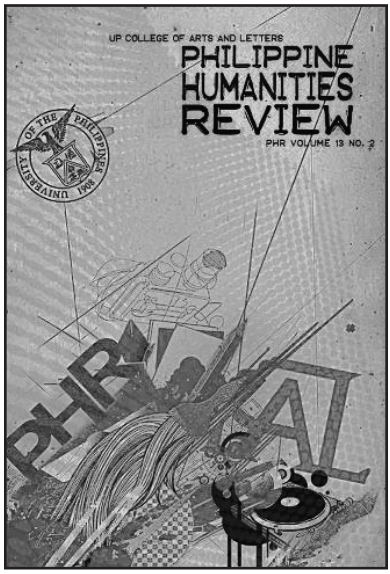

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KATRINA ANGELA R. MACAPAGAL

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THE FAME MONSTER: PASTICHE VERSUS PARODY IN THE CONTEXT OF SURPLUS ECONOMY

KATRINA ANGELA R. MACAPAGAL

At a time when the world is still attempting to recover from the shock of the global financial crisis, the music videos of American performance artist, Lady Gaga, are of particular interest. Lady Gaga's videos offer an onslaught of violent images, which have led to the production of parodies in the Philippines, distributed through the popular video website, Youtube. Among the numerous local parodies of Lady Gaga, the most popular local counterpart is Lady Gagita, tagged as one of many "Youtube sensations" that the Philippines has to offer. Certainly, Filipino consumers cannot completely appropriate the aesthetics of pastiche offered in Lady Gaga's videos in the same way that it is received in the United States (US). It is from this limitation to comprehend the logic of pastiche that the local production of Youtube parodies emerged. Through the videos of Gaga and Gagita, this paper poses the following questions: Can parody be explored as a means to resist and go against the depthlessness of pastiche? If this is true, up to what extent can this kind of mockery be realized as means for cultural resistance? There is renewed interest in the visual aesthetics offered by Lady

Gaga as she released a new album in April 2011. While the videos discussed in this paper were released in 2010, the focus of the study remains relevant as artists continue to make use of the aesthetics of pastiche and parody in visual production.

AFTER A RATHER LONG LULL IN THE AMERICAN MUSIC INDUSTRY, Lady Gaga, in all her fabulous monstrosity, re-entered the scene. *American Idol* was no longer amusing—as expected, the search proved more entertaining than the idols themselves. And so, from the nice-looking boys and girls of the idol show, the American public turned their attention to the outrageous spectacle of the Fame Monster. Consequently, so did the rest of the world.

Lady Gaga's breakthrough into the Philippine music market is not at all surprising as the country continues to embrace material and cultural products of American culture. Her first album sold over 15 million copies worldwide (LadyGaga.com), a huge feat considering the decline of album sales in the age of music piracy. What is worth noting, however, is the means by which Lady Gaga's fame has been distributed, received, and reproduced in this side of the world, as embodied by the emergence of Lady Gaga's local version: Lady Gagita.

Lady Gagita is Vinzon Leojay Booc, a mass communications student from Davao who produced a series of parodies of Lady Gaga videos on Youtube. Among his numerous attempts at parody, it was Booc's laborious frame-by-frame re/production of the music video for the song "Telephone" (Booc 2010) that caught the attention of viewers. Soon after his "Telephone" parody reached close to a million views on Youtube, local media produced print and television features on the latest Filipino "Youtube sensation." (LadyGagita.com).

In order to understand the nature of Lady Gagita's parodies, it is necessary first to understand the nature of Lady Gaga's fame. After all, Lady Gagita would not have emerged if not for the immense popularity of that being parodied. This paper will argue that Lady Gaga's fame is a kind of visual performance that banks on the postmodern aesthetics of pastiche, which Lady Gagita attempts to appropriate through parody.

Fame as Visual Performance

It cannot be denied that Lady Gaga offers more than music. Sure, she can sing and write pop, her songs are funky and undeniably catchy. But the music itself isn't that exceptional, one could arguably get a similar vibe listening to other female pop stars. I would even argue that Lady Gaga's music is the least interesting aspect about her rise to fame. Like many pop stars in the music industry, Lady Gaga is not simply a singer, she's a performer.

Lady Gaga herself claims that what she offers her audience is performance art (LadyGaga.com). The success of her performance does not really come from her music, but from her visually powerful and provocative packaging. Indeed, Lady Gaga herself is the performance, as she shocks viewers with one outrageous costume after another (it has been reported that she has never repeated an outfit): the bubble dress, the meat dress, the Kermit the Frog and the blazing red bird suit, just to name a few. And how could we forget the head contraptions. The sexual undertones in song lyrics, the provocative live performances, and of course, the hermaphrodite rumor helped seal her strangely fascinating packaging. American TV host Ellen de Generes said it in simple terms in an interview with Lady Gaga: "You're so entertaining, it's like, you're not just a great singer, *you're a show*" (Lady Gaga 2009; emphasis mine).

The genre of pop allows, and even necessitates, that Lady Gaga present herself as a show. Sociologist Simon Frith (1998, 466) notes that "…there is the realization that what is involved

in pop [unlike rock music] is not simply music but music as articulated through a performer or, rather, through an *image* of a performer. Thus we cannot distinguish the meaning of Elvis Presley's music from the meaning of Elvis Presley" (emphasis mine).

By performance, I follow the logic of Judith Butler's (1999, 173) definition of gender performativity which argues that "acts, gestures, enactments…are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means." I will return to the gender dimension of Gaga and Gagita later on. At this point, I want to stress the idea that Lady Gaga's performance of fame, or what it means to be the "Fame Monster," involves the creation and fabrication of a spectacle. As observed by editor Kate Durbin (2010), "Gaga's about faking fame, and she doesn't claim to be genuine. I definitely find her performance to be consciously a pose. That's part of her goal: to demonstrate how powerful the artificiality is."[1] While this comment on Gaga's goal may be contested, the quote at least points to Gaga's conscious self-construction of herself as spectacle.

The success of Lady Gaga's visual performance—the complex image of the Fame Monster— reaffirms Guy Debord's (1967) view that we live in the society of the spectacle, a society that consumes and is consumed by images. A society of the spectacle is marked by the constant decline of use value, which partly explains why Lady Gaga's performance—the shock and awe her image invokes—is more appealing than her music. For Debord (ibid., 12), "The real consumer has become a consumer of illusions. The commodity is this materialized illusion, and the spectacle is its general expression."

The music video serves as one of the most effective means for the creation and popularization of the pop star as spectacle. Extending de Bord's general theory of the spectacle,

media theorist Douglas Kellner introduced the concept of media spectacle, which involves the workings of the spectacle in various cultural fields including popular music. Kellner (2003, 8) notes: "Popular music is also colonized by the spectacle, with music-video television (MTV) becoming a major purveyor of music, bringing spectacle into the core of musical production and distribution."

Moreover, it should be stressed that the music video reinforces the commodification of music and the artists behind it:

> Artistic interest in the making of meaning does not end when the music is made, the record released, the performance over, but is equally invested in the way in which it takes on its public meanings via the media of television, radio, advertisement, the star system, and so on. The new interest in this reflects another technological development—video, which blurs, finally, the distinction between making music and marketing a commodity. Pop groups are now expected to construct their music as its own advertisement, a video spot on MTV. (Frith 1998, 466)

Such a view explains my particular interest in the music videos of Lady Gaga, through which she is able to achieve/perform her self-construction as commodified spectacle. How are we to understand the nature of her disturbing, yet strangely entertaining, visual performance?

The Rise of the Fame Monster

A look at Lady Gaga's early music videos reveals that the pop star did not cause much of a stir when she first came out. The initial act of the Gaga show was actually quite boring—"Just Dance" (LadyGaga.com 2010d) from her first album, *The Fame* (2008) features Gaga, well, just dancing with people in a party. The

follow-up video for the song "Beautiful, Dirty, Rich" (LadyGaga.com 2010c) shows Gaga floundering about in stacks of money and is more provocative; the song itself, however, is not that appealing. Her video for the hit song "Poker Face" (LadyGaga.com 2010f) is more visually interesting: it opens with Gaga emerging from a pool wearing a mirror mask and leotards, with shots of her sitting beside two Great Danes. Although the "love is a gamble" metaphor is nothing new, it was with "Poker Face" that she generated her first little controversy with the sexually-charged line, "bluffin' with my muffin," and her public admission that the song is about her bisexual fantasies. Gaga's next single, "Eh, Eh (Nothing Else I Can Say)" is virtually forgettable, but she made up for it with her hit, "Love Game," which scandalously opens with the line, "Let's have some fun, this beat is sick, I wanna take a ride on your disco stick."

Even though "Poker Face" is Lady Gaga's breakout single, the images of the music video do not make much of a spectacle. The images, although interesting, do not take over the song. The same may be said for the two singles mentioned above.

I would argue that the spectacle of the Fame Monster really took off only with the release of the video for the song, "Paparazzi." (LadyGaga.com 2010e). It begins with a montage of images of romance and luxury (e.g., flower, fountain, sculpture on a terrace) until we see Gaga and her male lover in a bedroom. Through snippets of tabloid headlines, Gaga is portrayed as a typical starlet struggling for fame. There's a short exchange of sweet talk, then the lovers move to the balcony where the paparazzi are waiting to take shots of the lip-lock. Gaga's lover presumably sold her to the paparazzi, and when Gaga resisted, the lover threw her off the balcony. The song begins with Gaga's survival from the lover's attempted murder. She emerges from a limousine in a wheelchair, wearing metallic leotards and a head brace. There's a dance scene with elegantly-dressed male and female servants, cuts of tabloid headlines proclaiming the demise of Gaga's career, and scenes of Gaga making out with strangers on a couch. In pursuit

of revenge, Gaga poisoned her lover and called 911 to say that "I just killed my boyfriend." The tabloids went wild ("We Love Her Again!" said one headline) and the video ends with Gaga posing seductively for her prison mug shots. Gaga says that the song and video is basically a critique of "fame culture" and how far people would go for fame, as expressed in the chorus: "I'm your biggest fan, I'll follow you until you love me, papa-paparazzi."

Gaga upped the ante on the theme of violence/murder in her video for "Bad Romance," (LadyGaga.com 2010b) the first release from her second album called *Fame Monster* (2009). The video has a rather horrific plot: Gaga is drugged and kidnapped by supermodels and auctioned off, presumably for sexual services, to the highest male bidder of a group that resembles a mafia. We are bombarded with one haunting image after another: Gaga sitting on something like a throne wearing a flashy gold outfit and wearing shades made of razor blades, surrounded by an odd mix of elegantly-posed people and a Great Dane; dancers in bright white leotards and white crown-like wraps on their heads (the costumes were reportedly inspired by illustrations from the popular children's book, *Where the Wild Things Are*); a casket-like capsule marked "MONSTER" from where Gaga crawls out of; Gaga in a bathtub with extremely dilated pupils; Gaga wearing avant-garde designer Alexander Mcqueen's gold 12-inch high shoes. These images have a touch of the eerie color treatment in Stanley Kubrick's film, *A Clockwork Orange*. The song that accompanies the video is equally disturbing, as Gaga sings of desire for a violent kind of love: "I want your love and I want your revenge/You and me can have a bad romance." In one stanza she sings, "I want your horror/I want your design/'Cause you're a criminal as long as you're mine/I want your love." The video ends with Gaga smoking a cigarette, slouched beside a skeleton on a scorched bed, the skeleton presumably belonging to the bidder who won her sexual services at the auction. The narrative suggests that Gaga set the bed/the winning bidder on fire because she did not want that "bad romance," contrary to what the lyrics of the song suggests.

Finally, we come to the music video for "Telephone," (LadyGaga.com 2010g) the spectacle of spectacles, the video that truly signaled the arrival of Lady Gaga's monstrous fame.

The lyrics of the song are simple enough to decode, with Gaga singing about how she would rather surrender to the dance floor than answer her lover's call: "Stop callin' stop callin' I don't wanna think anymore, I left my hand and my heart on the dance floor." But the visual rendering of the song complicates its meaning, as the narrative and images are seemingly infused with symbols/metaphors that touch on a range of issues including fame culture, media culture, consumer culture, and sex/gender politics.[2]

The video runs for over nine minutes. The first three minutes show Gaga's experience in the "Prison for Bitches" where she is stripped naked by prison guards who snidely remark: "Told you she didn't have a dick"—"Too bad." What follows is a scene in the prison courtyard where Gaga suddenly makes out with a buff masculine female inmate. Back inside the prison house a cat fight ensues, then Gaga finally begins to sing upon receiving a phone call from Beyonce. There is a dance sequence with Gaga and other inmates wearing studded underwear, fishnet stockings and heels. Gaga is then released, thanks to Beyonce posting bail. Fast-forward: We are taken to a diner, where Beyonce meets up with her boyfriend whom she and Gaga poison with food meticulously prepared by Gaga. In this elaborate scene, Gaga sports a telephone head piece. Almost everyone in the diner dies from Gaga's poison. With the dead customers as foreground, Gaga, Beyonce and some other dancers (who seem to have survived the mass murder) perform another dance sequence, with the two stars wearing skimpy outfits seemingly inspired by Wonder Woman and the American flag. As a television reporter talks about the suspects of the mass murder, the video closes with Gaga and Beyonce speeding away on Quentin Tarantino's "Pussy Wagon," ala Thelma and Louise, promising to "never come back." But that is just half of the story, as "to be continued" is flashed onscreen before the video ends.[3]

Looking at the development of the videos described, what is apparent is how Lady Gaga became more and more famous as her music videos became more and more perplexing and disturbing. In a sense, her self-proclaimed title of Fame Monster may be read literally—Lady Gaga garnered monstrous fame when she succeeded in staging her most monstrous spectacle to date via the "Telephone" music video.

Like the themes of violence and murder in Lady Gaga's videos, there is something almost sinister about the pop star's rise to fame following the shock of the global financial crisis in 2008. As the world was attempting to recover from what the International Monetary Fund (IMF) called the largest financial shock since the Great Depression (Stuart 2008), Lady Gaga, equally shocking, entered the global cultural consciousness as someone who thrives in such a crisis. And this is not just apparent in scenes of luxury such as in "Beautiful, Dirty, Rich" or the image of dollar bills marked with her face in "Paparazzi." Lady Gaga's whole packaging as the Fame Monster is unapologetically excessive at a time when it is supposedly not fashionable to flaunt any sign of excess.

The 2008 financial crisis was the global stage where/when Gaga unleashed the spectacle of the Fame Monster. If located within this context of the most recent capitalist crisis, the Fame Monster becomes a spectacle of excess—she is, literally and symbolically, "too much." This theory of excess may be linked to Marx's theory of surplus-value, the excess value used for capital accumulation. As explained by Marxist theorist Ernest Mandel (1967), "Under capitalist crises, *expanded reproduction* - economic growth - is brutally interrupted, not because too few commodities have been produced but, on the contrary, because a mountain of produced commodities finds no buyers."

Because of the unceasing desire for surplus-value, capitalism operates through overaccumulation and overproduction—and this is also how Lady Gaga operates in the sense of being "too much." Many have theorized about the factors

that led to the 2008 financial crisis which I will not be able to detail here, but at the heart of it is the crisis of overproduction that is inherent in the capitalist system. As Marx (1848) long ago noted, the capitalist system periodically experiences the "epidemic of over-production."[4]

In the sense that Lady Gaga is all about overproduction, it is important to locate Lady Gaga's context of performance within the crisis of surplus economy to emphasize her spectacle of excess. If anything, Gaga's monstrous fame is built on the overproduction of commodities that feeds into the desires of consumers.

But of course, the consumers' desire cannot be fulfilled; Gaga can never be fully grasped and comprehended by her fans. Related to the capitalist logic of never allowing the consumers' desire to be fulfilled, Chris Rojek's analysis of celebrity culture can further account for the appeal of the spectacle of the Fame Monster. His explanation of celebrity culture ties back to the spectacle of Lady Gaga as the embodiment of consumers' desire:

> Celebrity culture is one of the most important mechanisms for mobilizing abstract desire. It embodies desire in an animate object, which allows for deeper levels of attachment and identification than with inanimate commodities. Celebrities can be reinvented to renew desire, and because of this they are extremely efficient resources in the mobilization of global desire. In a word, they *humanize* desire. (Rojek 2001, 189)

And so it seems that the Fame Monster entered the scene at precisely the right time, when conditions have created consumers who openly denounce excess (consider the increasing protests against corporate greed after the shock of the financial crisis and recession), but may secretly desire it.

The Spectacle of Pastiche

Lady Gaga's aesthetics of excess fits the dominant feature of postmodern aesthetic production,[5] which Fredric Jameson has identified as pastiche. For Jameson (1991, 16), pastiche, unlike parody, is

> …a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody's ulterior motive amputated of satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists. Pastiche is thus blank parody, a statue with blind eyeballs...

To view Gaga's packaging as pastiche is to attempt to understand why most of her videos seem to deliberately resist interpretation, with all the allusions, mimicry, and the fusion of images from the past. Curiously, Guy Trebay (2010) of the New York Times points this out (without using the term pastiche) as something to be admired in claiming that Gaga's "singular innovation on the sincerest form of flattery has been to barge right past imitation to outright larceny…She patches together what she finds in the cultural image bank."

One may consider viewing Gaga's music videos using the framework of Jean Baudrillard's simulacrum, considering the proliferation of seemingly floating signs that Gaga deploys. Jameson (1991, 18) also mentions the "culture of simulacrum" in his discussion of the postmodern period of spectacle (following Debord). However, Baudrillard's simulacrum departs from the aesthetics of pastiche, because the simulacrum is "no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody" (Baudrillard 1994, 2). Even though simulacrum and pastiche are both considered postmodern cultural phenomena and are similar in their attempt to question the originality and authenticity of images, Gaga's music videos knowingly refer to and appropriate images and icons from the past. To return to the concept of pastiche: "Pastiche has a very particular relationship to

history. As a strategy it can often involve pilfering from history and combining historical elements in ways that have little historical meaning but are rather a kind of play" (Sturken 2009, 328).

Another concept that may be raised is bricolage as defined by Claude Levi-Strauss, because the fusion of images in Lady Gaga's videos may be read to produce new, potentially subversive meanings (Barker 2004, 17). However, the concept cannot explain the mimicry involved in the carefully and deliberately constructed spectacle achieved in Lady Gaga's videos, compared to the improvisation involved in the construction of bricolage. The subversive potential of Gaga's videos is also highly contestable.

However, Gaga's visual performance is not simple pastiche, it is the overproduction of pastiche, or the overproduction of excess. Gaga is able to offer some degree of novelty via pastiche overdrive. Shock performance is not shocking anymore; we are no longer disturbed by images of androgyny, sexual rebellion, murder, violence, etcetera, because we have seen them before in Madonna, David Bowie, and Boy George, just to name a few. Performance per se is a thing of the past, which is why excessive performance is what the Fame Monster continuously tries to offer.

The "Telephone" video best exemplifies the notion of excessive pastiche, which partly explains why this is Gaga's most heralded video to date. At the onset, the length of the video could be read as the initial signal of the video being overproduced. The music is displaced and superseded by the images in "Telephone," which the *Rolling Stone* magazine called "a visual orgy of sex, violence, and product placement" (Ganz 2010).

It is easy enough to spot the blatant product placements throughout the video—Virgin Mobile telephone, Diet Coke, HP, Polaroid, Wonderbread, Miracle Whip—with Lady Gaga being the biggest iconic brand among them all. Again, the notion of excess is seen in the total lack of subtlety of product placements. If music videos are supposed to serve as advertisements for the pop star,

the obvious product placements suggest Lady Gaga's awareness of herself as a commodified spectacle. On the one hand, perhaps this could be read as Lady Gaga's attempt at irony. On the other hand, I am inclined to read this as Jameson's "blank parody" of pastiche, in that the intended critique of consumer culture is offset by the glamour with which the products are used and displayed by Lady Gaga herself.

The images that signify the celebration of consumerism are linked with the radical feminism suggested by the narrative: here we see the alliance of Lady Gaga and Beyonce as strong representations of female rage against patriarchy with the murder of the male character. (Interestingly, we do not even know why Gaga was imprisoned in the first place). What is excessive in the murder narrative is not just the suggestion that men are evil and should therefore be destroyed—the excess is seen in the death of everyone (women included) who stood in the way of the killing rage,[6] as illustrated in the scene of mass murder which was celebrated through the dance number that followed.

Gaga's follow-up to "Telephone", the video of "Alejandro" (LadyGaga.com 2011a), features Gaga swallowing a rosary. Interestingly, the "Alejandro" video did not seem to inspire the same level of shock and awe compared to that of "Telephone." In April 2011, Gaga released her second album, "Born This Way," but it did not garner the same massive response from the public in terms of sales.[7] The video with the same title (LadyGaga.com 2011b), although still perplexing, did not have the same buzz created by "Telephone." Even the video for the song titled "Judas" (LadyGaga.com 2011c) did not spur too much of a controversy.[8] Gaga's latest gimmick, as I write this, is the creation of a male alter-ego[9] featured in the video for the single "You and I," but again, this gender-bending strategy did not invoke too much of a response, relative to the videos for the songs in *The Fame Monster* album.

The decline in response to Lady Gaga's succeeding performances may again be read in relation to the notion of excess.

The performance of excess must forever be renewed in the context of the postmodern condition. As Jameson (1991, 4) argues: "aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally: the frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods (from clothing to airplanes), at ever greater rates of turnover, now assigns an increasingly essential structural function and position to aesthetic innovation and experimentation." Lady Gaga needs to exceed the shock effect of her last costume, song, or video—or else, her performance will be rendered obsolete as quickly as she became famous. In other words, Gaga's strategy of excess means that she is only as good as her last performance.

Pastiche becomes Parody

What has been discussed so far is Lady Gaga's overproduction of excess in the context of surplus economy. In his analysis of pastiche, Jameson (ibid.) argues that the postmodern condition in the stage of late capitalism "makes parody impossible." How, then, do we make sense of Lady Gagita's entry into local aesthetic production through the strategy of parody as embodied by Vinzon Booc, a.k.a. Lady Gagita?

Booc comes from a humble background, a detail that has been highlighted in print and television features of Lady Gagita following the popularization of his "Telephone" parody.[10] The parody, quickly labeled a "viral video," gained a million hits barely a month after it was uploaded in April 2010 (LadyGagita.com 2011). According to Booc, his initial attempts at producing music video parodies of his favorite international pop stars like Beyonce did not receive much attention. It was his "Telephone" parody that made him a local "Youtube sensation," included in the 2010 Top 10 viral videos listed by a local online magazine (Alvarez 2010). A local writer marvels: "Booc and Palermo [who played the role of Beyonce] have certainly come a long way. From being just two kids in the small baranggay of Bunawan in Davao, they now enjoy media attention and get to be invited to perform" (Lim 2010).

How should we approach the success of Lady Gagita's parody? The renaming from Gaga to Gagita, seems like a humorous and localized parodic attempt. The term Gagita could mean a number of things, including mockery and comic homage. Linda Hutcheon (1989, 101) explains the value of parody as such: "As a form of ironic representation, parody is doubly coded in political terms: it both legitimizes and subverts that which it parodies. This kind of authorized transgression is what makes it a ready vehicle for the political contradictions of postmodernism at large." But is this hopeful definition of parody expressed by/in Lady Gagita?

Like the American Lady Gaga, it seems that Lady Gagita's rise to fame in the local context occurred at the right time, through the right medium. Parodies of music videos have been done before, but this was before the development of Youtube. Before Youtube, parodies of music icons like Madonna and Michael Jackson were mostly transmitted through comedy/gag shows on local television.

Technological development has, to some degree, made the commodity that is Lady Gaga more accessible to consumers in impoverished countries like the Philippines, at least to the privileged few who actually have access to internet technology. It may even be said that Lady Gaga herself is a product of the internet age. Lady Gaga, an American performer-commodity, re/stages and sells her performances through music videos uploaded in cyberspace. The profile posted on her website boasts of her success in the digital age: "She is also the only artist in the digital era to top the 5 million sales mark with her first two hits…she has over 1.3 billion combined views of all her videos online. She is also a staple in the social networking world…she's one of the biggest living people on Facebook with over 33 million 'likes' and is #1 on Twitter with over 9.5 million followers" (LadyGaga.com 2010a).

This access and marketing through the internet marks a salient difference in the manufacturing of pop stars at present. The same can be said for Lady Gagita. The fact that Lady Gagita's fame was launched via cyber-technology seems to compound the

celebration of and fascination over Lady Gagita, who was able to use technology as a tool for fame. In fact, Lady Gagita has extended his virtual fame beyond Youtube; he now has an official website and makes use of other social networking sites.

Despite the seemingly democratizing potential of the internet, cyberspace also serves as a new site of colonialism, a new space for the branching out of capital and consumers. For Jameson (1991, xix), the late stage of capitalism includes "new forms of media interrelationship…computers and automation, the flight of production to advanced Third World areas…." Related to the export of capital, Vladimir Lenin's analysis of the necessity of international exchange under monopoly capitalism remains relevant: given that an "enormous surplus of capital" (1916/1999, 70) has risen in advanced countries, there is a necessity to export capital to backward countries. This export of capital remains operational in the internet age—cyberspace has become a new space for the export of surplus capital, such as through the transmission of information and cultural forms (e.g., the music video) that heavily influences global culture and consciousness.

Obviously, the virtual exchange of capital in cyberspace, like the material exchange of capital, does not transpire on equal terms. This explains why local consumers cannot completely comprehend and appropriate the aesthetics of pastiche offered in Lady Gaga's videos in the same way that it is comprehended in countries like the United States. Even as the Philippines serves as a dumping site of surplus products including cultural aesthetic commodities/consciousness, local consumers are unable to situate themselves in the context of overproduction, the source of export capital.

This brings us back to the character of the international exchange between Gaga and Gagita. This is my key point about the nature of Gagita's parody: what we see in the parody of "Telephone," what we find funny in Gagita's representations, is not so much the overproduction of excess, but the opposite: the overproduction of scarcity. If Lady Gaga embodies the overproduction of excess, Gagita embodies the excess of scarcity.

In Gagita's "Telephone," these are the signs and images of scarcity: Instead of Diet coke, Gagita "wears" local C2 bottles as rollers; instead of glamorous designer clothes, Gagita wears his mother's old wedding gown and creates costumes using garbage bags; instead of a sandwich in the diner, Gagita serves pickles; and instead of a car, Gagita uses the cover of an electric fan. Props were improvised from scraps, and the primary setting is Gagita's house that looks like a shanty. As for post-production, Gagita even had to rent a computer in the neighborhood internet shop.

What Gagita lacks in props, he tries to make up for in performance. But Gagita's performance only highlights what is lacking. Scarcity is highlighted in the ironic opening credits labeled "Mayaman University presents," when the very opposite of wealth is showcased in the parody. Scarcity is moreover reinforced in the images from Lady Gaga's "Telephone" that Gagita is simply unable to mimic: the cut of the mobile phone (an accidental promotion of Virgin Mobile), the subsequent cuts of the Pussy Wagon speeding away, and a flash of iconic Alexander Mcqueen armadillo shoes. The images of technology, affluence, and mobility are desettling scenes in Gagita's parody as they are obviously out of place. Even though they are quick interruptions in terms of length, they also serve as signifiers of the disjunct between the parody and that being parodied.

This parodic visualization of the excess of scarcity could have been Gagita's subversive potential—up until local media dubbed this latest Youtube sensation as merely an act of *gaya-gaya, puto-maya* or impersonation (Jessica Sojo Presents 2010). Gagita's parody was initially heralded as a testament to Pinoy innovation, creativity, and resourcefulness, much like how we approach *pagpag* or how the poor eat leftover food scoured from garbage bins.[11] This way of seeing as popularized by local media renders Gagita's parody violent as Gaga's pastiche, but obviously not as glamorous. In relation to the use of parody in performativity, Butler (1999, 176) departs from Hutcheon's overly optimistic view: "Parody by itself is not subversive, and there must be a way to understand what makes certain kinds of parodic repetitions effectively disruptive, truly troubling, and which

repetitions become domesticated and recirculated as instruments of cultural hegemony." Gagita's parody, unfortunately falls into the latter category, exploited and stripped of its subversive potential.

I mentioned earlier that Gagita's parody may also be read in relation to gender performativity. Butler has commented on the subversive potential of the drag as a form of parodic performance, in that it reveals how gender is a fabricated and repeated act (1999, 175-176). However, in the Philippine context, Butler's concept of drag cannot neatly be transposed,[12] especially in the case of Lady Gagita who is seen not as a drag performer, but as an impersonator. If gender subversion means the freedom to establish one's own gender identity, I do not see how Gagita's mimicry of Lady Gaga is able to do so, given that his videos are celebrated for how closely he is able to resemble Lady Gaga, not how he is able to establish his own identity. Between Gaga and Gagita, it is Gaga who is actually able to parody gender, as seen in the "Telephone" scene where Lady Gaga kisses a female inmate and the introduction of her male counterpart in the video of "You and I" (LadyGaga.com 2011d).

Gaga/Gagita can both be understood as embodiments of surplus economy, but a huge gap exists between them, a gap which mimicry will not be able to close. Ultimately, Lady Gaga's pastiche is the production of a commodity; Lady Gagita's parody is, in the end, a means of consumption, despite having been produced in actuality (as in shooting, editing, uploading, etc.). Gagita's parody is his way of buying into Lady Gaga's pastiche.

However, this is not to take an ultimately defeatist view of Lady Gagita's transgressive potential. On 13 August 2010, I attended a forum on the subject of Youtube filmmaking, where Lady Gagita was a guest speaker. It was an informative talk, as Lady Gagita explained how he produced his parodies, and the intentions behind making those parodies. It was clear that Gagita knew what he was talking about, in fact he talked about how parodies in the Philippines are used for political satire. What surprised me, however, was that Gagita arrived with a manager from a local TV network,

which to me signaled that Gagita is on his way to becoming a local celebrity; he seemed to be literally stepping out from the computer screen into actuality. What was even more disturbing was how this manager spoke about and for Gagita, which transformed the forum into something like a press conference for an up-and-coming star. The manager spoke of Gagita's popularity as someone who was able to transcend his class origin, someone who represents the power of dreams. After all, that is the kind of story that would sell. Given the way Gagita's spectacle is being manufactured in local celebrity culture, how will Gagita, and others like him, struggle within such an exploitative system?[13]

The manufacture of figures like Gaga and Gagita in the field of popular music should be considered a significant area in cultural studies because it is a way in which "people, young people in particular, accommodate themselves to capitalism…To study pop music is to study a way in which common sense (including our own common sense) is shaped; to discover places, moments, where that common sense breaks down, cannot deal with needs and desires via straightforward consumerism, sets up alternative fantasies and demands" (Frith 1998, 472). Gaga as producer/product sells excess, and this is the fantasy/demand that Gagita attempts to buy into in his parodies. While the world seems to be taking Gaga seriously,[14] what about Gagita?

We go back to Gagita's first television feature—his first taste of fame—where he explained the intention behind his parodies: *Para sumikat, saka para maiahon ang pamilya ko sa hirap* (To become famous and to uplift my family from poverty) (Jessica Sojo Presents 2010).

And so it seems that Jameson (1998, 16). is right. "Pastiche eclipses parody." Gaga trumps Gagita—even as parody, with all its humor, puts up a good fight.

Notes

This paper has not been published on print elsewhere, however, parts of this paper have been published online in the *Philippine Online Chronicle*, March 2010. From this short article where I first raised the concept of pastiche, I developed the ideas to include the concept of parody.

1 Durbin together with Meghan Vicks, a comparative literature student who wrote a dissertation on Gaga's "Telephone" video, put up an online academic journal called *Gaga Stigmata*. See http://gagajournal.blogspot.com/p/about.html and http://www.salon.com/2010/05/28/lady_gaga_academic_journal/.

2 Following its release, a number of articles attempting to deconstruct the "Telephone" video were published online.

3 Over a year later, the much anticipated continuation of "Telephone" has not yet been released, even as I revise this paper (8 November 2011).

4 There was renewed interest in Marx's crisis theory following the 2008 global financial crisis. In an interview, Nouriel Roubini, a leading American economist told the Wall Street Journal (WSJ): "Karl Marx had it right. At some point, capitalism can destroy itself. You cannot keep on shifting income from labor to capital without having an excess capacity and a lack of aggregate demand. That's what has happened. We thought that markets worked. They're not working. The individual can be rational. The firm, to survive and thrive, can push labor costs more and more down, but labor costs are someone else's income and consumption. That's why it's a self-destructive process." The full interview that topped the WSJ headlines for months can be viewed at http://online.wsj.com/video/roubini-warns-of-global-recession-risk/C036B113-6D5F-4524-A5AF-DF2F3E2F8735.html.

5 Indeed, Gaga is hailed as today's "postmodern feminist" icon. The term is used even in popular, non-academic magazines/publications.

6 "Killing rage" is a concept put forward by bell hooks in reference to the rage she felt towards racism. For hooks, rage can be a catalyst for political action. See hooks, bell. 1995. *Killing Rage: Ending Racism*. New York: H. Holt and Co.

7 According to reports, Lady Gaga's *Born This Way* album did not sell as much as the *The Fame Monster*. The latter sold well in its first week of release because of Amazon's 99 cents sale, but sales sagged the week after from 1.1 million to a mere 49,000 digital copies sold. See http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/music_blog/2011/06/lady-gaga-tops-the-1million-mark-in-first-week-album-sales.html.

8 See "Lady Gaga fails to provoke Catholic Church with 'Judas'" http://www.salon.com/2011/05/09/lady_gaga_judas_catholic_church/.

9 Gaga's invented male alter ego is called "Jo Calderone," a masculine counterpart ala James Dean. She first performed live in the guise of this male alter-ego in the 2011 MTV video music awards. Interestingly, Lady Gaga calls this her version of drag.

10 Gagita's first television appearance was featured in *Kapuso Mo, Jessica Soho* on GMA. Shortly after that, he made several appearances in local variety and showbiz television shows. His most popular print feature was in *Manila Bulletin* where he posed as Lady Gagita for a top Manila-based photographer.

11 I remember watching a local television feature on GMA about the practice of "pagpag" where the reporter concluded that doing so attests to the resourcefulness of poor Filipinos.

12 In "Performativity, *Bakla* and the Orientalizing Gaze," J. Neil Garcia pointed out that the Filipino *bakla* performance is very different from Butler's Western concept of drag.

13 In the course of revising this paper, I learned that shortly after that forum, Gagita's fame gradually faded. His downfall was featured on a charity television show, *Wish Ko Lang*. The feature ended with the show providing a form of livelihood for Booc's family, and Booc was encouraged to return to show business by performing in comedy bars. Shows like *Wish Ko Lang* exemplify how even the loss of fame can be commodified and exploited.

14 The University of South Carolina currently offers a course titled "Lady Gaga and the Sociology of Fame." See http://www.gagacourse.net.

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