UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
Los Angeles

Reappropriating Desires in Neoliberal Societies through KPop

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of the requirements for the degree Master of Arts
in Asian American Studies

By

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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Master of Arts in Asian American Studies
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ABSTRACT:

This project analyzes contemporary KPop as a commercial cultural production and as a business model that emerged as the South Korean state's U.S-aligned neoliberal project, and its functions as an ideological, political, and economic apparatus to effectively affect the production and reproduction of desires in the emergence of various sub-cultures at disparate sites across the globe. Legacies of colonialism, neocolonialism, and (late) capitalist developments that sanctioned the conditions for this particular form of mass and popular culture, KPop as a commercial commodity is also a contesting subject of appropriation and reappropriation by those in power and those in the margins. By examining the institutionalized and systematic new media platforms and internet technologies which enables new forms of globalized interactions with mass culture in general and KPop in particular, the thesis locates how resistant and alternative (sub) cultures emerge in variable conditions. Through newly found mediums online, emerging cultural formations challenge and negotiate the conditions of commercial and dominant systems, to allow various and localized subaltern (secondary) cultural identities to decenter, disrupt, and instigate KPop and its neoliberal governance, to reorient and reappropriate itself in the process as well.

The thesis of Daisy Kim is approved.

Jinqi Ling
Thu-huong Nguyen-Vo
Victor Bascara, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles
2012

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Acknowledgements

Growing up in a British colony, my perception of America was established through the fictional characters from the book series Baby-sitters Club and Sweet Valley. They became my ideals and my access to America. As a tertiary-immigrant, squeezing myself into a middle school during some uneventful time of the school year in the suburbs of Los Angeles, my preconceived notions of America was shattered by a reality that appeared aesthetically, racially, geopolitically, and economically very different from the references I had been given. By the time I entered high school, I became part of the newly emerged generation, whose teenage dreams were published, administered, and indefinitely circulated on the World Wide Web through web-publishing tools such as Xanga and whose teen angst became a soundtrack available for download through Napster. The summer that I graduated from high school, the internet gifted me with Friendster, Myspace, followed by Facebook, with all the possibilities and complexities that would emerge through newly programmed social networking technologies. I became another casualty of the algocratic schemes that silently but effectively affect the conditions of contemporary existence in a late-capitalist society. Branding of nation-states into the minds of impressionable youth far and near, and negotiations of identity politics through popular culture has always been a set of fascinating and disturbing systems that I have been mesmerized and absorbed by. It is an area that is captivating to expose because the dominant narrative is so strongly articulated; yet we grow oblivious to the obvious, because the obvious gets incorporated into oblivion and becomes (un)recognizable through its projected norms, values, and beliefs.

Despite my constant preoccupation and enthusiasm for cultural studies and its (popular culture's) effective presence in diverse contemporary societies, it took me many detours to find

the confidence to begin working towards this research topic. My thesis project finally emerged through the supportive conditions that were located within the intersections of the Asian American Studies Department and Center. I am very grateful and thankful for my committee members Professors Thu-Huong Nguyen-Vo, Jinqi Ling, and Victor Bascara that have individually and collectively encouraged me to explore freely around my topic, and for guiding me with their own writings that have inspired and guided the directions of this thesis. It was a truly pleasurable experience and a very revealing learning process to be advised by their teachings. In particular, I want to thank Professor Victor Bascara for devoting immeasurable hours of his time and attention throughout this entire process. I am truly appreciative of his dedication and cannot express enough gratitude for providing me with all the academic resources, advice, reassurance, and the motivation to indulge in my own writing process.

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Introduction

Filmed in HD (high-definition) with blurred and zooming effects, Big Bang's newly released songs *Blue* and *Bad Boy* are playing in the background of a home-made music video. The mash-up music video clearly does not feature the members of one of KPop's most popular boy bands, Big Bang, but the resemblance of the actors to the boy band in this particular video are uncanny. From the dramatized gestures of pushing aside a love-interest, to the eclectically put-together urban-wear attire of the actors, the details of the video mimic and mirror the original music videos of *Blue* and *Bad Boy*. It is the top ranking video under Google Video's search for the words tagged under: big/ bang/ cover/ blue/ bad/ boy, which pulled up "About 5,260,000 results (0.45 seconds)." It is one of the most viewed cover videos submitted for YG Entertainment's 2012 Big Bang Cover Contest for the songs *Blue* and *Bad Boy*[1]. As one of the main cast members of YGLoversCrew (the dance crew behind the cover video) dressed as GD of Big Bang enters the video at 0:59, he is wearing an olive green puffy parka, donned with multiple peace-sign, smiley face and other patches and buttons, over a cream-colored knitted sweater which is only visible through the peeking of its sleeve and a bandana wrapped around his neck, tucked snugly away under the parka. A fluffy bright neon-blue furry cape is clasped onto the back of the parka and swings back and forth to his rhythmic gesture, in sync with a long strand of shoulder-length hair that is flinging around the right-side of his face. It's an odd-hairstyle, since an urban cap in black that reads BADBOY in white writing is keeping the side-swept or one-sided strand of shoulder-length hair wagging back and forth like a tail stuck to the hat. A full shot that introduces this dancer highlights his outfit even before he begins to dance

[1] YGLoversCrew. "Official MV- BLUE/BAD BOY (Big Bang) Cover." March 13, 2012. Online video clip. Youtube. Accessed on June 1, 2012 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L9By3oufRCY

along to the song. The paint-splattered, ripped and faded tight jeans and high-top sneakers which resemble vintage Converse shoes and an oversized metal pendant around his neck completed the outfit. This quirky and off-beat outfit is cool. It's a trademark of Big Bang, the epitome of KPop cool and swagger, thus every detail and item are a crucial and quintessential pre-requisite in the production of a cover video. YGLoversCrew even does a shout-out at the end of this video in accented, but much-rehearsed English, in a tradition of and paying homage to the original Global Contest video.

It is when the video hits the 1:49 mark, after following this dancer down an unknown quiet, urban neighborhood street that the scene closes in into a bust shot. The dancer continues to motion his enclosed fists with his thumb sticking out, pointing towards himself to the beat of the R&B sounding song sung in a mixture of Korean and English. You, as the viewer are directed by his thumbs pointing at his chest and you notice the Korean and Vietnamese flags sewn side-by-side into his parka, right over his heart. The scene flips to another dancer and the cover video continues to play out the scenes of the original Big Bang music videos to *Bad Boy*. This cover video is no exception to the rule, or exceptional when compared to other cover videos which were submitted for the Global Cover Contest. What is striking are the national markers (of the Korean and Vietnamese flags) that are tattooed onto his costume for the particular category of Best Costume Cover. The flags on the parka are signifying the marriage between the Vietnamese youth and their culture of covers, and KPop and the Korea that it represents. Through dedicated hours and money spent in the remaking of the costumes and labor that went in to perfecting the dance choreography and body movements, YGLoversCrew has successfully re-enacted the scenes of the original music video. He's passionately in character as he waves his thumb towards the flags, alluding to their elevated status from the Vietnamese fan/consumer to a

(re)producer of the Korea(n) KPop stars. There is no Big Bang in this music video, but it almost does not matter since there's nothing missing. Everything that makes a KPop video what it is supposed to be is all there. It has generated over half a million views in a little over a month on Youtube alone and the view count that it may have received through clip.vn (a Vietnamese video-sharing website), 56.com (one of China's several video-sharing websites; Youtube is not legally accessible in mainland China), or any other website that may have generated further traffic to itself. It's gotten over 3,600 comments on the video and even has a facebook fan-page[2]. They have a fan-base of users that are commenting how cute and handsome they are in English, Vietnamese, and Arabic among other languages. One user (resario253) says: "Like Seung Ri and GD, Viet boys so cool." The cover has transcended itself from a mimic into a duplicate. They are 'so cool.' Whether it is an echo of the 1990s slogan of "Cool Britannia" which helped transform and re-introduce Britain into the essence of global 'cool' with its transformative national re-branding through the platform heels and glitter-enriched body-con dresses of the Spice Girls and other notable Britpop stars that revamped Britain's culture from the previous conservatism to Tony Blair's charmed imagery of modernized Britain, or cool-ness as the functional device and currency to becoming a recognizable popular cultural entity in the pop-game—YGLoversCrew has risen to 'cool'.

Why did a group of Vietnamese youth get together to enter the Big Bang Global Cover Contest, and how did they generate over half a million views[3], and why did they go out of their way to duplicate the 5 members of Big Bang's costumes down to minute details of each member (from sunglasses, hairstyles, to perfectly choreographed dance moves and facial expressions of

[2] Doan Nhat Anh, (YG LOVERS CREW). "YG LOVERS CREW". Facebook.com. unknown. http://www.facebook.com/pages/YG-Lovers-Crew/274731025881414 1 Jun. 2012

[3] this view count, like all other videos that I reference, is growing as I type and cannot have a final quantified count, as long as it remains uploaded and accessible online; this is only a growing number

the original Big Bang members), only to add their only own authentic marker through that of the two nation-state flags on their heart? It is an ironic juxtaposition to attach the two flags together given its interlocking relationship to the Cold War histories. They are arguably the two primary examples of the Cold War's U.S militarism and occupation, where they share traumas of a civil-war and severe civilian and infrastructural devastation as sites of the droppings of the U.S.' napalm during its respective wars[4]. In addition to the shared geopolitical and traumas of war, both respective nation-states have recently reformed their economic policies towards the late-capital model of neoliberalism, with Korea joining the free markets at an earlier time period following the stalemate which divided the peninsula into closed-off communist-dictatorship governed North and a democratic Republic-governed South advancing economically at a surging pace largely due to heavy U.S investments, than the more recently reformed Socialist-neoliberal Vietnam. Both have undergone the direct military occupation of the U.S and Korea continues to remain a neo-imperialized subject and its respective economic and cultural growth under the proximity of U.S cultural imperialism[5]. What lies underneath as well as what are the overarching structures and systems that had created that moment of creativity of and for these dancers in the home-made music video cannot be analyzed as a mere spur-of-the moment action taken by these youth. Rather, a keen observation of the conditions that prompted the production of this video, and the technological webs that had brought such scenes to my viewing of the video lie in the complexities of the geopolitics, economic, social and cultural histories and their intersections that resonate in the present moment.

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[4] Cho, Grace M. *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, and the Forgotten War*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008. Print. "Between 1950 and 1953, US bombers dumped as much as 600,000 tons of napalm over the Korean peninsula…more napalm than had been used against Japan in World Waar II and more than would later be dropped over Vietnam." (71, Cho)

[5] Dal Yong Jin, "Reinterpretation of cultural imperialism: emerging domestic market vs. continuing US dominance" Media Culture Society 2007 29:753

In an attempt to understand the interlocking factors and complexities behind the above mentioned cover video, cover videos themselves need to be examined as a cultural commodity within themselves and as a cultural commodity that belongs to the histories that created the systems for their production. Covers, as a performance or (re)recording of a previously existing commercial song or album have been around, in line with the presence of popular music itself. While as the original recording or release of the "original" popular music may be situated as the authentic-author of the publication, covers have almost always followed suit and existed at various levels of professional, commercial, and amateur revelations. What I am focusing on is the contemporarily termed phenomenon of cover videos, which has been popularized through the inception of Youtube.com, a video-sharing website (as an internet technology) in 2005. Although Youtube was not the first internet technology to provide the platform for video-sharing, this paper will dedicate most of its analysis to the various effects of Youtube due to its mass usage[67] and dominant presence in the market of video-hosting websites. The newest form of reproducing music and publishing it online and "broadcasting yourself" (as a reference to Youtube's slogan: 'broadcast yourself') has become popularized since 2006 and has created an avenue for aspiring artists as well as the self-indulgent user to generate and share their user-generated digital production with the public. More specifically, I will further describe and analyze the cover videos submitted for the Cover Contests commissioned by the KPop industry. YGLoversCrew's application of themselves through cover videos is indicative of one of the many ways in which popular culture and media and internet technologies are both a creature of

[6] According to Alexa.com's ranking system, Youtube is the 3rd most accessed website. 18 May, 2012.
[7] Arrington, Michael. "YouTube Video Streams Top 1.2 Billion/Day".*Techcrunch* (Techcrunch), 9 Jun, 2009. Web. 4 June, 2012.

neoliberal marketization and governance as well as how they are affecting the progressions and effects of neoliberalism.

Technologies are creatures of neoliberal marketization and governance that are affecting the progressions and effects of neoliberalism. In the present stage of global capitalism, in which the complexities of neoliberalism are bearing new intersections between transnational economics, politics, and governances, social ideologies are also in constant tension and development for governing states, global corporations, and people. I situated my analysis of the emergence and effects of various popular culture formations through the framework of neoliberalism as the grounding component as indicated by Ross and Gibson (2007): "Neoliberalism is the prevailing political economic paradigm in the world today and has been described as an ideological "monoculture," in that when neoliberal policies are criticized a common response is that "there is no alternative""(p.2)[8] With the integration of the emergence of new technologies that has played a pivotal role in the construction and systemization of neoliberalism, the tensions, anxieties, dominance, and subordination that transpires cannot be directly or definitively defined.

In Thu-Huong Nguyen-Vo's examination of Vietnam's transition to a neoliberal global economy since 1986, her book *The Ironies of Freedom: Sex, Culture, and Neoliberal Governance in Vietnam* investigates the sociopolitical histories' effects and effects of the economic reform and the various consequential contradictions of "the neoliberal freedoms of a new transnational market economy" (xix, Nguyen-Vo). Through an exploration into the rise of commercial sex, the "new currency of power" as a mechanism of neoliberal commodity and

[8] Ross, E. Wayne & Gibson, R. (2007) Introduction, to: E. Wayne Ross & R. Gibson(Eds.) *Neoliberalism and Education Reform,* Cresskill NJ: Hampton Press.

neoliberal freedom and the paradox of choice and coercion that reverberates, she analyzes the cultural productions which represent sexuality and commercial sex in their relation to governance. Through a comprehensive evaluation of and complex engagements with theorists such as Foucault, Marx, Harvey, Ong and many others that observe "how freedom in the neoliberalist context of globalization is appropriated, contained and used" (xx). It is in the study of popular culture, in films such as *Bar Girls* and *Street Cinderella* that "a new way of depicting social reality has emerged"(215) and it is through such new mediums that she articulates the vices that have "captured the imagination of the government and public"(239). As Nguyen-Vo points out, neoliberal market economies and their "mode of governance that makes use of both choice and repression"[9] exists in Asia and other places which operate under American neoliberal (economic) interests, which Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri would refer to as Empire. Nguyen-Vo examines the commercial culture that emerged in post-1986 Vietnam as a site of the "production of ideology in its response to market freedom through its representation of society in a self-proclaimed social realism" (215). Accordingly, the cultural realm provides the window into making sense of the rapid changes incurring in the contemporary world. Then, perhaps the cultural productions available through Youtube can be a starting point to gain a glimpse of neoliberalism's effects from the very localized and individual level to the macro effects in the new media age.

In order to understand the effects of neoliberalism and new media internet technologies that prompted the Vietnamese youth of YGLoversCrew' cover video, it is necessary to examine the global media, popular culture and the cultures integrated within. By analyzing the promise of

[9] Nguyen-Vo, Thu-Huong. *The Ironies of Freedom: Sex, Culture, and Neoliberal Governance in Vietnam*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008. Print.

neoliberalism that is overtly and underhandedly declared through popular culture, we can trace the contradictions, opportunities, exploitations, marginalizations, pleasures, and desires that are relinquished and extracted. This thesis considers how the contemporary KPop industry, responsible for the above mentioned cover video, can be viewed as an example of neoliberal governance and how it has effectively inspired contradictory and alternate forms of ideological, sociopolitical, and cultural productions and consumption[10].

[10] Methodology- The primary sources for this thesis project are the music videos that are discussed throughout the thesis. These music videos which are both mega-agency based industry creations of commercial production and home-made amateur videos by what I call 'double-consumers,' which are fan-based consumers turned cultural-producers, are non-retail and personally made cultural productions. I accessed both types of videos through Youtube.com and Google Videos. In order to create a thesis project out of my own infatuation of a particular Neoliberal emergence, I turned to various Cultural Studies texts as academic resources to help establish my frameworks. Due to the progressive, contemporary and temporary nature of new-media and internet-based technologies, I relied on secondary sources such as blogs and journalistic articles in English and Korean.

Chapter One: Situating KPop

In this chapter I examine the historical context of South Korean popular culture in order to situate the emergence and current prominence of KPop. I distinguish and differentiate contemporary KPop from other forms of Korean popular culture. Legacies of colonialism, neocolonialism, and (late) capitalist development are credited with the conditions of the emergence of contemporary KPop as an industry and commodity. The identity of this capital-driven cultural industry are examined to study how the interrelations of South Korea's history and modernity are processed to become the nation's dominant pop-cultural and ideological narrative.

Branding a Nation

Contemporary KPop[11] functions both as the South Korean nation state's capital and ideological apparatus. Its function as a state's capital apparatus beyond the profits that it generates as a domestic music market industry becomes evident in some of the large scale advertising music videos that are produced and promoted each year. An example can be drawn from the Lotte Department Store and Duty Free Korea music videos which are generated with an extended cast of KPop and Hallyu's largest names. Lotte[12], one of Korea's conglomerates which employees 60,000 workers owns multiple holdings in diverse industries from food, shopping malls, department stores, financial services, IT, construction, electronics, entertainment among others, is one of the biggest food and shopping groups in both South Korea and Japan. It was established in Tokyo by a Korean businessman in 1948 and expanded in to Korea under the name of Lotte Confectionary Co., Ltd in Korea in 1967. Its operations as a manufacturer and retailer exist in China, Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, India, Russia, Philippines, Pakistan, Poland, and the U.S[13]. The elaborate 2010 music video commercial for Lotte Duty Free[14]* had an impressive line-up of KPop and Hallyu stars JYJ, Bi-Rain, Big Bang, Song Seung Hun, Park Yong Ha, Ji Sung (soccer player) and Kang Ji Hwan; its 2011 version[15] starred Hyun Bin, JYJ, Big Bang, 2PM, Song Seung Heon, Choi Ji Woo, Jang Geun Suk, and Kim Hyun Joong. Each individual KPop group and actor/actress was the top grossing act in their respective

[11] KPop is used to reference South Korea's contemporary popular culture music industry. I may use Korea and South Korea inter-changeably, but want to note that I am referring to South Korea rather than the Korean peninsula.
[12] "About Lotte." www.lotte.co.kr/english/. Web. 23 May, 2012
[13] "Lotte Int'l News" www.lotteintl.com/eng/index.asp. Web. 23 May, 2012
[14]* Leeya28. (2010, Jun 14) Lotte Duty Free- So I'm Loving You with JYJ. [Video File]. Retrieved from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eRywNFC7tok *note: Leeya28 is the "author" of the video in that the video was uploaded by the owner of this screen name.
[15] Lovechar2000. (2011, May 29)Lotte Duty Free 2011 CF. [Video File]. Retrieved from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_WN8KjdgORI

entertainment industry category for that calendar year. Every member of this cast looks like they have stepped out the cover of a glossy luxury-branded magazine. They are all flawlessly beautiful and hold up the standards of the Korean Hallyu aesthetic. The women all have porcelain-fair skin, svelte and petite figures, shiny and soft-touchable hair, large doe-eyes, perfectly straight noses with tall Caucasian-like bridges, plump lips, and fist-sized faces[16] that are impossible to age. The men share very similar features with hairless faces absent of any wrinkles, long and lean bodies with perfectly toned limbs and abs, with personalities and smiles that exude warmth and Valentine's Day-like romance. The commercial value of the KPop artists and Hallyu stars, and the music video as an international advertisement holds great profitability for Korea's retail and tourism industry. Its profitability extends deeply into areas beyond commercial retail, as noted in the article *Korean Women Television Viewers in Singapore* about, "Fans from these Asian countries even flock to South Korea to tour the production sites and their favorite Korean television dramas and films were shot, and to have their hair cut to even undergo plastic surgery in order to spot the same image as the Korean stars, or, to meet their idols in person[17]" (Shim, 2006). Given the intimate relationship between the Korean government and its conglomerates that makes up the state, it is evidence of how KPop functions as a capital apparatus for the state as they [the stars] become brand ambassadors of South Korea for its international consumers. Each year, the video is remade in Japanese as well, but the "primary" languages of the music videos are almost irrelevant. Its catchy and repetitive lyrics, which mimic other easy to follow KPop songs repeat the lyrics of:

[16] Fist-size face is translated from a Korean term "joomuk mahn han" which is used to describe how "beautiful" faces are supposed to be small in size

[17] Shim, D. "Korean Women Television Viewers in Singapore." Cultural Space and Public Sphere in Asia (2006): 163-181. Print.

So I'm loving you so I'm loving you

Naega wonhadeon duty duty duty du (the duty duty duty du- that I was wanting)

So I'm loving you

Areumdawoyo (is beautiful)

Neomu haengbokhajyo (-very happy)

Urin igoseseo (right here)

Neol kidarilke ([we'll be] waiting for you)

Let's go[18]

The stars become the inviting hosts for Korea's retailers, and as they gleefully sing to the consumers, are telling them that they will be happily waiting for their arrival to consume. By operating as a Duty-Free advertisement, the posters of the music videos are put on the international billboards at airports and on magazine covers. It is suggesting to consumers that by shopping at a Korean Duty-Free store or at one of Lotte's retailers, they will somehow come into direct contact with their favorite stars. In the 2011 music video version of the same advertisement, it opens up to a fairy-tale scene with Hallyu actor Hyun Bin, dressed as a Prince Charming in his tuxedo sits at a grand piano snuggled away inside a secret garden, to play off of his biggest grossing Korean drama for the year "Secret Garden," where he played the role of an heir to a Korean department store. The scene that it mimics as well as its original drama has already been written into both of its scripts that he *is* the heir to Korea's emblem of neoliberal (post) modernity and commercial success. In the following scene, Hyun Bin is seated at a tea party with a magical rabbit, as homage to the famous storybook Alice in Wonderland. He sings, underneath the glistening sunshine that "he will be waiting for you right here [at Lotte Duty

[18] Leeya28. (2010, Jun 14) Lotte Duty Free- So I'm Loving You with JYJ. [Video File]. Retrieved from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eRywNFC7tok

Free]." Next scene has JYJ, a popular KPop trio coming in and out of a Lotte Department store filled with shopping bags, singing: *nuhman ar suntaek/nuhman ae duty free* (your only choice, your only duty free). The scene transforms and gets engulfed into a magic ball which was under the hands and surveillance of TOP, a member of KPop band Big Bang. As if reading the consumer's fortune, he raps and the scene turns to GD, another member of Big Bang who is holding a magic lamp. As he rubs the lamp, instead of a genie, the rest of Big Bang's members emerge, dressed as genies. The boy band members then dance in circular motions around the backdrop of a mystical middle-eastern or storybook depiction of an exotic Arabian landscape. They are dancing around marbled pillars and an Arabian night's treasure chest flying around a magic carpet, singing the same repetitive lyrics of "your only choice, your only duty free." The music video continues with the rest of its cast performing under various caricature backgrounds. The message is simple and clear, whether it is actress Choi Ji-woo and actor Song Seong-hun re-enacting your typical prince and princess storybook tale, or 2PM (another famous KPop boy band) dancing around in Pirates of a fantasy Caribbean in sequined-pirate-garb, they are all readily and happily waiting for their fans to become consumers of Korean retail. Thus, KPop and Hallyu fans are being invited to be a part of the fantasies that the advertisement is trying to sell through their consumption of not only the entertainment and media that the stars provide, but the consumer goods that they represent.

KPop as an ideological state apparatus can be found through the state's employment of its stars as nation-building and nationalizing ambassadors both inside and outside of Korea. As an internal and domestic ideological apparatus, the government's censorship over KPop artists through their sexual performance and lyrics as a way to regulate contemporary Korea's own reception and standard of gender norms and social perception are well documented. From 2NE1,

a popular KPop girl-group's video campaign to promote the healthcare industry in Korea through their "Happy Energy Campaign,"[19] to actor Cha In Pyo's active involvement in various transnational and domestic adoption campaigns, various stars become political and ideological ambassadors of Korea. Celebrity diplomacy is nothing new, and is a widely used campaign tactic in various sectors and countries[20]. What is unique to KPop stars as ambassadors of the Korean nation are the ways in which their use-value is applied to further national branding to the international community to be representative of an economic miracle. The rhetoric of "Korea-from recipient to donor state[21]" is often cited to describe Korea's emergence in the post-Asian Tigers economy as having overcome the economy traumas of the 1997 IMF crisis and having grounded itself in economic prosperity. The rhetoric is used to encourage Korea as a donor-state by the U.S and other founding members of Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), a 34-nation international organization which is "committed to democracy and the market economy.[22]" KPop stars become a state apparatus through their performance and through their status as pop idols for other modernizing Asian countries. In order to reinstate and to reaffirm Korea's branding as a donor state, it needs to perform as a fully modernized Asian cosmopolis of post-industrialization success.

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[19] YGLzeelisious. (2012, Mar 5). Happy Energy Campaign Message from 2NE1. [Video File] Retrieved from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RBBT7IzcA-U

[20] The soft power capital accredited through celebrity ambassadors have been studied and analyzed by Andrew F. Cooper in his recent publication, *Celebrity Diplomacy* which also coined the term "celebrity diplomacy" officially. Cooper writes on the past and current phenomenon that has important global implications that go beyond the boundaries of celebrity buzz and into the greater realm of international relations. A panel discussion hosted by the USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism on April 21st, 2009 discussed *The Effectiveness and Value of Celebrity Diplomacy* and joined Cooper to deliver some of the key findings on the developments of celebrity diplomacy's capacities, effectiveness and weaknesses. (my own writing from another unpublished project).

[21] Choi, Jin Wook (2011). "From a Recipient to a Donor State: Achievements and Challenges of Korea's ODA" *International Review of Public Administration,* Vol. 15, No. 3, 37-51.

[22] "OECD Home" http://www.oecd.org/home/. 16, May 2012.

The Emergence of Contemporary KPop

In 2001, Media and Cultural Studies Scholar Koichi Iwabuchi described Korean pop-music (KPop) as a "culturally odorless" and "Asianized Western" model of pan-regional modernity based on the songs infused with smatterings of English and their slick dance routines[23] during the initial phases of the Korean Wave (Hallyu). I locate contemporary KPop rooted within the larger body of Hallyu, Korea's media liberalization which began in the late 1990s, which became one of the country's most notable export industries during its succession into the age of globalization as the workings of the modernity project (Giddens, 1991)[24]. As Sociologists "Harvey (1990) and Jameson (1996) argue that humanity has entered into a new historical epoch since the 1970s (from modernity to postmodernity; from capitalism to late capitalism), made possible by the development of new technologies" (Shim, 4)[25], Hallyu is Korea's modernity project. It is the prominent exportation of Korean cultural industry into the retailers and homes of its regional neighbors throughout East and Southeast Asia, a process Iwabuchi defines as "emerging intra-Asian popular cultural flows under globalizing forces" (Iwabuchi 2002, 16)[26]. Korean culture in the form of popular media such as movies, dramas and popular music has become transnational, expressed by scholars like Arjun Appadurai (1996)[27], Linda Basch, Nina Schiller, and Cristina Blanc (1994)[28] among others, and hybrid. Borrowing

[23] Koichi Iwabuchi, "Becoming 'Culturally Proximate': The A/scent of Japanese Idol Dramas in Taiwan," *Asian Media Productions*, ed. Brian Moern (Richmond: Curzon, 2001), 54-74

[24] Giddens, Anthony. *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1991. Print.

[25] Shim, D. "Waxing the Korean Wave" *ARI Working Paper No. 158*, 2011 http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/docs/wps/wps11_158.pdf

[26] Iwabuchi, Kōichi. *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2002. Print.

[27] Appadurai, Arjun. 1996. *Modernity at large: Cultural dimensions of globalization*. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press.

[28] Basch, Linda, Nina Glick Schiller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc, eds. 1994. *Nations unbound: Transnational projects, postcolonial predicaments, and deterritorialized nationstates*. New York: Gordon & Breach

the words of Linda Basch, Nina Schiller, and Cristina Blanc, transnationalism is "the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of original and settlement…to emphasize that many immigrants today build social fields that cross geographic, cultural and political borders…[and] and essential elements…is the multiplicity of involvements that transmigrants' sustain in both home and host societies" (1994, 7), and as Iwabuchi concedes as a "more locally contextualized manner to the interconnections and asymmetries that are promoted by the multi-directional flow" (Iwabuchi 2002, 17). Hybridity, the term that cultural scholar Marwan M. Kraidy explains as "the fusion of two hietherto relatively distinct forms, styles, or identities…which often occurs across national borders as well as across cultural boundaries" (2005, 5) is another way to describe the inherent structures of Hallyu and the working of modern nation's as cultural hybrids[29]. Transnationalism and hybridity is applicable in describing the current Korean media cultural industry as it is an engine driven by "Particularly younger Koreans, with no memory of poverty or hunger, are exploring the new world of pop culture, taking full advantage of their wealth" (Dator and Seo 2004, 32)[30] given the key players in the production, branding and distribution of KPop are transnational identities and their workings are inherently crafted through hybridity. Doobo Shim and Koichi Iwabuchi wrote extensively on the political and economical generation and the capital markets' institutionalization and systemization of the Korean Wave (Hallyu). Hallyu, which describes the post 1990s and current exportation of Korean popular culture and its success in becoming canonized into the East and Southeast Asian popular and public psyche is analyzed

[29] Hall, S. 1996. *Modernity: An introduction to modern societies*, ed. 595–634. Oxford: Open Univ. Press. (See p. 617)

[30] Dator, J. and Seo, Y. (2004) "Korea as the wave of a future:The emerging Dream Society of icons and aesthetic experience." *Journal of Futures Studies*, Vol. 9, No.1, August 31-44.

to examine its ability to trigger unique and different self-reflexive responses for respectively geo-targeted consumers.

I narrow the focus on KPop as a site of analysis for close readings on how contemporary pop culture, whose dominance and influence is very much dependent and reliant upon multimedia and the internet, rests on the various complex negotiations of personal, group and national identities it articulates and the racial representations that are made through different bodies of agencies, while the histories of war, American hegemony of culture, and racial formations get overlooked. Whether we analyze KPop as a business model, musical genre, or a multimedia visual and musical project, the ways in which KPop as an industry helps produce and reproduce how its consumers and fans perceive and reiterate Korean popular culture and racial formation are broad and different for various groups involved.

Korean popular culture has positioned itself as a dominant form of popular culture in East and Southeast Asia in the past decade, spreading readily and steadily through Latin American and European countries in the present-years, according to Dal Young Jin (2007)[31]. While as Jin points out the criticism over contemporary "Korean creative industries are staging their own version of cultural imperialism by expanding into neighboring Asian markets" as a form of "reverse or counter-cultural imperialism… to the East and South Asian regions…[while] the process remains complex, however, because the U.S still dominates the Korean cultural market through both cultural products and capital" (Jin, 756). Prior to analyzing Korea's current exportation of its creative industries as reverse or counter-cultural imperialism, a proper investigation as to what Korean popular culture is needs to be better examined. Through the

[31] Jin, D. "Reinterpretation of cultural imperialism: emerging domestic market vs. continuing US dominance" *Media Culture Society* 2007 29: 753- 771.

examination of Korean popular culture as it exists intertwined within the broader academic, economic and sociocultural contexts, it is a cultural formation and production existing in a transnational and global exchange of commodities and consumption. Initially, it was the television dramas of the beginning phases of the Hallyu that served as a core driving force which catapulted trans-regional and international tourism to Korea (Huat & Iwabuchi, 2008)[32], and now Korean popular music (KPop) in particular has become the ultimate national cultural ambassador (brand), becoming symbolic and analogous to Korea's "national" cultural identity.

History of Korea's Popular Music

Popular culture, as it is studied and understood through various Social, Cultural, Anthropological and Media Studies, remain as an ambiguously situated scholarship despite a wealth of contextualized assertions and analysis. Citing a myriad of influential theorists on cultural studies such as Gramsci, Appadurai, Glick Schiller and many others that analyze the considerable affects of "political, economic, and cultural influence media and popular culture have on local, national, and global communities," (Mahon, 467)[33] Maureen Mahon discusses how despite a clear and definitive definition of popular culture, the quoted theorists "view media and popular culture forms as both cultural product and social process and examine the ways in which individuals and groups negotiate the constraints of the particular material conditions, discursive frameworks, and ideological assumptions in which they work… these studies also comment on the aesthetic qualities of the forms" (Mahon, 468). It is through a thorough

[32] Chua, Beng H, and Kōichi Iwabuchi. *East Asian Pop Culture: Analysing the Korean Wave*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008. Print.
[33] Mahon, M. (2000) "The Visible Evidence of Cultural Producers." *Annual Review of Anthropology* Vol. 29, 467-492.

discussion between and mapping of the various cultural studies theorists that we can "also address the relationship of social reproduction and social transformation" (Mahon, 468).

Just as "culture" cannot be singularly defined nor homogenously constructed and represented, there is no singularly distinctive sound that can authoritatively claim true authenticity and ownership as being reflective and definitive to a culture. In particular, popular music in the contemporary form is expressed by George Lipsitz as "part of a well-coordinated social pedagogy training viewers to become the kinds of consumers that marketers desire them to become" (2007, 9)[34], appears to be a futile area for cultivating a cultural identity. However, in the case of Korea, the relationship between popular music and national and cultural identity is paramount. According to Young Mee Lee's historical findings in the book*, Korean Pop Music: Riding the Wave*, Korea's history of its own popular music is rooted to colonization. It was during the Japanese Occupation Era of 1910-45 that the genre of popular music developed. Due to the loss of national sovereignty, political and cultural deprivation for Koreans under Japanese colonization, Lee considers the period between 1925-45 as the critical period when "Korean popular music began to appear on commercial recordings"[35] following the totalitarian rule of the Japanese and also Korea's initial exposure to and development as a capitalist society. Unlike traditional Korean songs and folk music which traces its history back to the pre-occupation period, Korean popular music, which was called taejung kayo was a colonizing and profit-generating construction by the Japanese. Characteristic of popular music as a form of appropriated art form by a ruling elite which "appropriates the experiences, desires, tastes and artistic practices of the masses, but is determined by the capitalist doctrine of profit regulated by

[34] Lipsitz, George. *Footsteps in the Dark: The Hidden Histories of Popular Music*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007. Print.
[35] Howard, Keith. *Korean Pop Music: Riding the Wave*. Folkestone, Kent: Global Oriental, 2006. Print.

the hegemonic ideology of the ruling class" (2, Howard) taejung kayo was both the colonizer's appropriated commercialized sound, modeled after Japanese ryukoka (yuhaengga or songs in fashion) which were heavily influenced by Western instruments and modal elements. Taejung kayo then can be read as a reappropriation of Japan's own appropriation of Western harmonies, an uprooted transnational cultural product which was implanted into the Korean peninsula and its cultural psyche.

According to Lee's chapter, taejung kayo was considered worth emulating by the colonized Korean public and to be approached and emulated as a new civilized, urban and educated music form. It was initially difficult for Koreans during the beginning of the occupation era to digest and to relate to the sounds since it was a different musical language from the traditional and folk musical forms of pre-occupied Korea. Korean popular music was a new colonized language, a set of orchestrated sounds based on Western notes of capitalism and modernization. The practice of a Western musical language and the usage of the English language as a form of cultural currency began to appear and was processed as the social vocabulary for the Korean bourgeoisie or those that wanted to be associated with certain class status.

The next progression in Korean popular music occurred during the 1950's when American military forces occupied Korea during and after the Korean War. American Los Angeles-based radio, American Forces Radio and Television Services (AFRTS) was the first satellite radio station during the Korean War and became popular, finding itself on the mainstream Korean radio waves by late 1950's (23, Howard). With the introduction of American popular music through the radio, Korean popular music continued to be influenced and inspired by American songs of that same time period. Also, the demand for entertainers and

singers for the American servicemen grew during the late 50's. Korean popular music "groups" began to surface, mostly to cater to the American soldiers. According to Roald Maliangkay, "before they were allowed to perform, Koreans first had to audition before talent scouting Koreans and Americans" (26, Howard). Many popular songs of this time period were either famous or non-commercialized/unknown American songs, dubbed or lyrically re-written in Korean. It was not until the 1960's that Korean popular music would get to express its own individual sound and aesthetic. Even the progression of Korean popular music was based on the system of inherently catering to an American aesthetical and melodic palate. As articulated in a chapter written by Heather A. Willoughby[36], "as in other forms of popular culture, is arguably as much about illusion and appeal to the fantasies of the audience, as it is about talent and creativity." Korea, as a nation colonized by Japan, uprooted by a civil war, then neo-imperialized by the U.S. military emerged as an industrial and modernizing miracle, and popular music continued to play a pivotal role operating on three grounds. First, as a means to appeal through expected illusory fantasies; second, as a form of propaganda for the ruling part(ies) to influence and emphasize patriotism and allegiance[37] as well as being the primary mass commercialized platform for the Korean public to express their emotions and ideologies during their own decolonization and industrialization periods.

Korean popular culture has gone through rapid transformations during its fulfillment of neoliberalism, as though to mimic Korea's vast industrialization and integration into the global marketplace. Considering the ways in which Korea was dubbed as one of the Asian Tigers, it is ironic that one of the main turning points in Korea's entrance to the international popular culture

[36] Howard, Keith. *Korean Pop Music: Riding the Wave*. Folkestone, Kent: Global Oriental, 2006. Print. Note chapter by Heather A. Willoughby on p. 102.
[37] Howard, Keith. *Korean Pop Music: Riding the Wave*. Folkestone, Kent: Global Oriental, 2006. Print. Note chapter by Ronald Maliangkay on p. 55.

market was an outcome of the financial crisis in 1997-98. As stated by Cho Hae-Joang, "Once Koreans became aware of the flow of various forms of capital around the world—financial, investment, and speculative—they threw themselves into that world created by full-blown capitalism. One of the most unexpected dramas to emerge from these large movements of capital, media, culture, and people centered around hallyu or the "Korean Wave.[38]" It was neither an organic financial endeavor nor a true marketization of art for art's sake, however, as the Korean government and the oligopoly of Korean chaebols (conglomerates) orchestrated the exportation of its popular culture industry[39] as a way to build a new export-based market economy for Korea. The Korean IMF Crisis which was caused by a lack of liquidity, a regional risk contagion, large withdrawals of foreign funds, troubled short-term debt obligations, and the failure of the Korean government to make swift decisions in regards to bailing out Korean conglomerates at the time, all caused doubt in the minds of investors on whether or not the government had the capacity to deal with the crisis. Korea cooperated with the IMF to receive a $58.4 billion bailout package conditioned upon structural reforms and tightening of monetary and fiscal policies. Korea received part of the bailout, but the conditions of the bailout were too strict for Korea to meet its short-term debt obligation payments which resulted in Korea seeking the U.S. for help. Ultimately, the U.S. helped Korea restructure 95% of its troubled short-term debt obligations by the first quarter of 1998, thus relaxing the Korean IMF Crisis[40]. It can be noted that by virtue of the U.S. assisting a financially devastated Korea in restructuring 95% of its troubled short-term debt obligations, the U.S. was resituated as a significant influence and

[38] Cho, H. (2005) "Reading the "Korean Wave" as a Sign of Global Shift." *Korea Journal*. Vol. 45:4. 147-182.
[39] Shim, D. (2006) "Hybridity and the rise of Korean popular culture in Asia" *Media Culture Society* 2006 28: 25- 44.
[40] Kim, K. (2006) "The 1997-98 Korean Financial Crisis: Causes, Policy Response, and Lessons." http://www.imf.org/external/np/seminars/eng/2006/cpem/pdf/kihwan.pdf . 4 May, 2012.

stakeholder into the Korean financial sector. It can be analyzed that during this juncture, Korea and U.S investments alignment strengthened significantly to serve the better interests of the U.S. What is significant to contextualizing the IMF crisis is that the roots of the popularization of Korean pop culture, Hallyu, was an emergence out of the convergence of yet another U.S-Korea structural alignment. From the Korean cultural industry's mantra to 'Learning from Hollywood' as a result of the 1995 media policy report which reported, "Korea needs to encourage vertically integrated media conglomerates…to match *their* sizes and resources" and the chaebol's (conglomerates) nationalistic response of "It is our duty and responsibility to export Korean films overseas" (Shim, 2006, 8-9), a heavily state funded film and cultural industry was born in the 1990's. Aside from reappropriating American entertainment industry models through their 'Learn from Hollywood' slogan, the IMF-bailed out Korea's Kim Dae Jung administration dubbed his presidency through the self-given nickname- "'President of Culture'…as president in 1998, established the Basic Law for the Cultural Industry Promotion in 1999 by allocating a total budget of $148.5 million to this project" (Shim, 2011, 10)[41]

While a catalogue of scholarship is dedicated to the formation and implications of the Korean wave and KPop, this paper focuses on KPop in its most contemporary form, KPop is a staged fantasy of authenticity as a coupled real and imagined aesthetic and sound which explores and expresses the new cultural styles of an emerging post-industrialized Korea with its foundations relying on American (Western) pop-music, style and aesthetic. This thesis examines how the fragmented, predominantly containerized production process of KPop has forged KPop as a cultural form that re-appropriates the real and imagined sociocultural and corporeal 'Westernized Korean' into a marketable and easily consumable product for its own domestic and

[41] Shim, Doobo. *Waxing the Korean Wave*. Singapore: Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore, 2011. Print.

international audiences. By analyzing the affects and effects of how racializing, sexualizing, and occupying of space in a selection of KPop music videos, and cover videos, this paper also studies how vastly corporatized global media structures have produced KPop to reassert and reiterate culturally hegemonic ideals, images and sounds, consequentially stimulating localized and organic formations of media and cultural productions which negotiate the hegemonic standards of contemporary media culture.

As a transnational and hybrid cultural product which has been marketed, perceived and reappropriated throughout the Asia Pacific as a representation of Korea's own modernization and capital achievements, Hallyu, has entered the imaginaries, fantasies and expectations of its fans and consumers successfully in the greater Asia Pacific by serving as a self-reflexive cultural commodity for the consuming and importing nations[42]. Koichi Iwabuchi writes extensively on the effects and affects of Hallyu in the Asia Pacific, breaking down the sociopolitical implications of the transnational cultural transactions. He argues that the success of Hallyu and the imagined perception of Korea are perceived very differently in the different countries. Although the intersections of gender, age, and class needs to be accounted for, his general assessments indicate that mainland Chinese may react self-reflexively to the Korean dramas and other manifestations of Hallyu because they are reminiscent of the Confucius traditions and norms that Hallyu is trying to maintain and embody through its storylines. In the case of mainland Chinese viewers, where rapid industrialization which even exceeded that of Korea's, certain aspects of its social traditions and the Confucius ideals of family have been lost in the process. Thus, the self-reflexive and reactive turn that they take away from Korean dramas is nostalgia for their own past. In the case of the Southeast Asian viewers, Hallyu presents another

[42] Chua, Beng H, and Kōichi Iwabuchi. *East Asian Pop Culture: Analysing the Korean Wave*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2008. Print.

set of self-reflexive points. Hallyu and KPop have become the symbolic site of neoliberalism's success- a (post)modernized Asian cosmopolitan. Countries such as Vietnam which is processing its structural shifts towards a capitalist neoliberal economy as noted earlier through Nguyen-Vo's *The Ironies of Freedom: Sex, Culture, and Neoliberal Governance in Vietnam*, cultural production becomes contested sites of imagining and reappropriating the complex socioeconomic conditions of its own.

In addition to operating as and providing a space for self-reflexivity, KPop and Hallyu serve another purpose for the various Asia Pacific nations that have been its major consumers. According to Shim and Iwabuchi, KPop provides an alternative to Western pop culture which had been the dominant cultural commodity. As a more racially and culturally relatable production, KPop has become a trans-regional cultural production of choice. However, given the historical, political and economical conditions in which KPop has been born out of, its authenticity and proficiency to be representative of a socio-politically imagined Korea for its consumers become questionable.

Chapter Two: Reappropriating through New Technologies

Building on the previous chapter's focus on the historical development and role of South Korean mass culture, this chapter examines the significance of new media platforms for enabling new forms of globalized interactions with mass culture in general and for KPop in particular. I concentrate on the parallels and connecting partnerships between the structures of new media platforms and hegemonic global media industries. KPop becomes an example of new media and internet based technologies' incorporated governance and its effects on dominant and emergent cultural industries.

KPop through the Institutionalization of Broadcasting Yourself

Given that the core of my analysis is of contemporary KPop and it is a topic that has gained much popularity through Hallyu, my own specificity of contemporary KPop is of the content (produced, marketed, distributed and performed) that was released and became popularized simultaneously with not the launch but the institutionalization of Youtube.com. The factors that led to my specificity are for the following reasons: First, the technical and governing policy changes that occurred after Google's purchase of Youtube.com for $1.65 billion in October, 2006[43] brought many changes for the way commercial content in general gets distributed. This is non-unique to KPop, but the way that it affected and affects KPop as an industry is significant; second, the KPop artists and content that I focus on are the selections that (mostly) became active after the acquisition of Youtube.com by Google. The technology restructuring of Youtube is one of the large mechanics behind KPop's respective success outside of Korea; and third, the relationship between the web-based technologies and contemporary KPop are closely integrated and the former is vastly effectual on the effects of the latter.

A. Aneesh's discussion of algocracies in *Virtual Migration: The Programming of Globalization*[44] is a good overview to understand the effects of a rather neoliberal machine called the internet. The internet may be the epitome of neoliberal design and development. Although it is credited as being an American invention, a communication system created by the U.S government in the 1960s taking shape through various outgrowths of operational network connections, the internet has no centralized governance. Its usage however is and can be governed. The internet itself, as a network of networks, is a global system of interconnected

[43]Kirkpatrick, Patrick. "The real reason that Google bought YouTube?" http://money.cnn.com/2006/10/18/technology/fastforward_gootube.fortune/index.htm

[44] Aneesh, A. *Virtual Migration: The Programming of Globalization*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006. Print.

computer networks and networking technologies. It connects a third of the world's population together through the engineering of codes and networks. This particular machine, taking its physical form in that of a computer (among other technologies like cables, Ethernet, network cards, etc) is a device "informed by their source code" (101, Aneesh). Aneesh observes the power and significance of such source codes (literal computer codes that make up the frames and content of websites and computer software programs), as a "panoptic power" (106, Aneesh), borrowing from Foucault's reading of Jeremy Bentham's architecture of the panopticon. Describing internet and other technology operations as governing its users through continuous surveillance, it is particularly useful in understanding the usage of this panoptic scheme in KPop and its distribution through Youtube and other web-based technologies.

I no longer turn on the TV or listen to the radio. Instead I am persuaded by each day's momentary trending topics, issues, sounds and aesthetics that are presented to me through various internet platforms, from interactive and user-generated social networking sites (SNS) to portals[45]. Despite my intentions to remain an unbiased observer and an autonomous voyager of the World Wide Web, the sophisticated geo-targeted internet marketing technologies based on finely engineered algorithms and auto-complete (based on my own usage history and geo-targeted demographic surveys) instantly presents me an assemblage of information, of channels and sites directing me towards predicted desires and knowledge to satiate my own curious tastes and needs. Each frame of my frequented websites is the socially and deliberately constructed windows of knowledge which I willingly consume and inhabit. From viewing news clips to

[45] A web portal or links page is a web site that functions as a point of access to information on the World Wide Web. A portal presents information from diverse sources in a unified way. Apart from the standard search engine feature, web portals offer other services such as e-mail, news, stock prices, information, databases and entertainment. Portals provide a way for enterprises to provide a consistent look and feel with access control and procedures for multiple applications and databases, which otherwise would have been different entities altogether. Examples of public web portals are AOL, iGoogle, Yahoo!, Yahoo Finance, Naver, MSN, etc.

structuring my own visual understandings of the world, each click of frame becomes the vantage point of my momentary connection and contact with the world. What I am informed by on a daily basis by the images provided through the internet often becomes my assumed understanding and relation to the world, especially in the realm of popular culture. Given that the exhibited material are algorithmically identified as popular, mainstream, thus personalized and socialized as mainstream information and normative popular culture, even the displays of that instant's tragedies and disturbances are readily perceived as standard and customary. I have been conditioned to expect the expected when I log onto the internet which exists within its own foundations and margins of political, sexual, capital and racialized order. My own culturally imperialized (Herbert Schiller)[46] self, an unwitting effect of media imperialism (Oliver Boyd-Barrett, 1997)[47] to be more precise, came across an unfamiliar terrain in my assumed familiar frames of youtube.com and its preponderance of videos produced upon the Western hegemonic constructions of racial and sexual norms. Basing my own disarray and orientation through media and popular culture on Sara Ahmed's (2006) account of racial orientation and orienting towards and around race and racialized bodies, I reflect on the racial corporeal schema of KPop and how particular contemporary productions of KPop are disorienting the culturally imperialized preconceived racial alignments towards new terrains.

My own interaction and debilitated functioning through the World Wide Web is due to the algocratic layer of governance that exists as the "bureaucratic domination…exercised by making people accept the authority of impersonal rules and regulations" (109, Aneesh). The computer has assumed "the role of the controlling authority" because the software programs

[46] Schiller, Herbert I. *Mass Communications and American Empire*. New York: A.M. Kelley, 1969. Print.
[47] Boyd-Barrett, O. (1997). International communication and globalization: Contradictions and directions. In A. Mohammadi (Ed.). *Interrnational Communication and Globalization*. London: Sage. pp. 11-26

needed to access the internet is an "algorithm-based structure" and since algorithmic codes require a structure of function, the powers (corporations, universities, governments, and individuals) that create the algorithms for internet sources and software programs are the ultimate governing bodies. Thus, the very platform of Youtube, as a user-generated video-sharing technology is a systematically structured space of governance that resides in the complex intersection of socioeconomic, cultural, and political algorithmic codes behind its function. The KPop music videos presented and made accessible and consumable rests on the contentious threshold of various constraints and markers of power, dominance and influence.

In his 2012 publication *The institutionalization of YouTube: From user-generated content to professionally generated content*, and 2010 dissertation, "User-generated content (UGC) revolution?: critique of the promise of YouTube" Communications and New Media Studies scholar Jin Kim looks at the influence and consequences of Google's acquisition of Youtube and large media corporations utility and governments' censorship since the transaction. According to Kim's findings on page 87 of his dissertation[48]:

> "YouTube added a "theater view" option for longer videos (Stelter, 2008b). Although YouTube clarifies that the individual user's account is limited (1 gigabyte total, 10 minutes per file), new channels have more space than an individual account. Big media companies utilize the new limitless post policy by posting full episodes. In April 2009, CBS posted more than 17,000 clips, including 119 full episodes of MacGyver (season 1~5), 90 full episodes of Beverly Hills 90210 (season 1~4) and 70 full episodes of Star Trek (season 1~3)." (87, Kim)

[48] Kim, J. (2012) "The institutionalization of YouTube: From user-generated content to professionally generated content." *Media Culture Society.* vol. 34 no. 1 53-67

The systematic changes to Youtube through the re-engineering of its algorithmic structures also significantly affected the KPop industry. It has helped the dominating KPop agencies to create company Youtube channels which consolidated all of its artists' music videos and other types of video productions. Instead of users uploading the music videos of KPop artists' performances and music videos, which left the accessibility rather fragmented and at the mercy of the fan-based users, it gave rein to the management companies to create linear and incorporated 'channels,' re-directing the flow of internet (consumer) traffic into their control. This structural technique is practiced by most commercial music management companies, from Sony, Universal, to SM Entertainment. Most recently, there has been a consolidation of KPop video channels onto one singular auto generated Youtube genre page called K-pop[49] which are "created by algorithms to collect trending and popular videos by topic. Auto generated channels act like user channels in that you can subscribe to them and stay updated on new videos[50]" showing evidence of the panoptical organizing and surveilling nature of algocratic schemes.

Quoting another Media Studies scholar Robert W. McChesney, this new found utility of Youtube for large media companies can be "generally characterized as one of globalization, technological revolution, and democratization" (1, McChesney). McChesney's study and critique of the global Media, neoliberalism, and imperialism, in the correspondingly titled article published in 2001, he states: "neoliberalism is almost always intertwined with a deep belief in the ability of markets to use new technologies to solve social problems far better than any alternative course." It is this alternative course that he critiques as the neoliberal policies that call for the commercial media and communication markets to "re-regulate" to serve corporate

[49] Auto-generated by youtube: http://www.youtube.com/topic/USZ9e7iCCHM/k-pop
[50] From Google's Help page: http://support.google.com/youtube/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=2579942

interests[51]. As he references the 7 multinational [mega-agency] corporations that dominate the world's media market (80-85%), he argues that it is this global media system which necessitates consolidation towards multinational mega-agencies which makes this neoliberal economic system "not the result of 'free markets' or natural law; it is the consequence of a number of important state politics that have been made that created the system" (11, McChesney). The author cites the extensive ties between the media multinationals and Wall Street (representative of the world's investment banks), and their efficacy as political lobbyists at the multiple national, regional and global levels, it is the neoliberal economic and political effects and "political culture" (14) that emerge out of the powerful global media systems. Ultimately, the article pivots "the entire global regime is the result of neoliberal political policies, urged by the U.S government…the role of the U.S military as the global enforcer of capitalism, with U.S based corporations and investors in the driver's seat…In short, we need to develop an understanding of neoliberal globalization that is joined at the hip to U.S militarism" (17-18). Then, the lasting argument that McChesney makes about the imperialism that occurs when the "providers of substantive news concerning international politics" are primarily through the journalism of the U.S based multinational mega-agencies, the commercial media becomes a political platform.

Based on the above studies, Youtube can be positioned as a continuum of the dichotomous neoliberal developments. It is challenging to provide a definitive framework to the function and governance of particular web-based technologies due to its constant re-generation that occurs at the algorithmic and user-generated levels. Literary critic and scholar Jinqi Ling illustrates the complex and "ambitious nature of networked computing as a form of

[51] McChesney, R. (2001)"Global media, neoliberalism, and imperialism." *Monthly Review;* Mar; 52, 10; Alt-Press Watch (APW)

contemporary oppositional politics, especially in terms of its tendency to produce performative contradictions, even while it allows unhindered access to time and space" (137, Ling)[52] in *Across Meridians: History and Figuration in Karen Tei Yamashita's Transnational Novels*. Ling makes usage of Mark Poster's criticism (of the limitations) of "digitally mediated social interaction…makes 'the full presence of face-to-face meetings' less essential while it creates subject positions 'only through their textual, aural, and visual uploads'"(137, Ling). This limited and digitally mediated social interaction is the algocratic systems' design of Youtube's function as a partial communication platform. What is particular is how Youtube is repeatedly credited to providing the platform for KPop's breakthrough beyond the Asia-based (regional) popularity of Hallyu. It can be considered the start, or as in Sara Ahmed's distinction as the "point of orientation,[53]" where many of the non-Asian (viewers residing in the outliers of Hallyu's influence) first came across and accessed KPop [through Youtube]. For the first time viewer, that may unknowingly or consciously come across KPop music videos without much pre-conceived notions or context of the genre, Youtube is a point of re-orientation, where the impact of global economic reorientations and the pre-existing intersections of race, sex, and class orientations become disoriented, reoriented and socioculturally, geopolitically, and spatiotemporally negotiated, reoriented and re-made. Whether it is a Latin American teenager or an Atlanta-based housewife, the initial access to KPop will likely strike a racialized, sexualized and objectifying audiovisual experience within the spatiotemporally distanced confines of this immaculate consumption.

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[52] Ling, Jinqi. *Across Meridians: History and Figuration in Karen Tei Yamashita's Transnational Novels*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2012.
[53] Ahmed, Sara. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006. Print.

The Korean state's influence in the construction and makings of its markers as a Korean cultural-authenticity needs to be further examined, since it serves and functions as a "national cultural identity" for contemporary Korea. As one of Korea's largest exports at par with its other large export industries, such as Hyundai and Kia cars and LG and Samsung electronic goods, it has served as the core driving force in increasing tourism and has become analogous to its national cultural identity. However, the visible layers of production, which relies on the prominence of the collaborations and importations of Western artists into the production, physical articulation and performance of KPop makes it a re-appropriation of Western pop culture remade through Westernized Korean aesthetics. Thus, the national cultural identity that it is meant to inherently embody and represent through the label of "K(orean)"-Pop becomes a label without an oriented reference point. However, this reappropriation of a pre-existing Western culture is nothing new and nothing unique in the neoliberal markets. Referencing Marta E. Savigliano's study on the commodification of Tango into an art form and dance of desire associated with consumption, she states: "It became an exotic good in the political economy of Passion: appropriation, accumulation, marketing, packaging, commercialization, distribution, and consumption of the wealth of exotic feelings, that is, of the Passion of the Other" (Savigliano, 12)[54]. Savigliano's book, *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion,* explores the politics of tango- how its music, dance, lyrics, and philosophy (national identity) is exoticized and re-appropriated into a commodity. One of the most fascinating approaches that the author takes is in her discussion of "passion as emotional capital that is accumulated, recoded and consumed" (39, Savigliano). Although KPop may present a different type of exotic, it is another art form based on music, dance, lyrics, and national identity politics. The gender and sexual

[54] Savigliano, Marta. *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1995. Print.

tensions that reside and arise through KPop also cannot be ignored, and it is necessary to address what gets reappropriated in the strategically servicing and makings of KPop. Furthermore, it is through the exploration of what it means to create commercial value out of emotions and feelings which can be accumulated, recoded, and consumed that will bring about a new awareness on the effects of KPop and the new types of reappropriations that emerge in response.

KPop as an Emergence and Reappropriation Project

KPop, as it historically emerged through various reappropriations of Western pop-music, currently exists as a transnational and hybrid form of pop-music. It is no secret that a large number of American pop-musicians and producers have been working in the production of KPop. A growing trend consisting of notable (American pop-music) industry names have been producing or entering into collaborative agreements with KPop bands and their respective agencies. Industry shapers, such as Quincy Jones, Teddy Riley, will.I.am of the Black-Eyed Peas, Swizz Beatz and even fashion designers such as Jeremy Scott have been recently tied to several KPop projects. One of KPop's most popular boy-bands, which Rolling Stone considers to be one of its 'most likely to break in America[55]', Big Bang will be used as a study on how KPop is a constant reappropriation. Longtime choreographer to Big Bang is Shaun Evaristo, a famed Filipino American choreographer who is behind the success of other American pop artists such as Omarion and *American High School Musical* star Vanessa Hudgens. A North Hollywood native, Evaristo incorporates a hybrid of street dancing and American 90s electropop choreography to remake 'Big Bang' choreography. The orchestrated dance and body

[55] Benjamin, J. "The 10 KPop Groups Most Likely to Break in America." *Rolling Stones Magazine*. Online. 18 May, 2012. http://www.rollingstone.com/music/lists/the-10-k-pop-groups-most-likely-to-break-in-america-20120518

movements of Big Bang are not gestures that are uniquely Korean nor to the artists themselves but a remaking of American popular dance movements remade to fit their songs that are written by Korean American song-writer and producer Teddy that grew up in New York City and Diamond Bar, CA. This performing of American-infused and American-produced forms of music and dance choreography of Big Bang is a common theme and practice found in KPop. Big Bang, as artists sings the lyrics and performs their own dances that may belong to their own corporeal selves (and to the band Big Bang), yet the choreographies belong to the directions of Evaristo which are reappropriations of American popular street and electro-pop dance forms. Big Bang, then becomes the corporeal carriers of American pop-culture reappropriations conceived by its viewers and consumers as "K(orean)-Pop" artists.

In order to continue the conversation of KPop as an emergence out of Korea's own political, socioeconomic, and cultural histories, and as the emerged reappropriation of the culturally imperialistic and hegemonic American pop-music [multinational mega-agencies], internationalized through finely crafted, sophisticated and powerful algorithmic systems, the works of Walter Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", Raymond Williams' selected pieces from his illuminating text *Marxism and Literature*, Marx' critique of the commodity fetish, Carol Clover, George Lipsitz, and Ehrenreich, Hess and Jacobs[56]' study of fandom and sexuality will be addressed.

George Lipsitz opens up his first chapter to his book, *Footsteps in the Dark* by describing a containership that gets broken in the tangle of rough seas inside a severe storm. He alludes to the makings and distribution of pop music (and its stars) in the age of digital capitalism as that of

[56] Berry, Chris, Nicola Liscutin, and Jonathan D. Mackintosh. *Cultural Studies and Cultural Industries in Northeast Asia: What a Difference a Region Makes*. Aberdeen, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2009. Print. Note Rowan Pease chapter, "Korean Pop Music in China" (p. 165)

"containerization," Which is "the use of automated cranes and interchangeable containers…created for the convenience of profit-making commercial interests" (2-3, Lipsitz) in the production and distribution of music that contestant-based reality television shows emerge in response. Raymond Williams authors his chapter, "Dominant, Residual, and Emergent" to highlight how the hegemonic dominant creates residual effects where various moments and elements of emergence appear. It is through these emergent appearances that alternatives and/or resistant experiences, meanings, and values that could not be "expressed or substantially verified in terms of the dominant culture" become "active manifestation of the residual" (122, Williams)[57]. Williams continues to analyze the conditions of cultural activity that have been processed into "immediate and regular conversion of experience into finished products" (128, Williams) even though nothing is explicitly and finally formed, because every moment, even the present reality is subjectively formed in relation to a past tense. Denying the fixed-form sense of reality and the fully completed present, Williams recognizes social consciousness that exists at any point in time as the effective practical consciousness as the true lived (living) experience. The effective presence is importance because this is what can be defined as the structures of feeling- which allows for the various 'structures'- the "specific internal relations, at once interlocking in tension" (132) to manifest into and articulate the structural conditions as well as the experienced realities to define the conditions for the emerged and emergent feelings to be felt, lived and become residual in the process of the present.

The theoretical frameworks set forth by Walter Benjamin will help illustrate the emergence of KPop as reappropriated and reproducible forms of commerce. And the commodification of a particular cultural industry and art forms can be best described through

[57] Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford [Eng.: Oxford University Press, 1977. Print.

Marx' dialectic of the commodity fetish. In Benjamin's essay, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, he illuminates the arts and the cultural industry in the modern era and the times to follow by prefacing that "the manner in which human sense perception is organised, the medium in which it is accomplished, is determined not only by nature but by historical circumstances as well,"[58] insinuating that the modern form of art, which is based on the mechanically reproduced replicas of the arts that existed before it in both its production and reception is based on our own conceived notions and understandings of its value. What gets lost is the spectator's ability to perceive and appreciate the elements that had been effectively formed in the past which are still active and effectively processing in the cultural elements of the present. He channels Marx' theory of commodity fetishism, in which [and in part] he expresses how people are governed by the objectified values of commodities (the reproductions of art). With the introduction of technological innovations which has transformed the accessibility in producing and accessing art, which has given the modern emergence of art a new function- its innate ability to be a mechanical reproduction, resides in the *absence* of "its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be. This unique existence of the work of art determined the history to which it was subject throughout the time of its existence."(ii, Benjamin). Thus these art forms do not occupy a unique spatiotemporal, is devoid of the original authentic arts based on its rituals and the "location of its original use value" (iv, Benjamin). Instead, art now resides in the residuals of its past and present conditions that have presented an avenue for it to exist as a mechanical reproduction. Moreover, with the use of camera technologies, it has further impinged on arts' ability to occupy a spatial presence. For the actors that are performing in front of a camera, they exist not in the present performance but within

[58] Benjamin, Walter, Hannah Arendt, and Harry Zohn.*Illuminations.* New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968. Print.

context to the contact that the camera may provide. The camera can be synonymous to the gaze of any audience member, which Benjamin concludes that "everybody who witnesses its accomplishments is somewhat of an expert" (x, Benjamin), and such expert viewers are subject to "The spectator's process of association in view of these images indeed interrupted by their constant, sudden change" (xiv, Benjamin).

I would like to revisit Marta E. Savigliano's text *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion* to reference how art forms exist outside of its present spatiotemporal and within the confines and structures (political and economic) that harbor their existence. By looking at the conditions that commodified Tango as an "exotic" political economic commodity through mechanically reproducing its aura of Passion through various designs of "appropriate, accumulation, marketing, packaging, commercialization, distribution, and consumption of the wealth of exotic feelings, that is, of the Passion of the Other/Otra" (12, Savigliano), she determines that as both a colonizing and decolonizing mechanism, that the Tango has committed social changes in several places and time. Although Savigliano's work is a specified decolonization project, I reference an assortment of her analysis to later generate a more insightful and close reading of KPop. Similar to Benjamin, she privileges the position of the specter. In her particular case study, she examines how it does not take two to Tango, rather, it exists largely in part for the "expectant, engaged" (74, Savigliano) specter that is a default expert of viewing and appreciating the performance. The Argentines, through the Tango became the exotic who willingly played, "a colonial erotic game played between unequal partners," (75-76) and practiced "appropriating and reshaping the Oriental for the consumption of Western Europeans" (85). In similar fashion, Korean popular music in its earlier stages served the same distinctive purpose. As mentioned earlier through Young Mee Lee's historical reference to the

emergence of popular music in Korea in its post-War and its following decades, popular music in Korea is rooted in its function to reappropriate the popular America music of that time period to entertain and service the American military personnel. Appropriated and reproduced, both the Korean musicians of the 1950s-70s, as well as the Argentine Tango dancers became approachable, consumable, and relatable, but it is in the commodification of what it is trying to replicate that certain elements of its original (or predecessor, if it is argued that there can be no true original and authentic art in the era of modernity) are elsewhere and replaced by newly emerged aesthetics. Savigliano asserts that in the presentation of the Tango as a valuable commodity, ambiguities are left to create the structures of perpetuating an erotic perception of the Tango's identity. It is the exotic that remains integral in the reappropriated form of Tango that provides it its value and power to remain a political and economic apparatus. It is the exotic that becomes desirable for the specter, because it cannot be wholly reproduced and fulfilled by the specters themselves. For emergent art forms that materialized under conditions of hegemonic and imperial structures, much of its value is conditional to its ability to remain a relatable yet desirable novelty. This may also be the logic behind the function of popular music or other forms of commercial cultural productions, where in order for something to become popular and enter the consciousness of the masses, it needs to appear desirable. But this desirability within any art form and its relation to the consumer varies largely based on the different structures of feeling that each person is conditioned to appreciate. As it was referenced earlier, KPop and Hallyu's success in the Asia Pacific was due to its ability to represent itself to the targeted consumers as the exceptional cultural commodity symbolic of the ultimate Asian modern cosmopol and the differing forms of desire that it projects on the various regionalized demographics.

Breaking Wave: Conditions of Reappropriation and Distribution of the (un)Exotic

The KPop industry has made several major attempts at promoting some of its most successful artists into the popular U.S mainstream in the past half decade[59]. The initial and most evident crossover attempt of a contemporary KPop star was Rain (Bi; who was then-under JYP management), when he entered the popular U.S consciousness[60] through the much publicized parody of his music video "Ways to Avoid the Sun" by Stephen Colbert, the largely popular American political satirist and host of the Stephen Colbert Report on Comedy Central. Colbert was responding to his loss to Rain in the Time Magazine's online poll where Rain came out on top as number one (to Colbert's second). The parody sparked much media coverage and the broadcast led to Rain's guest appearance on the Colbert Report in early 2008. Between 2008 and 2009, Rain starred in two Hollywood films, Speed Racer and Ninja Assassin. Both films were directed and produced, respectively by the Wachowski brothers, who are the creators of the Matrix series. Neither was much of a box office success, regardless of a nod from the 2010 MTV Movie Awards with their *Biggest Badass Award* for his role in the Ninja Assassin. It was during this time when one of Asia's best-selling female solo artist and KPop phenomenon, BoA (under SM Entertainment management) who had enjoyed trans-regional success throughout East Asia (according to Oricon charts) since 2003 made her crossover attempt into the popular U.S mainstream in 2008. Despite efforts to release her American debut song and its supplemental music video, "Eat You Up" with then-popular American rapper Flo-Rida, and performing at mainstream venues such as KIIS FM's annual Jingle Ball, a music industry powerhouse concert, did not lead to mainstream airplay or broadcasts. Se7en (under YG Entertainment), a KPop male

[59] Although there are several other KPop groups gathering attention from international audiences, the above list of KPop artists are the only ones to claim true crossover attempts in that they released formal American albums in the continental U.S.

[60] *just a side note since it was mentioned by Music scholar Eun Young Jung that he debuted in 2006 which was met with harsh criticism. http://www.uky.edu/Centers/Asia/SECAAS/Seras/2009/06_Jung_2009.pdf

solo artist had a similar feat as BoA during his American debut between 2008-2009. He released an American album and featured popular American rappers Lil Kim and was featured in R&B pop-star Amerie's 2007 album. Both BoA and Se7en had English-songs that sounded comparable to any other American popular song during that time and their music videos resembled that of an American pop and R&B video which featured recognizable American musicians. Nonetheless, the album or its supplemental music video failed to achieve mainstream airplay and broadcasts. Aside from their inability to get exposure through the popular radio frequencies and major broadcasting channels such as MTV, their retail album sales were commercially weak.

Since then, two major KPop girl groups have "debuted" in America, trying to penetrate the popular U.S mainstream markets. Wonder Girls (under JYP management), composed of 5 young female singers with the Lolita-like sexual stage presence with their quirky, catchy and repetitive pop songs and dance choreographies epitomized the definition of a KPop girl group. When their hit song "Nobody" went viral with everyone from American youth to Filipino inmates from the Cebu Provincial Detention and Rehabilitation Center (CPDRC) uploading their own renditions, or "cover videos" of the music video (mostly for its repetitive and bubble-pop dance moves), crossed over to the popular U.S domain in 2009 through various entertainment industry endeavors. In addition to releasing an American English album, the Wonder Girls tried to build a franchise through the pre-teen market. Their most successful crossover presence was performing as an opening-act for the Jonas Brothers' concert tour. The Jonas Brothers are an American popular boy band composed of the 3 Jonas siblings and was considered a pre-teen phenomenon with sell-out tours, several television shows through the Disney channel, movies deals and a long list of retail merchandise under their own franchise. After opening up 45 shows

with the Jonas Brothers, the Wonder Girls tried to continue catering to their specified target consumer market through made-for-television movie on Teen Nickelodeon. The Wonder Girls were somewhat able to penetrate into the popular U.S consciousness through their physical presence and visible performance. They were able to become commercialized and profitable, although their U.S crossover remained within the perimeters of the pre-teen market. This is exceptional in two regards.

First, the Wonder Girls had managed to captured the essence of what pop stars are meant to do. According to George Lipsitz who writes about the "intersection of pubescent sexuality and sophisticated marketing" (22, Lipsitz) as being formulaic to the pop star production model, they were able to utilize the "technologies of digital capitalism…to expand consumer access to a broad range of cultural expressions" (20, Lipsitz), given that such cultural expressions include branded merchandise to build upon their own existing franchise and to produce and distribute content such as made-for-television movies. Second, the steps that the Wonder Girls (and JYP Entertainment) took to garner and expand their consumer market are remarkably "American." Unlike the Korean entertainment industry where popular music is released through the major entertainment companies already branded as "popular," the steps they took in touring with an already established and mainstream band and expanding a consumer-base through physical concerts and utilizing digital media are the current formulas of establishing an American pop group. This is not to contest that "a very small number of songs with Anglo-American melodies and chord progressions, and a very small number of television programs owned by an even smaller group of producers" (20, Lipsitz) is not the current state of the American pop music industry. Rather, it is their digital media network of fans, their live performances, and merchandising in conjunction with the commercial entertainment industry backing was what

helped them achieve the ability to enter the popular U.S consciousness and penetrate that market. The Wonder Girls may not have secured a television series through the Disney channel and have become popular and mainstream household names, but according to Lipsitz' criteria of "pop stars," they have met that burden. It is also almost a natural progression that as pop stars, they are meant to enter the musical stages as a temporary companion for the pre-teen consumers' rapidly changing diet of diverse popular cultural consumption. As Halberstam would explain as the dominant reigning model of youth" (5, Lipsitz), it can only presume to take hold over the consumers' momentary pleasures. Regardless of what the scope for their success was for JYP Entertainment, the Wonder Girls were the first KPop group to receive broadcasting coverage from a mainstream cable network and to generate some profit based on their own branded merchandise.

The most recent crossover attempt by yet another KPop girl group is by the Girls' Generation (managed by SM Entertainment). Svelte and slender group of 9 young women sashaying their narrow hips and lengthily stretched legs chanting "girls bring the boys out," the chorus to their American album title-song "Boys" was supposed to mark the unmistakable successful KPop crossover into the popular U.S mainstream. The logistics were already well in place. They had over 64 million views on their official Youtube channel on one of their previous hit-singles, "Gee". It had generated just as many cover-videos and international digital media hype as their predecessor, the Wonder Girls. 2 of the 9 members were California-born Korean Americans. Teddy Riley, the famous and somewhat legendary American popular music producer (credited to producing Michael Jackson, Janet Jackson, Lady Gaga and Blackstreet albums) and produced their new title song "Boys." SM Entertainment had signed a deal with America's industry giant, Interscope Records, Snoop Dogg had been featured in their remix, and

their American mainstream debut was back-to-back performances on Late Night with David Letterman and Live with Kelly. It was a well orchestrated industry powerhouse launch.

With international industry giants and their existing international fan-base of millions watching this widely syndicated crossover debut closely with a magnifying glass (or multiple global news outlets, such as the Wall Street Journal, and CNN, and of course, internet-based news-generators), the Girls Generation failed to "bring the boys (America) out." The hype quickly faded and their album sales did not generate much retail transactions. The number of views on their Youtube channel did not increase or expand beyond what was already calculated for, and they were not invited back to perform on any other major public or cable networks. Girls Generation essentially marked a turning point, if not a particular progression in KPop. It was a U.S-Korean pop industry hybrid crossover project, despite their introduction to the U.S mainstream as a "Korean" girl group. From their English album with its recognizable "Anglo-American melodies and chord progressions" of popular beats, synchronized base, harmonies, slices of auto-tune, and lyrics comparable to previously popularized American pop songs such as Kelis' "Milkshake" whose chorus read "my milkshake brings all the boys to the yard"- Girls Generation should've been able to strike the right chords with its American audiences. They had the American-ideals of beauty which is pre-requisite of female pop bands, as expressed by Lipsitz as "the standards mandated by the technologies if the look and the relay of juxtaposed images and signs at the center of contemporary commodity culture" (13, Lipsitz) which had been standardized by the likes of Christina Aguilera, Nicole Scherzinger (of Eden's Crush and the Pussycat Dolls), Jennifer Lopez and Beyonce. The 9 girls of Girls Generation had been fully reappropriated to fulfill the imagination of Korea's appropriation of America's idealized imaginative of an Asian female aesthetic, to mirror the beauty proportions and appetites of what

it's perception of America's ideal female Asian corporeal and pop star would be. Ironically, that appropriation failed to appease the mainstream American viewer and was unable to transform their viewership into a profitable commercial commodity.

What can be observed from the previous attempts by the KPop industry to provide successful (albeit profitable and mass consumable) crossover into the American music industry takes an ironic twist at neoliberalism. In a sense, it followed the narrative of McChesney. It tried to align with existing mega-agencies and mass media outlets. Yet, it was unable to penetrate into the mainstream American consciousness. Perhaps, we then have to analyze what it means to become desirable for the American public in their consumption of pop music and popular culture. Also, repeating Savigliano's excerpt on Tango's success as a reappropriated consumable culture for the Western audiences, she highlights that it is the exoticism as well as its appropriately reappropriated essence and presentation of Tango that was its selling point. For the KPop artists that had previously attempted crossovers, the effects of its exoticism need to be further and differently reappropriated into a desirable commodity. For instance, all the songs that the KPop singers put out were remakes or originals sung in English. Although it can be observed that singing the songs in English may be a prerequisite in releasing singles in the States, it makes it almost indistinguishable from other American Top 40 releases. Thus, if a radio station were to pick up their singles, the audio will transfer to its listeners as another common and nondescriptive song that can be disregarded. Reflecting on other non-English pop music phenomena that gained popularity in the U.S such as the Spanish song "Macarena" or even the likes of Ricky Martin's "Livin' La Vida Loca," their original releases into the U.S markets remained in their original state and language. Although they remained somewhat of a fad, it was the somewhat exotic novelty factor that captured the attention of the American public. In the

example of an Asian artist that had left an imprint in American modern dance industry is that of Michio Ito. Dance and Performance Studies scholar Yutian Wong captures the historical and political structures that shaped the career and identity of the late modern dancer Michio Ito in the book *Worlding Dance*[61]. Wong "tackles the identity of Michio Ito as am 'international artist' whose fame was based, in part, on his status as an exceptional person who transcended national boundaries" (11, Foster)[62] that categorically placed him into the dance industry based on the racial biases that existed during the racially discriminating period between the 1928 Denaturalization Act and the immediate decade following World War II. Wong exposes the racist structures that prevented the recognition of Michio Ito as a canonical figure in American modern dance history, given that he "taught at the Denishawn school where Martha Graham, Doris Humphrey, and Charles Wiedman were his students" (148, Foster) that became "canonized as textbook examples of 'American choreographers'" (146, Foster). Born in Tokyo, Japan in 1982, his "legendary rise to fame" (145, Foster) occurred throughout the studios and salons of Europe in the 1910s. He was recruited as an inspirational and well-established dancer and choreographer to the U.S in the 1920s to help establish the cultural makings of Southern California. He trained and mentored historically referenced American modern dancers and even orchestrated the newly built Pasadena Rose Bowl's Pageant of Lights. "Ito also performed, in addition to his own modernist choreographies, Orientalized versions of various Asian dance forms and tango popularized by white modern dancers" (Foster, 148), indicating that much of his own performances were based on providing the spectacle of reappropriated choreographies to suit the desires and needs of audiences and other American dancers of his particular time period.

[61] Foster, Susan L. *Worlding Dance*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire [England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. Print. Note the chapter by Yutian Wong in this book.

Following the bombing of Pearl Harbor, Ito was interned by the U.S government and eventually expatriated himself out of the country. It required tactical strategies in the following years to reintroduce Ito's racialized body and professional identity. Several reconstruction projects that "privileged Ito (as) the 'international artist'" (149, Foster) which Wong argues as "the trope of internationality as a process of deracialization overlaid with the desire to domesticate his racial otherness" (149, Foster). This conceptualization of an artist as an international star is exceptional in that, as an 'international' figure devoid of linkages and ties to any racialized nation-states, that individual can exist as an entirely exotic entity residing within their own worldliness and exoticness. Artist, as cultural workers exit in context to the realities that they perform in, while also presenting alternative realities that they create through their crafts, and viewers get consumed into this imaginatively yet mechanically produced space. Then, what kind of space can and does KPop create given its existence as a neoliberal apparatus residing within the residual effects that fostered its emergence? As cultural performers and cultural producers, what are the spatiotemporal realities that they occupy and which spaces can they pioneer?

Chapter 3: Structures of Dominance

This chapter explores the system of norms, values, and beliefs behind the formation of mass and popular culture industries' functions, ideologies and values. KPop is at once a region-specific emergent form of dominant mass and popular culture, as well as a commercialized cultural form for the contestations of appropriation and reappropriation by those in power and those in the margins. I therefore find it necessary to examine how the elements of dominance and power operate and the values that emerge as universal conditions and commodifiers operate at various levels of the cultural process. This chapter provides close engagements with multiple pop-cultural productions to analyze the values built into the hegemonic and universalizing structures of dominant mass and popular culture.

Commercial KPop in the U.S

Multiple factors regarding ethnicity, gender, sexuality, race, racialization and the cultural and political factors surrounding KPop and the U.S needs to be addressed. As Asian Americans have been historically and systematically racialized in the U.S as perpetual foreigners or aliens within[63] in context to the overall U.S populace, we have to consider the implications of this pre-existing perception surrounding Asian artists as racialized figures. The sexualization of Asians and Asian Americans in media has also been through rampant narratives. The men are primarily type casted as either the Kung Fu fighting martial artists (propagating their Oriental-Other-ness), emasculinated males devoid of sexual seduction and desires in the form of model minority, quiet sidelined nerd figure, or demonized Cold-war enemies. Even for characters written into films as the leading roles, their sexuality is almost always suppressed. For example, Jackie Chan in his multiple American big-budget films is never in [sexual] lust, and for Jet Li in commercially successful *Romeo Must Die*, the film makers declined any sexual contact between him and the leading actress (the late Aaliyah) to be consummated on camera. The media's systematic sexualization of Asian and Asian American females have been primarily caricatures of the heterosexual male's stereotypical sexual desires as either the Lotus Blossom Baby, the Dragon Lady or the Femme Fatale. Both men and women are also often stereotyped through speaking in broken and sometimes illegible English, defining them as foreign and unnatural objects.

Furthermore, Asian American cultural and artistic performers as actors/actresses and musicians have had difficulty breaking into an unforgiving media industry. Although there have been recent emergences and examples of Asian American musicians and actor/actresses creating a space for themselves in mass media (Far East Movement and actress Sandra Oh for example),

[63] Lee, Robert G. *Orientals: Asian Americans in Popular Culture*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999. Print.

many yet-to be commercialized artists remain in the indie scene. The depictions of perpetually portraying Asian Americans and Asians in mass commercial media as such sexualized and racialized figures needs to be better understood in its relations and effects on KPop's crossover activities. The question becomes what types of exoticism and in what excess can KPop create and retain in order to appear as a desirable yet approachable pop cultural commodity? Can KPop exist within the American consciousness in lieu of its Asian American artists, and moreover, how and under which conditions can they co-exist? There are numerous other areas to explore such as the growing partnerships being forged between Asian American artists and Asia-based entertainment agencies and their transnational activities which this paper cannot fully address at this time.

As KPop ventures off into global marketplaces, it becomes a racialized and nation-bound subject for its non-Korean viewers, given the "Korean" in KPop. Cognizant of its own racialized subjectivity in a global and visually-centered pop-market, KPop industry producers are adopting various forms of situating its most commercially successful and potentially successful artists into the consumers' consciousness. The logic and social governance of racial-formation for Koreans is based on a U.S hegemonic construction of the racialization process[64]. The racializing techniques employed by the KPop industry moguls and their creative and marketing teams are diverse. One of the exceptional and recent trends which has been under-examined by existing scholarship is the usage of the corporeal and spatiotemporal that have been deployed to not only situate particular artists into the global consumers' psyche but also situating them as relatable and palatable international and culturally-relevant power contenders as international pop stars.

[64] Kim, Nadia Y. *Imperial Citizens: Koreans and Race from Seoul to La*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2008. Print.

In the reappropriation process, a finely calculated formula for retaining and exoticizing its racial, sexual and ethnic appeal will be crucial in the making of a crossover-able cultural commodity.

From *Rolling Stone*, *The Wall Street Journal*, to the *Los Angeles Times* has been reporting on a new trend, almost a phenomenon that is turning up at the crevice of its pop music shores, coast-lining at the tip of the *Billboard* and iTunes charts. KPop, Korea's international trend-setter has arrived at the forefront of America's own consciousness through the Girls' Generation's introduction on David Letterman and its frequent airplay in between Britney Spears and Lady Gaga tracks at the popular West Hollywood-based gay-club Rage on its Gameboi nights. These unmistakably "Korean" pop-songs have been making cross-over attempts into the U.S and other non-Asian markets in the recent years, and the types of response they have received has been mixed. I recall its unmistakable Korean-ness in that, despite the mixing of English into song lyrics, the songs are indeed, sung primarily in Korean. Also, most of its performing artists are ethnically Korean, even though some KPop bands have non-Korean members incorporated into their respective bands, and many of the KPop performing artists, producers, and management personnel are diasporaic Koreans.

KPop as Korea's neoliberal apparatus for branding itself as a desirable modern cosmopolis that is currently in the stages of trying to enter the U.S. I argue that succession into the U.S. neoliberal market and situating oneself there (as either an individual or as a state) has become a universal standard of success and achievement. This marketplace is not only and economic arena but its margins stretch out into infinite extensions of politics, governance, culture and allows fully integrated players to exercise the freedom to create a state of individualism. The promise of neoliberalism is that the unrestrained capital markets will provide

the opportunities for individualism, wealth, and creativity to arise. It becomes the ultimate reality to desire, the ultimate desire to realize.

Fashioning Desires through Popular Culture

To exemplify the construct and effects of neoliberalism, I turn to the pop cultural icon Jay-Z, in his manipulation through neoliberalism in creating himself as a symbol of desirability. Through his lyrics, I follow the progression of his career from a rapper, to pop star, and finally into a cultural reference. I will then describe the similar yet different tactics that KPop is using to generate a comparable type of desirability through the examples found in GD & TOP of the boy band Big Bang's music video 'High High.'

[Interlude: sample from "Blades of Glory"]

"I don't even know what that means!"

"No one knows what it means, but it's provocative."

"No it's not, it's gross!"

"It gets the people GOING."

-Jay-Z ft. Kanye West "Niggas in Paris" 2011

Political economies of desire are complex and cannot be singularly defined. The feelings and emotions which surround the desires that are produced and the desires that it provokes cannot be summed up as a whole experience nor can it be observed in its fragmented phases. What then can be observed and made to be understood are the various political economies which take effect during the entire progression and reaction. In Jay-Z featuring Kanye West's "Niggas in Paris," Jay-Z raps:

You escaped what I escaped, you'd be in Paris gettin fucked up too

B-Ball so hard - let's get faded, Le Meurice for like six days

Gold bottles, scold models, spillin Ace on my sick J's

What he is speaking of and the desires that his lyrics provoke and inspire can be broken down into these terms: “You escaped what I escaped, you'd be in Paris gettin fucked up too”- If you had lived through and transcended the urban streets of America as an African-American male hustler-turned-rapper, having to go through the various tribulations that he had to face, such as the various types of discrimination, marginalization, and subjugations, then you [the listener/viewer] will be in a glamorous and iconic place reveling yourself into oblivion without a care, too. The political economies of Paris can be observed as two-fold; as a site of modernity and wealth beyond dollar-value given its historical implications as the capital of a major Western colonizing nation-state, as well as a site of getaway, a vacation away from the everyday life which most people dwell and live through.

“B-Ball so hard- let’s get faded, Le Meurice for like six days”-- Jay-Z is beyond a care in the world and its daily struggles because he has commercially and financially reached the top, where he doesn’t have any worries and can be hedonistic and as wasteful of currencies and daily duties, that he can afford to lose count of the days of his own indulgence for “like six days” [ambiguous number of days] at Le Meurice, a 5-star luxury hotel in Paris. Le Meurice, a top-rated hotel renowned for its extravagance located across the Louvre in Paris is a symbol of exclusivity and wealth, made available only to the world’s elites. Jay-Z, as the ultimate achiever in the late-capital world as a pop-cultural icon warrants a space at Le Meurice as a patron at the historical hotel alongside other cultural icons such as Salvador Dali, Rockefeller, Elizabeth Taylor and Head of States among others.

"Gold bottles, scold models, spillin Ace on my sick J's"-- Jay-Z is implying that he is drinking bottles of Armand de Brignac (also known as Ace of Spades), which is an expensive champagne brand, branded for its signature gold-metallic bottle, while he is scolding (telling off) models (females whose occupation is to present certain industry specific standards of idealized attractiveness) that are surrounding him for spilling the mentioned champagne on his collector's item Air Jordan sneakers. What is also indicative of this line is that his shoes are worth more to him than the beautiful women that are simply existing and present to fill the need of their feminine-sexual use-value. He already has it all- including a wife, Beyonce, who is considered one of the most beautiful and commercially successful women in the world. Thus, the models surrounding him and present at his party are simply there for aesthetic appeal and the desires that they trigger for the outside viewers. What is left unsaid is the most captivating aspect to this song and how the unmentioned realities are what make this song transformative. In addition to his status as a top-selling recording artist, Jay-Z is an entrepreneur that has accumulated an extensive list of businesses and turned himself into a mogul. He was quoted in 2009 interview stating: "my brands are an extension of me.[65]" Such brands that have become an extension of him include the gold bottles that he raps about in "Niggas in Paris" and his other songs. He has received equity in Sovereign Brands, the company behind the champagne brand Armand de Brignac (gold bottles) and is estimated to profit an annual return of $4 million dollars since 2006, in exchange for his endorsement and partnership. In addition to being the owner of Roc-A-Fella records, he has significant holdings in the clothing line Rocawear, co-owns a number of upscale bars and lounges in multiple cities in various regions of the world, beauty products, an NBA team (the Brooklyn Nets), a slot-machine casino, and large real-estate investments. Although the

[65]Hiphopdx.com. "Jay-Z Talks Business, Success in New Interview".*idiomag*. March 15, 2009. 17 March, 2012.

exact figures and net-worth of Jay-Z is not transparent, what becomes obvious is that his identity can no longer be attached to his role as a rapper. Instead, the branding of Jay-Z and recreating an individual into a commodity fetish has positioned him to emerge, synonymous to a certain lifestyle and as a symbol of the attainment of the neoliberal promise. Then, "Niggas in Paris" is a way to express Jay-Z (and Kanye's) place in the world, as cultural icons that have exceeded and transcended the norms of modern life. All they have left to do is to simply enjoy and assert their status as symbols of desire for the rest of the world to covet.

The transformation of Jay-Z into this symbolic commodity fetish can be learned through his earlier songs, where he makes it clear that he intends to and will deliberately commodify himself. Such intentions are laid out in his songs "Moment of Clarity," "I Just Wanna Love U (Give it 2 Me)" and "Diamonds from Sierra Leone (remix)" (also with Kanye West). In the song "I Just Wanna Love U (Give it 2 Me)" which are one of his earlier pop songs and also the turning point in his position from a rapper to a mainstream rapper-pop-star, he says:

I'm a hustler baby, I'm a hustler

I just want you to know, wanna let you know

It aint where I been, it aint where I been

But where I'm bout to go, top of the world!

And from a hustler, he recreates himself again in "Diamonds from Sierra Leone (remix)":

I'm not a businessman

I'm a business, man

Let me handle my business, damn

He provides an explanation in his need and intentionality behind his own transformations in "Moment of Clarity":

Music business hate me cause the industry ain't make me

Hustlers and boosters embrace me and the music I be makin

I dumbed down for my audience to double my dollars

They criticized me for it yet they all yell "HOLLA!"

If skills sold, truth be told, I'd probably be

lyrically, Talib Kweli

Truthfully I wanna rhyme like Common Sense

But I did five mill' - I ain't been rhymin like Common since

When your cents got that much in common

And you been hustlin since, your inception

Fuck perception go with what makes sense

Since I know what I'm up against

We as rappers must decide what's most impor-tant

And I can't help the poor if I'm one of them

So I got rich and gave back, to me that's the win/win

So next time you see the homey and his rims spin

Just know my mind is workin just like them...

... rims, that is

In a way to defend his own reappropriation of his music in its style, content, production and distribution, he points out the structural systems of the mainstream media industry that create challenging conditions for rappers to become commercially successful by retaining the original styles of rap music- “Since I know what I'm up against,” he considers himself as a self-made

artist that got to the stages of commercial success through his own means- “Music business hate me cause the industry ain't make me.”

Although it is not specified in the lyrics, Jay-Z began his career by signing himself onto his own independent company under the label Roc-A-Fella Records in 1995 with his two business partners. In describing the process of his transformation into a commercial artist rather than remaining as a lyricist and rapper which he was criticized for by his then-peers, he justifies this act by saying- “But I did five mill' - I ain't been rhymin like Common since”… “We as rappers must decide what's most impor-tant/ And I can't help the poor if I'm one of them.” Perhaps, the most provocative line in the song is- *“I dumbed down for my audience to double my dollars,”* where he is admitting that the music that he now puts out is devoid of true meaning and narrative about the realities that ‘true rap music’ is supposed to articulate, but a mechanical reproduction that can be more relatable and consumable by the mainstream for profitability. Jay-Z, in his own words, has fully embraced and integrated himself into the neoliberal markets by placing capital growth at the center. For him, this venture into the neoliberal realm is the ultimate achievement- “So I got rich and gave back, to me that's the win/win.” According to Jay-Z’s analysis, in order to win and to become a winner, one must become monetarily rich. It is only through the acquisition of wealth that one can exercise his/her freedoms to help others. As a culturally branded figure, Jay-Z has taken on ambassadorial roles to promote the U.N and the American Red Cross’s campaigns, as well as becoming politically active during the 2008 Presidential elections as an advocate of then-Senator Barack Obama and through his recent endorsement of President Obama’s support for marriage equality. It is his popularity and cultural influence as a commodity fetish (branded identity) that has recreated him into a form of mainstream desire that makes him a standout example as a neoliberal emergence.

KPop's GD & TOP's "High High" tries to embody the similar antics of creating a world to desire for its viewers. As hosts and the only male patrons at their own party, surrounded by beautiful, mostly white model-esque females that are eager to invite them into an exclusive night of mayhem, designated for GD & TOP, they rap:

Nahn yi bahm eh daetong-ryung (I am the president of this night)

As the Head of State of this Playboy-themed club, the indulgence does not stop. From the overflowing liquor to the arrays of women that are throwing themselves against GD & TOP, they are more concerned about asserting their status as already having achieved all desires. The women are simply there to reaffirm their status and desirability for the viewers.

"High High" and Reappropriating Desires

As one of the most popular KPop boy bands, Big Bang has received much attention from various mass media outlets that praise them as a pop music powerhouse. According to two recent Time Magazine articles titled "South Korea's Greatest Export: How KPop is Rocking the World" and "Watch Your Back Bieber, the Boy Band is Making a Comeback,"[66] it highlights how they won MTV EMA (European Music Awards)'s 2011 Best Worldwide Act Award by beating out Britney Spears with 58 million votes. What is interesting about this particular boy band is that it has gone through multiple musical and aesthetical transformations since its inception in 2006, representative of the shift to transnational and hybrid production which has become uniform within the KPop industry.

[66] Zafar, A. "Watch Your Back, Bieber: The Boy Band Is Making a Comeback." Time Newsfeed. Online. 4, Jun 2012. http://newsfeed.time.com/2012/03/09/watch-your-back-bieber-the-boy-band-is-making-a-comeback/

Directing our attention to GD and TOP's music video 'High High' whose production was highly influenced by Korean American party promoters based in Seoul, who have recreated a glam-ed up American nightlife party scene, reminiscent of a trendy Hollywood or New York City club as the music video's setting. The created environment of the music video makes the viewers question, or forget where the singers are situated. Whether the Korean artists were uprooted from their home-base in Seoul and transplanted into a Hollywood or Vegas Playboy-themed club, if a Playboy club had landed into the backyards of Seoul, or you are simply in another space and time where only the members of GD & TOP and their female hosts cease to exist is not the question. Even the thought of the scene resembling a trendy Seoul nightclub frequented by its growing number of expats and foreigners does not cross the viewers' minds. You are invited to simply enjoy and live vicariously through the two males as they maze through their night of mayhem. GD & TOP, in perspective, exist in the transnational consciousness of those juggling between the modern and the post-modern. While GD & TOP dance and swagger through a synthetically constructed nightclub scene, they capture/reappropriate the essence of the privileged transnational heterosexual male's ultimate hedonistic and decadent existence/reality. Leaning more towards lustful debauchery than epicurean tastes for a long nameless index of beautiful women and a steady stream of alcohol filled with other bawdy behaviors that are meant to lead them into the twilight, there is no need for restraints. GD & TOP are the true libertines of the night. Where they are, and when it takes place is of no concern; for them nor their party aides. Any troubles are to be left at the door. You, the viewer are invited to join their cult of young adulthood, existing in the surreal reality of an indulgent and excessive party, as a modern cosmopolitan is supposed to be.

The conventional purpose of a party as a symbolic narrative is a tactical yet genuine depiction to translate and inspire desire. It is also a very American tradition to portray success and desire through the form of parties. From Scott Fitzgerald's American classic novel, *The Great Gatsby* to contemporary pop cultural headlines made by Charlie Sheen, the attributes that are associated with parties and their desirability carry greater economic, sexualizing and social implications.

Fitzgerald's lyrically descriptive words depict the newly obtained wealth of Jay Gatsby during the Jazz Age. The Jazz Age, which marked a turning point in American cultural and economic history as a transformative era where pop culture exploded; it is arguable that the residue of cultural shifts through which alternative and resistant sexual and racial politics emerged. The glamour of the Jazz Age is often depicted through party scenes occupied by women's sexual liberation and indulgence of music, dance, and alcohol. Fitzgerald's Gatsby and his parties read similar to the party scenes of 'High High.' From *The Great Gatsby*:

> "The bar is in full swing, and floating rounds of cocktails permeate the garden outside, until the air is alive with chatter and laughter, and casual innuendo and introductions forgotten on the spot, and enthusiastic meetings between women who never knew each other's names"[67]

The party is a time and space that is real- consisting of delights and pleasures that is also forgettable because it is shortly lived. The satisfactions that the party provides are not real in that it is an end in itself. Once the party is over, all that was consumed disappears and only exists in the memories of those specially selected individuals. But this particular party that Gatsby puts

[67] Fitzgerald, F S, and Matthew J. Bruccoli. *The Great Gatsby*. New York: Scribner, 1996. Print.

together is an existence in itself. The party exists for the sake of being a party and the transient hedonism that it projects.

> "I believe that on the first night I went to Gatsby's house I was one of the few guests who had actually been invited. People were not invited--they went there"[68]

It is nothing more than an empty envelope. It has no real-value content, but subsists on its ability to generate a value based on its purely artificial and aesthetic appearance. This is the similar purpose and function of the party in 'High High.' It is the device to brand KPop (through GD & TOP) to as a commercially viable and desirable commodity. GD & TOP are entering this party of their creation within their own created reality to reorient themselves into the center of focus. The guests (women) are irrelevant. They exist to reaffirm their own existence and presence as famed, attractive, successful, hyper-heterosexual, and desirable entities that have nothing left to desire for themselves. And like Gatsby, GD & TOP are there to welcome you into their own reality no matter whom you are and where you have been. They embrace you into their world, and through them, you too, can be a part of that reality as long as the party goes on-

> "He smiled understandingly — much more than understandingly…. with a quality of eternal reassurance in it…It faced — or seemed to face — the whole external world for an instant, and then concentrated on you with an irresistible prejudice in your favor. It understood you just as far as you wanted to be understood, believed in you as you would like to believe in yourself, and assured you that it had precisely the impression of you that, at your best, you hoped to convey"[69]

The sensationalization of the type of parties that can be described as a spectacle is another way to exoticize a party as an exclusive space that restricts the rest and includes only the

[68] The Great Gatsby
[69] The Great Gatsby

selected few. In his infamous "20/20" interview with ABC News' Andrea Canning which took place on February 28th, 2011[70], Hollywood actor Charlie Sheen who has become notorious for his outrageously scandalous partying and pandemoniacal lifestyle brands himself through his parties. He is branded as being so spectacularly and naturally successful that he engages in unorthodox styles of partying, because he can:

> "DUH. Winning… It's like guys, it's right here. IMDB. 62 movies. A ton of success. I mean, come on bro, I won best picture at 20. I wasn't even trying. Wasn't even warm."

He then emphasizes his partying antics as a mystical tale, exceeding any contemporary or historical understandings, existing only beyond people's imagination:

> "The run I was on made Sinatra, Jagger, Richards, look like droopy-eyed, armless children… I expose people to magic. I expose them to something they're never going to see in their otherwise boring lives. And I gave that to them. I may forget about them tomorrow, but they'll live with that memory for the rest of their lies, and that's a gift, man."

Charlie Sheen also situates his party in a temporary place-- a place of spectacle for consumption through viewership. It's bad, but you still want to possess a part of it. It's bad behavior and the eroticism that emerges is what make it desirable. His partying is a gift; because it provides the type of spectacle that the mainstream public cannot create or perform without his presence and his unique ability to live out such a lifestyle. It is Sheen, through his success and excessive wealth and his ability to brand himself that turned him into a fetishized commodity.

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[70] Canning, A. "20/20" *ABC News.* 28 Feb, 2011. 20 May, 2012. http://abcnews.go.com/GMA/video/charlie-sheen-not-bipolar-bi-winning-13017875

That commodity can be consumed from a safe distance and without latching onto any risky and threatening acts for your own body.

The 2010 music video "High High" stands out as a marker of Big Bang's transition into a new turn towards internationalism and operating as a nation-building cultural project. The opening scene of the music video is that of a faceless DJ whom the viewer only sees from bust down and to his fingers that are spinning an electropop club-beat. The lyrics are simply auto-tuned English words: One, two, three; One, two, three to accompany the DJ's beats. The scene transitions to a member of the band whose fingers are tapping a large metallic belt buckle to the beat; then the camera briefly pans onto a row of young white women dressed up in nightclub gear waiting in line of a club that are clearly situated as "objects that are already in place" (Ahmed, 114). The camera goes back to the tapping of the metallic belt buckle before the singer's arms raise into a arch to redirect the camera to focus onto his face as he stands in front of a shiny black wall lacquered with a large golden Playboy logo before he dances towards the line of women that are directing their gaze towards him in confusion and excitement. It is only at this point that the song begins and the viewers are aware of the Big Bang member's face which is an Asian face. The song continues into the actual lyrics which are sung in Korean with snippets of repetitive English lyrics such as "all the party people in the house," "make it move, make it move," "make some noise," and "I'm so high, high, fly, fly, touch the sky" in semi auto-tune. The rest of the song takes place inside a club with several flash backs to the large golden Playboy logo. The plethora of mainly Caucasian- white young women clad in sexually provocative attire and suggestive gestures are central to the video and are reminiscent of any other American music video set in a nightclub scene. The women are happily dancing and grinding against themselves, the furniture, and the male artists who are singing and dancing

throughout the video as well and some are happily splashing themselves with champagne. Blondes, brunettes, and red-heads in rather scantily clad outfits are jumping around the club with close-ups at their faces that mimic arousal and sexual pleasure.

However suggestive the interactions between the two men and the white women are, it is nonetheless kept visually devoid of any displays of sexual organs or sexual acts. Even during the most suggestive displays and bodily exchanges, it is void of any real sexual contact such as fondling, kissing, or groping. A slight linger of bodily exchanges may occur but no illustrations of sexual acts exist on screen. Whether it is to remain in accordance to Korea's conservative MOGEF's programming regulations or not, it can be observed that no further physical contact is even necessary to stimulate its viewer. As a music video, its intention is not meant to arouse the viewers' physique but their psyche.

Ahmed recalls in her book, *Queer Phenomenology* on how whiteness goes unnoticed unless the view is disrupted by a racialized other. Ahmed says: "whiteness is invisible and unmarked, as the absent center against which others appear only as deviants or as lines of deviation" (121), yet in this music video the viewer is thrown off and disrupted by the usually invisible whiteness. The white heterosexual female bodies dictate the viewer from the beginning of the video. By standing in line and being the only pool of bodies that are visibly marked by their racialized faces (because the male bodies in the video are left faceless until later), the viewers are directed to follow their gazes which are directed towards the Big Bang members. But it is their sexualized gaze that indicates desire, alerts and invites the viewers that these women are eager, willing, and rightfully situated. During the scene when the boy band members are entering the club, the camera zooms in to the Playboy logo that shines bright. As a symbol of hyper-hetero male sexuality, the Playboy symbol marks the club scene as a hyper-hetero male

sexual territory, in which the female males which mostly happen to be white are situated for sexual consumption. After the Playboy logo, the camera points to an entrance hallway where half a dozen white women in space-cadet/flight attendant attire are welcoming and ushering the boy band members into the club. This scene is indicative of Ahmed's analysis: - "The normalization of heterosexuality as an orientation toward "the other sex" can be redescribed in terms of the requirement to follow a straight line…The naturalization of heterosexuality involves the presumption that there is a straight line that leads each sex toward the other sex, and that "this line of desire" is "in line" with one's sex" (70, Ahmed). In this case, the linear body gestures of the women that are ushering Big Bang into their space is a naturalization of Big Bang's heterosexuality towards the other women in the club.

The significance of this music video is not simply based on the fact that it is the first of their music videos to cast and situate white women as love interests and/or objects of sexual desire (their new album's new music videos all consist of the same racialized and sexualized casting of white women). It is how the usage of white female sexualized bodies in these music videos are indicative of the sociocultural and geopolitical intersections and complexities that exist between white bodied women in Korea and Korean men. According to findings in *International Women in South Korea's Sex Industry: A New Commodity Frontier*[71] by Joon K. Kim and May Fu, the improved political and diplomatic ties between Russia and South Korea in the 1990s, Russian merchants began to import Korean textiles. During this same period, a flow of Russian and other former-Soviet bloc women began migrating to Korea (as well as Japan, Taiwan and China). By the late 90s when Hallyu became a large contributor to the Korean national economy, the Korean government began to issue special artist and entertainment visas

[71] Kim, J. and Fu, M. (2008) "International Women in South Korea's Sex Industry: A New Commodity Frontier." *Asian Survey*. Vol. 48, No. 3 Published by: University of California Press. 492-513

which were easily obtained by Russian and other Eastern Europeans that began to fill positions as ballet dancers, acrobats, singers, and models. Most of these jobs were gendered roles which were specific to women's labor. A particular niche market that young Russian/Eastern European women began to dominate was in the Korean lingerie advertising sector. Korean actresses and models had always stayed away from modeling for lingerie companies, since it was considered taboo, which resonates in the histories of Neo-Confusion beliefs and social regulations of Korean women's bodies. With this influx of predominantly white women in such sexualized and culturally specified work spaces, the sex industry in Korea grew as well. Korea had initially gone through a sex industry boom following the Korean War in 1955 when camptowns surrounding the U.S occupied military bases became anonymous to the red-light districts. The camp towns continue to exist today but is not the main form of sex-work industry, labored by Korean women's bodies as it once was. Rather, the sex industry has spread nationally and through cyberspaces and many of the sex-workers are foreign migrant women. Many of the women that entered with artist and entertainment visas work fulltime or part-time in the sex industry or are trafficked into sex work at different points of their stay. According to the sources found in an article by Joon Kim and May Fu which studies the international sex workers in Korea, over 1,300 Russian women entered with artist and entertainer visas in the early 2000s. Although not all women that enter with such visas engage in sex work, and not all sex workers enter with a visa, it is one way to gauge the number of women that may be working in the industry. What is striking is that according to "the Korean Institute of Criminology, the sex industry alone generates approximately $24 billion of economic activity annually, which in 2002 constituted 4.1 % of South Korea's gross domestic product (GDP)" (Kim, Fu, 495), and surveys indicate that out of "114 men who had paid to have sex with foreign women in the year 2002…

Korean men favored Russian women (67.5 %), followed by Korean-Chinese (21.7 %), and Filipinas(17.4 %)"(Kim, Fu, 506).

It is not to argue that the women cast in the "High High" music video are to mimic the prevalence of white female sex workers, but it is to approach how the white female body embodies the sociocultural and geopolitical affects of globalization in a particular way. Another analysis to draw from the casting of white women and orienting their gaze and choreographing their gestures in that particular video is that soon after the release of that video, Big Bang became more active in the international pop music scene. With over 15 million youtube hits on that particular video alone (they currently have 205.4 million overall views on youtube), it draws on the question of how these women's bodies and sexualities orient Western or non-Korean viewers in their perception and reception to Big Bang's music videos.

The orienting of white heterosexual women towards and in line with Big Bang reorients their visible racialization (visible in that it is not an invisible whiteness). Contrary to the existing dominant Western hegemonic depiction of racialized heterosexual Asian males which orients them in a constant state of undesirable and defective for sexual desire, the reorienting of racialzed sexualities (heterosexual white females and heterosexual Asian males) towards each other creates a newly disrupted and reoriented directions for sexual desire. By orienting the white women towards GD & TOP that occupy the center of orientation, and point for orienting towards, a new way of aesthetically aligning racialized sexual bodies has emerged. It is indicating that in this much staged fantasy, racial lines have been withdrawn through this realignment. According to Wong; rather, "the trope of the non-white 'international artist' is often used to gloss the political exigency of racial, ethnic, gender, and class difference suggested by the term 'artist-of-color'. In the narration of socially decontextualized and personalized

professional histories that span geographic regions including both Western and non-Western locales, the international artist has come to signify the utopian end of race as a highly politicized and polarizing category" (Foster, 144). Whether the casting of white women into the hyper visible and present context of KPop videos is indeed to highlight the hyper-sexual commodification and consumption of their bodies or as a way to reorient the racializing of Big Bang towards an international audience, the transnational economies that affect and are and effect of the commodifying of white women's bodies in East Asia are a presentable fact. This group of white women's bodies themselves "becomes a site of global culture"[7273] (Kim, 98) which can be consumed as both a commodity and as a racially reorienting technique and device.

Policing the Feminine through KPop

The implications in the highly suggestive music video are not restricted to the sexualization of white women. But it is in the usage of female sexuality to represent KPop and Korea's successful integration into the neoliberal realm, and the markers of achievement that creates oppressive and exploitative conditions for women. The presentation of morphing Korean female sexuality in KPop through infantilization and fetishized vulnerable erotic commodities exists not only in the music genre and in the psyche of its consumers but in the realities of Korean society as well as other regions that KPop extends its influence to. The KPop industry is currently under a lot of scrutiny for its sexist, exploitative, violent, and dehumanizing practices that have become regular forms of governance. Contrary to the portrayal of Korea and its cultural ambassadors to be perfectly constructed and readily consumable *good*, where a dominant

[72] Savigliano, Marta E. *Tango and the Political Economy of Passion*. Boulder, Colo. Westview Press, 1995.
[73] Kim, T. (2003) "Neo-Confucian Body Techniques." *Body & Society* 9(2): 97–113

patriarchy exists to address the need to act as a guardian for its vulnerable and precious feminized figures.

A particular term Idol is given to the most popular KPop artists and has multiple plays on the word 'idol.' The solo or band members that are considered to be Idols prescribe to certain archetypes that are prerequisites to becoming and remaining an Idol. Aside from the idolization that they receive from their devout fans, the makings of an Idol can be narrowed down to these factors: 1- They are or appear to be in their teens at the time of their debut, and for groups that have members with different ages, the majority of its members are in their teens or appear to be in their teens; 2- They have auditioned and had gone through extensive training at one of the industry's leading agencies, where 'training' includes singing, dancing, performing, polishing their mannerisms and public persona, and any physical changes that may be required to meet the specified aesthetic requirements of becoming an Idol; 3- In describing the various limited archetypes of Idols' identities include, we can use the examples found in almost all KPop Idol groups where each of the members are given certain detectable and uniformed identities[74]. In any given group, there will be the "cute" member, who usually is the youngest in age will embody different aspects of innocence through their typically petite frames, large-round eyes that are used to frequent bat their eyelashes and perform childlike behaviors. Fans often want to safeguard and protect such Idols and the Idols in these positions continue to provide public-private personas that live up to such expectations by remaining a desirable yet not to be sexually lusted after figure. They become the point of orientation to describe other members in the band in reference or in contrast to. From this embodiment of cuteness, you get a "sexy" member that exudes the type of sexuality that affirms the fans or viewers to lust after them. They are dressed

[74]I took note of a blog post found on Seoulbeats, by a "Natalie." May 22, 2012. http://seoulbeats.com/2012/05/k-pops-archetypes/

more provocatively than their counterparts, older in age, or regularly exposing their abs (for males) and dressing more provocatively (for females) on and off the camera. There is a "responsible/mature" member that often takes on the leadership position in the group. There is a "quirky" member that is often dressed in more eccentric outfits and is either more talkative or quiet/moody in their public depiction of themselves. Then there is a "diva" member that exhibits such high levels of confidence that people often forges an appetite to address their larger-than-life mannerisms and fashion tastes. For male Idols, although the "sexy" archetypes may inhibit masculine hyper-heterosexuality as an alternative to the softer, less hypersexualized band members, they are never sexually aggressive. Rather they embody the aura of the sexual purveyor that portrays the ultimately desirable male figure that is objectifiable but never threatening. The combinations of these archetypes provide a member, if not members for any KPop fan to indulge in, find relatable and to find desirable. Overall, KPop Idols, as archetypes remain within the confines of the conservative Korean society and its media industry that is heavily policed by the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family (MOGEF) which is the government entity that oversees the distribution of cultural content. As the conservative and dominating agency, MOGEF has strict guidelines that define and limit what can be considered 'appropriate' in terms of song lyrics, artists' aesthetics, clothing, and choreographies. Anything that can be determined as sexually suggestive (for instance, female artists are not allowed to show their bare stomachs while male artists are allowed and socially encouraged to do so), as providing social unrest/confusion (no references to anything that suggests immoral or socially divergent thoughts and actions allowed), or as critical of the governing agencies (the Korean nation state and the economic systems) are repeatedly and instantly banned. Bans can be placed on full albums, singles or performances and prevents any of the major television networks and

radio stations from distributing such content. This contradictory form of neoliberal governance, where the government continues to heavily encourage a "free marketization" in the internationalization of KPop as a leading export industry while extensively censoring the artists, their music and music videos has essentialized a vulnerable, Lolita-like effect on its female artists. Most girl groups and female solo artists maintain infantilized, doll-like, sexy-but-not-sexual, flawlessly feminine and pubescent types of sexuality that meets the demands of a patriarchal society. Sexually objectifying pop stars is a common practice of consumers as well as the world's media industries, but this emergence of an entire genre of overtly submissive and infantilized type of sexual objectification of women that do not actually engage in sexual encounters is a divergence from the rest. Additional governance of female artists' sexuality through 'dating bans' on many of the Idols which is commonly practiced by the KPop agencies is also a transparent form of monitoring and appropriating their sexualities.

There is a plethora of examples that have been reported by the mainstream media on the sexual harassment, exploitation, rape, violence, unfair pay and dehumanization of KPop artists. It should be acknowledged then, that other similar cases may exist without getting filed and reported by the mainstream media. Taking the power-dynamics between entertainment agencies that have complete power and dominance in the production, marketing and distribution of KPop and the artists which is the probably perpetuator of exploitative working and living conditions for these artists, I provide the most widely reported exploitation scandals as a starting point. In 2009, actress Jang Ja Yeon (27-years-old at the time) from the sensationalized Hallyu drama "Boys Over Flowers" committed suicide at the peak of the television drama's popularity. She hanged herself after leaving a 7-page letter for the public to expose the frequent beatings, rape and other dehumanizing acts performed on her by her agent, Kim Sung Hoon since her debut

into the entertainment industry in 2006. She details how her agent had forced her to have sex with 20 plus men of influence in the industry. Police investigations followed and Kim was charged and is currently facing a maximum of one year in jail. This also sparked a public outcry from the Korean public against the entertainment agencies that have been accused of exploiting vulnerable (and often under-aged) artists into "slave contracts." The KPop industry is a particular business model that is in the production of perfectly manicured and orchestrated Idols whose greatest selling point is in their synthetic flawlessness. In order to maintain this business model, aspiring artists must audition and get signed into an established agency. Since the major television networks that provide the platform for "debuts" have alliances with a network of agencies, KPop artists cannot debut or enter the mainstream without a contract. The conditions of the contracts vary, but they mostly require individuals to remain a 'Trainee'- an apprentice for unspecified time periods. In the example of KPop's currently most successful groups such as Girls Generation (average of 5 years) and 2NE1 (average of 4 years), the time spent as a Trainee is to not only train them in vocals and dance, but also in plastic surgery, language lessons (so that they are readily exportable from the time of debut), and acting lessons. The Trainees are sometimes used as backup dancers for other existing KPop groups and agencies often "trade" their Trainees in order to create the girl/boy bands with the right archetypes. They become the ultimate commodity, where their individual and original identities are absent and replaced by their sheer reproducibility. For most KPop Idols, they enter an agency in their pre-teens or as teenagers. This creates rather skewed power-relations between the dominant agencies and the subordinate artists. For most Trainees, as minors without access to legal counsel and alternative systems of debuting and becoming a KPop star, they are subject to vulnerable working conditions and unfair contracts. 3 members out of the popular boy band TVXQ filed a lawsuit

against their agency, SM Entertainment for the unfair 13-year exclusive contract with disadvantageous payment structures that they were required to sign. The Seoul Central District Courts ruled in their favor and the three members went to form their own KPop group, JYJ. Even though their debut as a new group placed their inaugural album at #1 upon release, conflicts between agencies resulted in the suspension of their activities and a simultaneous ban from Korea's 3 main (dominating) television networks. In the course of a year, JYJ was able to return to the major networks, but the type of (total) control that entertainment agencies have over their artists and the entire entertainment industry became clear through this incident.

Many female artists share the same working and living conditions as the late Jang Ja Yeon exposed. A preponderance of evidence of 'Sponsors' that exist in the entertainment industry surfaced in the past few years, mainly due to regularized suicides of artists the persisted. Sponsors are influential and wealthy (usually older) men that become 'providers' for Trainees and aspiring artists. Due to the lengthy training periods and the high costs associated in the detailed productions of Hallyu stars, entertainment agencies have picked up the use of Sponsors as a norm. In exchange for their sponsorship, female aspiring artists are expected to provide sex and other forms of physical services (such as entertaining Sponsors and their guests at private functions). Although some female artists, in anticipation of their debuts may willingly engage in sexual relationships with Sponsors, the National Human Rights Commission of Korea's 2010 survey of 111 actresses and 240 actresses found that 2/3 claimed that they were told to have sex with potential Sponsors or other men in power, ½ claimed that declining such advances or commands placed them at risk and at a disadvantage in their careers, and another ½ claimed that they had received assistance in their career upon accepting the conditions which involved sexual relations with the men. Even though there have been examples of how male Idols have been

coerced to sexually harass and rape female Trainees by their agency, this sexual exploitation of the Korean entertainment industry primarily affects women.

It is ironic when tracing the sexualized histories of Korea during the occupation of Japan and the militarization of the U.S that the country that has been sexually exploited by colonial and imperial powers are continuing the patriarchal, violent, sexist, and dehumanizing practices. The effects of Korea's neoliberal governance which has created a shift in the racial makeup of its sex-workers as well as re-making its traditionally homogenous racial and ethnic makeup of its overall population due to the mass importation of mail-order brides from its regional neighbors (China, Vietnam, Philippines, Thailand, Cambodia and ethnic Koreans from China- Choseonjok among other ethnicities), the objectification on female sexuality and aggressive control over their sexualities remain one of its prevailing mechanisms of control. In the case of 'mail-order brides,' it has become a widely used and socially accepted form of marriage for Korean men (particularly outside of its capital, Seoul). Countless broker agencies are in the business of actively recruiting marriage-eligible women outside of Korea to meet the demands for Korea's marriage-aged men that are unable to readily find a bride in their own local spaces. As another emergence out of Korea's turn to neoliberalism, it witnessed a vast exodus of women from the rural areas and into the cities, leaving its male population without wives and child-bearers. Internet websites also heavily market international marriages for women in Southeast Asia and China to Korean men. The branding of Korea that takes place through the images and identities embodied by its cultural ambassadors (KPop and Hallyu stars) primarily through televisions and the internet have taken up the role of creating new types of emergence.

Chapter 4: Identifying the Emergence

Rather than referring only to the selected and abstract dominant system, this chapter seeks to locate the residual effects of the systemized capitalist structures of new media and internet technologies and global media industries. While previous chapters engaged with mass culture under late-capital neoliberalism, the following pages locate cultural reactions that emerge under uneven power-relations that manage to articulate themselves in public consciousness. These newly emerging cultural formations may not be considered mass or popular. Either they are a separately distinguishable emergence resisting marginalization and remaining unresolvable to dominant culture, or they are active subcultural processes that get incorporated into and at some distance from the dominant culture. And at times, these new reactive emergent cultural formations are entangled between the ambiguous lines of the dominant and its emergent given the evolving, rapid progressions of new media and internet technologies. It is through the ambiguities that localized subaltern (secondary) cultural identities are negotiated, displaced, established, reoriented, and reappropriated into their respective emergences.

KPop as an Identity Formation Tool in Popular Sub-Cultures

Finding legibility through a close reading of a very particularly racialized, gendered and sexually demarcated space of the West Hollywood popular gay nightclub Rage, it is through the reviews on the very public and user-review-based website called Yelp.com where I found six separate comments on the visibility of KPop during its GAMeboi nights[75]. I reference its visibility in addition to its audibility due to Rage's set-up of playing the music videos of the songs that it plays on the various big-screen televisions surroundings its main dance-floor. The popular reception of KPop music and music videos by the patrons of GAMeboi is an interesting space to explore. Rage is situated in the heart of West Hollywood's famed and popularized strip in the midst of LGBT bars, restaurants, and clubs. Although its workers and patrons are diverse in their sexual orientations, the predominant consumer demographic is members of the LGBT community and their allies. GAMeboi, also known as Gay Asian Male night (with a play on the Japanese created popular portable gaming console *game boy*) is the weekly event held at Rage mostly and regularly on Friday nights. According to a patron that blogged about his experiences and analysis of this particular space:

> "If you are into Asians, or if you just like the feeling of being taller than others, this is the place to be. You have your skinny cigarette-smoking Kpop boybanders outside, the Filipino B-boys upstairs, the young Thai boys dancing to 2NE1 on the dancefloor, and the one tall black guy that is about 4 feet taller than everyone else telling everyone he's not into Asians, but he really is….It's like some crazy, gay, Asian boy buffet.

[75] GAMeboi nights at the West Hollywood club Rage is short for Gay Asian Male nights, where the predominant number of patrons are Asian and Asian American gay males, females and "Rice Queens" which is a termed coined to describe non-Asian gay males that have a preference for gay Asian and Asian American males.

…So if you like someone, you will have to be the aggressive one and muster enough courage to ask the Taeyang look-alike for a dance.

…I wouldn't say that Gameboi defines me, because that'd be a silly way to describe myself….But the sheer magnitude of just being around others like yourself is somewhat comforting. Despite all the haters and the divas and the insecure feeling I get… Sometimes, just playing up the stereotype and being around others with similar backgrounds helps you find out more about yourself.[76]"

-- *Kevyn*, blogger of http://queerious.com

Kevyn, as a self-identity gay Asian American who appears to have recently transplanted himself in Los Angeles after graduating from college, states that in addition to seeking a career in Los Angeles, he had "a lot of self-searching to do about what it is to be an independent homosexual Asian man.[77]" In his own self-journey to finding himself and a community, this particular blog post titled *RAGE- Really Asian Gay Experience* is a provoking point to continue analyzing KPop and the complexities that intersect in the emergence of desires. Kevyn's desire is not only to self-search his individual identity (which includes his sexual identity) but to find a community that he can identify with, find comfort in, as well as the most desirable aesthetics that he associates with becoming "the queen of Gameboi… be thin and popular and accepted." In his partially satiric comments, certain truths and desires can be extracted. Throughout this blog post, he repeatedly references KPop Idols as well as certain attributes that go in the makings of a KPop Idol.

[76]Kevyn. "Raaaaage." January 13, 2011 http://queerious.com/2011/01/13/raaaaage/ 25 May, 2012
[77] Quoted from the same blog- Due to my discovery of these texts through a blog, I can only assume these statements.

Despite the profoundly censored and synthetically constructed identities of KPop artists (more so with the Idols), KPop has proven to be a relatable, desirable and continuously consumable commodity for certain demographics. From the Vietnamese youth entering cover contests to Kevyn, one thing or another has cultivated a passion for desiring KPop as a form of consumption and as a form of identifying themselves through KPop. According to Kevyn, GAMeboi nights are recollected through the looming presence of KPop. In addition to mentioning the KPop songs and music videos that are playing around and in the background of the night, his reference to "skinny cigarette-smoking Kpop boybanders" and the "Taeyang[78] lookalike" indicates how KPop has emerged in the consciousness of GAMeboi. The cigarette-smokers that he describes are (probably) not actual KPop stars, but rather his peers who have reappropriated certain aspects of KPop stars through their attire, aesthetics, and or mannerisms. The Taeyang lookalike reference is telling of Kevyn's own preference for the type of KPop Idol that he desires most. In the intersections of the diverse identities that exist inside of Rage, KPop has emerged as omnipresent through the speakers, flat-screen televisions and onto the corporeal bodies that are occupying the time and space of its GAMeboi nights.

The type of popular reception of KPop at GAMeboi nights as well as by the millions of fans and consumers of KPop can be additionally explained through Rowan Pease's, George Lipsitz's and Carol Clover's analyses of fandom. In Rowan Pease' *Korean Pop Music in China*, he pinpoints Hallyu (KPop) fans as those who "not only consume a culture, but who translate that consumption into activity, joining a community with whom they share feelings and thoughts about their common interests" (158, Berry et al), an observation that is similarly made by Lipsitz and Clover as well. In Clover's study of horror film fans, she alludes to the type of fandom

[78] Taeyang is a member of the popular KPop boy band Big Bang.

where fans await the release or screening of a horror film that is typically predictable in its plot and delivery, that it is that type of familiarity that horror films provide that often excited the fans[79]. And their engagement with the film begins not at the time of viewing, but rather during the stages of anticipation. It is when they are discussing, driving to, and standing in line before entering a movie theater, that their expectations and engagements begin. Fandom is, as the driving force behind the different pop cultures are active, effective, shared, and time-sensitive phenomenons.

Pease also quotes Ehrenreich, Hess, and Jacob's study of Beatles fans, "although from a very different time and culture, throws up some interesting similarities. The Beatles' somewhat androgynous sexuality seemed to offer 'a vision of sexuality freed from the shadow of gender inequality because the group mocked the gender distinctions that bifurcated the American landscape into 'his' and 'hers.'"[80] The reasoning behind the appeal of male idols for their non-threatening sexuality is a prevalent point made by Pease, Lipsitz, and Clover. And it is this very type of sexuality that is relinquished by boy bands, which positions them "as objects of admiration, by encouraging them to inhabit a state of romantic longing as an end in itself…suggesting that erotic and romantic desire can be fulfilled by purchasing the appropriate commodity" (5, Lipsitz). They are sexually objectifiable, but it is always without sexual and physical contact. As idols and consumable desires, they remain hanging on the walls of fans, on their magazine covers, on their television screens, and inside their psyche. This attraction is considered prevalent among pubescent and teenage girls, in their own journeys towards self-discovery and toward adulthood, their own ambiguous sexualities which are socially constructed

[79] Clover, Carol J. *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film*. Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1992. Print.
[80] Howard, Keith, ed. (2006) *Korean Pop Music: Riding the Wave.* Folkestone: Global Oriental. Note chapter written by Rowan Pease.

to remain suppressed, and manifested through their fandom. Halberstam provides another alternative emergence of fandom- 'queer fandom.' She contends that queer fandom "may mimic but nonetheless reformulates adolescent fandom" where through this fandom that queers can enter a temporarily that exists in between the dominant real-spatiotemporal, and in between definitive sexualities of the hetero and the homosexual identities. For the different types of KPop fans, their fandom emerged out of the various conditions (geopolitical, racial, sexual and economical) that created the residual effects that constructed their desires. Perhaps, in order for KPop to cultivate a popular and mainstream fandom, it needs to better assess the complex design behind the makings of desire within the mainstream's psyche.

In Lipsitz' *Footsteps in the Dark*'s discussion of American boy bands he says:

> "Boy bands are generally marketed more as objects of romantic desire…they appear on the scene rapidly, attract enormous attention for a few years, and then fade from view. Part of their popularity stems from their function as the fad of the moment, from their ability to mark a particular moment in time. Their celebrity status constitutes an event in itself: to ignore them is to be out of the loop" (4, Lipsitz).

This popular aspect on the appeal and power of pop culture is important in understanding the constructions of desire. What is desirable exists in context to particular time and space and for those particular bodies that are experiencing and its effects.

Emergence as a Temporary Space

Developing a discourse through Raymond Williams' frameworks specified in "Dominant, Residual and Emergent," one of the most prominent forms of emergence to emerge out of the contemporary KPop industry as a neoliberal emergence is through the reactive, alternative and

resistant formations found in cyberspace. The particular stage that newly developed emergences are made visible is on various websites and are organized both to counter and to reaffirm the dominant structures designed by the hegemonic global media mega-agencies and the dominating KPop industry. Major music labels have been incorporating internet-based Cover Contests as a lucrative marketing tool. Cover Contests provide an alternative platform to market the company's artists' new releases by generating more exposure to the original songs. As a contest, it creates another top-down approach to distributing content and information for the active and productive viewers to comply with the contest's rules and regulations. For each cover video that gets submitted into any given contest, each submission is tagged or linked to the original song. It is also a way to re-circulate the title of the song and the original artist in multiple websites and pages. In addition to operating as a re-generating tool, Cover Contests encourage viewers to become even more active consumers. For the viewers that participate in the contests, their production of a remake/cover of the original becomes another way of consumption. In order for a cover to be made, the original must be closely analyzed and synthesized to create a real and believable cover. They are likely to watch a music video or listen to a songs multiple times, and will have to alter their own aesthetics to reappropriate themselves into a cover artist. In the act of creative construction of a cover, the participant becomes a double-consumer. Even for the non-participating viewer, they are also given encouraging tools to become a more active consumer. With each cover video that they watch and each vote that they cast into the process of selecting a contest winner, the non-active consumer is remade into an active consumer during that course. Cover Contests also exist within an inherently dominant-subordinate framework. As a contest, it is a structure based on a reward system. Only the music industry that engineered the activity is

capable and privileged to select the winner. The contestants then are reaffirming tools for the commercial music industry.

KPop Cover Contests are not exception to this role. Each cover video made becomes another way to validate the music industry. What is exceptional about these cover videos is found through the organizing bodies behind the contests as well as the thousands of recently remade double-consumers. What stands out and is a unique area of emergence is in the very spaces that it occupies and the residual effects of U.S hegemony become evident.

> "Nativism, everywhere actively lamenting the loss of purity, is a form of culturalism preoccupied with questions of identity and authenticity."[81]
>
> (*On the Power of the False,* Achille Mbembe)

The above quotation, as articulated by Achille Mbembe in his article, *On the Power of the False,* speaks in part to the author's own aspiration to urge the nativist and Afro-radical scholars to expand beyond expressing Africa "as a wounded and traumatized subject." In this exploration of seeking a region's [which had been so traumatized and wholly consumed by centuries of colonization] identity and authenticity through culture can be applied to South Korea's own aspirations and struggles to decode itself as an identifiable entity of itself. The neoliberal contemporary Korea does not have a past of its own "natural state" to reflect upon, since its industrialization and its own modernity had occurred post-Japanese colonization and during U.S military and political occupation and governance. Whether Korea is seeking to authenticate itself as a true native and autonomous state, entirely separated from the U.S is debatable[82], but what is true is that contemporary Korean society is going through its own

[81] Mbembe, A. (2002) "On the Power of the False." *Public Culture* 14.3 629-641
[82] Kihl, Young W. *Transforming Korean Politics: Democracy, Reform, and Culture*. Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharpe, 2005. Print. Note p.163

negotiations of contesting and promoting existing hegemonic U.S cultural and political presence. These residual uncertainties and negotiations are present in KPop's Big Bang Global Cover Contest videos. The advertorial video which announces the very contest is made by the Big Bang members that are promoting this event in English for their "global" fans. It becomes quickly obvious that due to the tone of Big Bang's speech, that English is not their first language. The entire segment sounds overly-rehearsed and unnatural. This is evidence of the complex and exceptional ways in which representations of race and nation states are being articulated and negotiated through internet-based digitized media. The adoption of English as the dominant language reaffirms the prevalence and hegemony that is left unquestioned by commercial media. The ambiguity that remains to be answered is how the construction of Big Bang's identity gets reappropriated and translated for their loyal fans versus the unexpectant, resistant, new and/or random fan. Countering the actions of upholding American cultural hegemony through the usage of English in its promotion process, the contest generates hype around the all-expense paid trip to Korea to visit Big Bang. Even though English becomes the language choice of communication, the award resituates Korea and Big Bang back into the central focus for discussion. The prize that gets awards for the contest winner is to be invited into an exclusive space that is occupied by Big Bang. It provides that temporary opportunity in time to cohabitate a KPop engineered yet shared reality for the prized double consumer. This can be observed as another extension of KPop's function as a neoliberal apparatus to promote the branding of Korea and to increase the flow of tourism.

In the "2012 Big Bang Fantastic Baby Dance Cover Contest," two of the three winners are black, female hip hop dancers from France. The first of the winners is a dance group from Thailand. In addition to reading the potentially obvious reasons for their success as cover

winners being 1) the fans' own talents and artistic merits as dancers; 2) Thailand and France are two of the countries where KPop has cultivated a growing and popular fanbase and has also recently performed sold-out concerts implying that online users and fans from those countries may have likely casted more votes; 3) YG Entertainment has an incentive to continue promoting their artists in the countries where they already have a existing market, and will promote submissions from those countries, some questions that can be raised through these winning videos can be how these videos are racially and nationally marked.

What is uniform in all the video submissions (not just the winning videos but all submissions), is that their own biographical information is written and provided in English with some entries that have accompanying writing in their own respective languages and Korean. For entries being submitted by users in Japan, Thailand, France, Brazil and so forth, where English is not their main language, English becomes the naturalizing and standardized language to introduce themselves to not just YG Entertainment but to the rest of their cyberspace community. This particular cyberspace community, which is indeed an international body of users and consumers do not necessarily log in from English as main-language speaking countries. However, the written communication takes place in English even though YG Entertainment's official website is written and directed in both English and Korean. It is also interesting to note that YG Entertainment (in conjunction with other agencies) caters to the global consumer market by educating its artists and training them to speak in English in their own advertorial videos. This is a residual emergence through the histories of how the Korean popular singers of the 50-70s performed for the American club-owners near the army bases. The usage of English is exemplary of their alleged acceptance of the existing militarist-dynamics between the U.S. and Korea.

In addition to functioning as an alternative reaffirmation of the dominant power structures, cover videos do provide a window for resistance. The YGLoversCrew, as a cover band appear to be, at best, mere mechanical replicas of Big Bang. But there are various parts to their existence as an emergence that can be considered resistant. The process of becoming YGLoversCrew cannot be dismissed or overlooked. The type of self-reflexive turns and negotiations with the self in relation to their own localized power-constructions can provide a useful space of deconstruction. For instance, although it is the KPop and global media mega-agencies that are omnipresent dominant powers that created these Cover Contests, for the Vietnamese youth that are living under other forms of power constraints. Whether it is Vietnam's Socialist policies or its own gendered sexual politics, direct and continued engagement with other cover artists through internet-based communication platforms such as Youtube.com and Facebook.com can provide critical self-reflexive shifts in their own recognition, acceptance, and resistance to their world. Another way that YGLoversCrew as a cover band is able to exercise forms of resistance is in their embodiment and remaking of cool. As a finely made replica, their coolness can appear as dismissible and inauthentic. However, this exact form of mechanically reproduced cool that they embody is equal in its value of cool that Big Bang embodies. Both are byproducts of practice, of reappropriation, and reproduction. The process and the ingredients are the same, thus the final product are equal. The inequality that persists is the political and cultural impact of the final products. But as noted through the web-traffic count and multiple frames of presence that the YGLoversCrew occupy in cyberspace, they have emerged to contest the sole existence of Big Bang. Similar to the powers of pop idols that can generate a large turnout based on their projected appeal (such as concerts), for cover bands that gain popularity become comparably effective in distributing content and information. They

can also generate large turnouts based on their projected appeal, as it is made clear in their flash-mob videos. Without corporate backing, local youth have been able to inspire a certain emotion and a type of desire to create physical shifts (hordes of people had to move from their respective point A's to a designated point B in order to do a flash mob, upon YGLoversCrew's request/command). Another simple example of this is in the emergence of the YGLoversCrew's facebook.com's fanpage. As the owners of a fanpage, which allows users and consumers to subscribe to that page, gives abounding amounts of power to the owner. A fanpage operates as a one-way street, in a one-directional and linear communication flow. From an individual user and into a 'public figure' worthy of and in charge of a fanpage, this small but transformative shift has offset the finely engineered structures of the algocratic schemes and the global media hegemony. The cover videos are not a means to an end. It can be read as a stepping stone in the process of other newer forms of emergence. Although YGLoversCrew is not a commercial and mainstream entertainment figure, the possible ways to manipulate the top-down structures of the media industry, as well as their hegemonic practices (such as the Cover Contests), through newly found mediums online can decenter, displace, or otherwise reappropriate KPop, and perhaps its neoliberalism as well.

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