Chow adds,

To read theatre as a distribution of the sensible means that it establishes what *is* and *isn't* able to be visible or represented, in the 'common sense' (and here I use sense in its dual meaning, of both perception through the senses, and the meaning or understanding that arises there from). The common modes of perception are important because they structure what Rancière calls the 'police order,' which means the set of unspoken but understood rules that determine certain roles in society.

It is in this set of unspoken but understood rules that as an audience member, I begin to recognize the distinction of the real and the fantasy or even recognize the blurred line between the two. Perhaps in this distribution of the sensible, the theatre even makes audience members more aware of the illusion and, therefore, invites them to look beyond the illusion because, as Chow explains, "what is" and "what isn't" are also easily distinguished by audience members. In other words, audience members are not passive spectators. As Jacques Rancière asserts, the spectator is emancipated: "It is the power each of them [the audience members] has to translate what she perceives in her own way, to link it to the unique intellectual adventure that makes her similar to the rest in as much as this adventure is not like any other" (*Emancipated Spectator* 16-17). Despite a play's attempt to invade the audience's intellectual disposition, audience members are reflexive about what they encounter onstage. As Rancière puts it, "We do not have to transform spectators into actors [...]. Every spectator is already an actor in her story; every actor, every man of action, is the spectator of the same story" (*Emancipated Spectator* 17). In this invocation of theatre's *patibong*, as an audience member who is already emancipated, I become aware of my own entrapment—my own becoming of a prey.

In realizing my own becoming of a prey in the world of *Welcome to IntelStar*, I realized how the play wanted me to believe that Domingo is performing a world that is experienced by call center agents themselves, and that this world is a real world. But my self-entanglement made me realize as well that the call center phenomenon is not as simple as what is being presented onstage because, as also illustrated in my discussion earlier, certain empirical data reveal otherwise. My



entanglement with the play and with myself made me think more about the call center institution as a product of globalization. On a final note, my entanglement made me think that with globalization reduced to homogeneity and the market system, the postcolonial subject position of the call center agent is presented as helpless and powerless where power, despite being unequally distributed, is not absolute. Perhaps other audience members also became aware of their self-entanglement and questioned whether call center institution is in fact an exemplar of performing the global.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This essay is part of a larger research project titled “*Buhol-Buhol: The Possibilities and Problems of Entanglement in Contemporary Manila Theatre.*” I am thankful to the National University of Singapore for the funding support granted to this project. I am also thankful to the following individuals for their generous contributions to this essay: Paul Alexander Rae, Jacqueline Stacey, Felicia Chan, William Peterson, Julius Bautista, Shanthini Manokara, Alonzo Alulod Gabriel, Ramona Flores, Veronica Caparas, Oscar Serquiña, and the two anonymous reviewers who saw the possibility of this essay to pursue an academic conversation about contemporary Manila theatre.

### ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The Carlos Palanca Memorial Award is an award for literary works in the Philippines, which include short story, poetry, non-fiction (essay), one-act play, full-length play, screenplay, and novel in both the local languages and English. In 2005, Chris Martinez received the third prize for one-act play for his *Welcome to IntelStar*. The Carlos Palanca Foundation chose Martinez’s play as the performance highlight during the awarding ceremonies. Under the direction of Alexander Cortez, TV comedian Michael V performed the role of Chelsea. After its staging at the Manila Intercontinental in 2005, the monodrama was performed in Cebu City under Little Boy Production before its commercial debut at the Studio Theatre of the Cultural Center of the Philippines in Manila in 2006. Two other productions were staged after 2006: one in Angeles City under Tony Mabesa’s direction which also featured Eugene Domingo as Chelsea and a restaging by Little Boy Production in Cebu City with local TV personality Jude Bacalso as Chelsea.
- <sup>2</sup> In the Pangasinan province of Northern Luzon, fishing is a major industry. This area of the archipelago is known for its abundant schools of milkfish, locally known as *bangus*. The province is known for its various food products made of *bangus*. A favorite is the *daing* or dehydrated milkfish in sweet vinegar and garlic, which is also one of the country’s export products. In the provinces of South Cotabato and Sarangani in the Mindanao region, tuna is a major source of the region’s revenues.

<sup>3</sup> The Filipino as a happy individual is one stereotype featured about his/her individuality in popular writings. For instance, Reynaldo Lugtu's feature essay in the Manila Standard Today attests that "rain or shine, crisis after crisis, calamity after calamity, we Filipinos are still smiling and laughing it off." Andrei Medina seconds this by proclaiming, "Filipinos are naturally a happy bunch and always have a smile ready for every occasion even if they are faced with problems that would normally depress or put down people from other nations."

## WORKS CITED

- Alladeen*. By Keith Khan, Ali Zaidi and Marianne Weems. Dir. Ali Zaidi. The Builder's Association and motiroti. Victoria Theatre, Singapore. June 2003. Performance.
- Ancheta, Maria Rhodora G. "Halakhak: Defining the 'National' in the Humor of Philippine Popular Culture." *Thammasat Review* 14 (2010/2011): 35-60. Print.
- . "Phantasmatic Constructions: Language and Humor and the Interrogation of Identity in Contemporary Filipino Comic Plays." *Humanities Diliman* 8.2 (2011): 1-29. Print.
- Bello, Walden. *Deglobalization: Ideas for a New World Economy*. London: Zed Books, 2002. Print.
- Bhagwati, Jagdish. "Anti-globalization: Why?" *Journal of Policy Modeling* 26 (2004): 439-463. Print.
- Chanda, Nayan, and Susan Froestschel, eds. *A World Connected: Globalization in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. New Haven: Yale Center for the Study of Globalization, 2012. E-book, print.
- Chotirawe, Carina. "Humor and Pathos: Filipino Diaspora Drama (Carlos Bulosan's *The Romance of Magno Rubio* and Chris D. Martinez's *Welcome to IntelStar*)." *The Thammasat Review* 14 (2010/2011): 61-76. Print.
- Chow, Broderick. "Two Dogs and a Maid: Theatricality, Visibility, and the Royal Shakespeare Company's *The Orphan of Zhao*." *Broderick Chow*, 19 Oct. 2012. Web. 30 Oct. 2012.
- Chow, Rey. *Entanglements, or Transmedial Thinking about Capture*. Durham: Duke UP, 2012. Print.
- Davidson, Michael. "On the Outskirts of Form: Cosmopoetics in the Shadow of NAFTA." *Diasporic Avant-Garde: Experimental Poetics and Cultural Displacements*. Ed. Carie Noland and Barrett Watten. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. 115-136. Print.
- Delias, Dina Marie. "Non-Mobile Labor and Transnational Subjectivity: Call Center Workers in Global Call Centers in the Philippines." Diss. National University of Singapore, 2014. Print.
- Gell, Alfred. "Vogel's Net: Traps as Artworks and Artworks as Traps." *Journal of Material Culture* 1.1 (1996): 15-38. Print.
- Held, David. *Cosmopolitanism: Ideas and Realities*. Cambridge: Polity P, 2011. Print.

- Held, David, and Paul Hirst. "Globalisation: The Argument of Our Time." *Open Democracy: Free Thinking about the World Online*, 2002. Web. 10 Jan. 2012.
- Keys, Tracy. "Review a World Connected: Globalization in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century." *Global Trends Blog*, 2 Feb. 2013. Web. 1 Sept. 2013.
- Lugtu, Reynaldo C., Jr. "What Makes Filipinos Happy?" *MST.ph: Manila Standard Today*. Manila Standard Today, 17 June 2012. Web. 1 Sept. 2013.
- Martin, Hans-Peter, and Harold Schumann. *The Global Trap: Globalization and the Assault on Democracy and Prosperity*. London: Zed Books, 1997. Print.
- Martinez, Chris. *Laughing Trip*. Quezon City: Milflores Publishing House, 2006. Print.
- McKenzie, Jon. "The Performative Matrix: Alladeen and Disorientalism." *Performance Research* 13.2 (2008): 26-36.
- Medina, Andrei. "Philippines Part of 10 Happiest Countries—Survey." *GMA News Online*, 22 Dec. 2012. Web. 15 June 2013.
- My Fake American Accent*. Dir. Ned Trespeces. Perf. Mailes Kanapi, Jonathan Neri, Martin de la Paz, Cherry Mae Canton. Dirty Kitchen Productions, 2008. Film.
- Odon, Resty S. "Reviews: Welcome to Intelstar; Gee-Gee at Walterina." *Restyo Blogpost*, 3 July 2007. Web. 10 Aug. 2012.
- Rae, Paul Alexander. "Where is the Cosmopolitan Stage?" *Contemporary Theatre Review* 16.1 (2006): 8-22. Print.
- Ranciere, Jacques. *The Politics of Aesthetics*. Trans. Gabriel Rockhill. London: Continuum, 2004. Print.
- . *The Emancipated Spectator*. Trans. Gregory Elliott. London and New York: Verso, 2011. Print.
- Salonga, Aileen Olimba. "Language and Situated Agency: An Exploration of the Dominant Linguistic and Communication Practices in the Philippine Offshore Call Centres." Diss. National University of Singapore, 2010. Print.
- San Juan, E., Jr. "Globalized Terror and the Postcolonial Sublime." *The Postcolonial and the Global*. Ed. Revathi Krishnaswamy and John C. Hawley. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2008. 157-165. Print.
- Sky. "My Fake American Accent (Ang Buhay na Walang Tulugan)." *Definitely Filipino Online*. Definitely Filipino, 17 Dec. 2011. Web. 12 Dec. 2012.
- Sonntag, Selma. "Linguistic Globalization and the Call Center Industry: Imperialism, Hegemony or Cosmopolitanism?" *Language Policy* 8 (2009): 5-25.
- Welcome to IntelStar*. By Chris Martinez. Dir. Chris Martinez. Perf. Eugene Domingo. Tanghalang Huseng Batute, Cultural Center of the Philippines, Pasay City. Jan. 2006. Performance.

**Sir Anril Pineda Tiatco** <siranrilpt@gmail.com> earned his PhD in Theatre Studies from the National University of Singapore. He was a visiting scholar at the Research Institute for Cosmopolitan Cultures in the University of Manchester from August 2012 to February 2013. His essays have appeared in the Asian Theatre Journal, Philippine Humanities Review, JATI: Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, TDR: The Drama Review, and Modern Drama. Tiatco is also the author of the forthcoming *Entablado: Theatres and Performances in the Philippines* (University of the Philippines Press, 2014). A faculty member of the University of the Philippines Diliman Department of Speech Communication and Theatre Arts, Tiatco is currently also the Director of the UP Diliman Information Office.