Dangerous Mediations:
YouTube, Pop Music, and Power in a Philippine Prison Video

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by Áine Mangaoang

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ABSTRACT

Dangerous Mediations:
YouTube, Pop Music, and Power in a Philippine Prison Video

Áine Mangaoang

The cultural crossings between music, new digital media, prison and postcolonial Philippine culture form the basis of Dangerous Mediations, which provides a close, intertextual reading of a contemporary prison performance to question the assumptions behind seemingly familiar, entertaining audiovisual media content. Through the lens of critical cultural studies, and ethno/musicology, I examine the interplay between Michael Jackson’s renowned hit Thriller (1983) and a specific interpretation of this work by a group of 1500 Filipino inmates at the Cebu Provincial Rehabilitation and Detention Centre (2007). Rereading Jackson’s impact on popular music and culture in light of postcolonialism, penology, popular music studies, YouTube theory, and in relation to Philippine culture, I trace the evolution of this contemporary music and dance practice within Cebuano culture, as it is transformed and mediated online. I address the prevalent idea of music as an innately positive power, and through a close reading of this irresistible performance, I deconstruct prevailing (dangerous) stereotypes regarding the ‘inherently musical Filipino.’ Reflecting on how, why, and to what effect popular performance can pollinate across cultures and nations, I demonstrate how audiovisual digital platforms such as YouTube can play an important role in shaping our understanding and experiences of the world we live in. Focusing on the performances made by inmates, by Filipinos, by amateurs, I show that we are able not only to historicise the effects of the disenfranchised, but through a close reading of the intertextual, hybridised mediated performance, we may also gain access to and gradually understand that which might otherwise have remained invisible.
To the dancers – past and present – of the Cebu Provincial Detention and Rehabilitation Centre.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Undertaking a PhD is as humbling an experience as it is an enriching educational opportunity, being supported by a great many people along the way. First and foremost, sincere thanks to my supervisors Anahid Kassabian and Rob Strachan for their continuous support of my project. Part of what made my time in Liverpool so unique was the School’s weekly PhD reading group, and so I thank my colleagues and fellow PhD cohort at the School of Music for many heated roundtable discussions that continued down to the Philharmonic public house. In addition, many of the department’s staff gave me constructive comments at early stages of the project, and patiently read much of this work in various drafts and conference paper formats; special thanks to the generosity and guidance of Sara Cohen, Freya Jarman, Holly Rogers and Kenneth Smith.

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I first stumbled upon this video as a Masters student at University College Cork. I owe Áine Sheil my deepest thanks for going above and beyond any
supervisor’s call of duty in encouraging me to explore this video at doctoral level. I am especially grateful to the many generous scholars who assisted me, both on and offline, and have influenced numerous aspects of this dissertation at various, crucial stages: Kathrine Barnecutt, Hannah Bulloch, Christi-Anne Castro, Sara Cohen, Þorbjörg Daphne Hall, Carljoe Javier, Gurdeep Khabra, Rachel Kahn, Tony Langlois, Raul Perttierra, Mary Racelis, John Richardson, Griff Rollefson, Fritz Schenker, Vincenz Serrano, Karen Tongson, Thea Quiray Tagle, and Carol Vernallis.

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I may never be able to sufficiently thank my family: my parents Marian and Antonio, for bringing me to choral festivals and Filipino-Irish karaoke parties from the very beginning. Marian was, and is, a sounding board on so many occasions, and Antonio greeted every translation query with enthusiasm. My sisters Maeve, Deirdre and Marian have encouraged my academic adventures, especially by drumming up a healthy dose of distraction. As I near the final stages of formal education, I remember with deepest gratitude the late James (Uncle Jim) Tobin. Richard and Sarah deserve very special mention, along with all the Foott family for supporting my dreams through copious amounts of coffee cake. Enormous thanks to JB Fletcher, pupil extraordinaire. This project has invariably consumed my life since 2009, so most
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There is a saying in Tagalog, ‘Ang hindi marunong lumingon sa pinanggalingan ay hindi makarating sa parorooonan’ (he who does not know how to look back at where he came from will not reach his destination). I look back at my PhD journey with deep appreciation for all those who have helped me each step of the journey. However I owe the most gratitude to the dancers, past and present, of CPDRC, without whom none of this would be possible. Unbeknownst to them, their lives have enriched mine beyond measure and they occupy most of the pages of this dissertation, and so it is to the CPDRC inmates that this work is dedicated.

Áine Mangaoang
Cork, Ireland
September 18, 2014
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<td><strong>Anito</strong></td>
<td>(Filipino) Deity; Idol</td>
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<td><strong>Bakla</strong></td>
<td>(Filipino) A term that once specifically referred to effeminate and/or cross-dressing male (a gender-based observation), however today’s use of <em>bakla</em> often conflates effeminacy, transvestism, homosexuality, and/or the concept of the third gender</td>
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<td><strong>Balikbayan</strong></td>
<td>(Filipino) Refers to Philippine nationals who permanently reside abroad. It may also refer to those of Filipino descent who acquired foreign citizenship/permanent status abroad</td>
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<td><strong>BJMP</strong></td>
<td>Bureau of Jail Management and Penology, Philippine government</td>
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<td><strong>Cebuano</strong></td>
<td>(Filipino) Pertaining to people, language or culture from or of the Cebu region of the Philippines; the Cebuano people form the second-largest Filipino cultural-linguistic group</td>
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<td><strong>Clicktivism</strong></td>
<td>The use of social media and other online methods to support, promote and facilitate a cause including petitions, protests, boycotts, crowdfunding, and circumvent news/media blackouts</td>
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<td><strong>CPDRC</strong></td>
<td>Cebu Provincial Detention and Rehabilitation Center, Cebu, Philippines</td>
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<td><strong>Hataw Sayaw</strong></td>
<td>(Filipino) ‘Sayaw’ means ‘dance’; ‘hataw,’ while literally translates as to strike or beat, when used in the context of dance as in ‘hataw sayaw’ is pertains to ‘dance show’ or to ‘dance your best.’ The phrase ‘Hataw na!’ is slang for ‘Bring it on!’</td>
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<td><strong>Ilocano</strong></td>
<td>(Filipino) <em>Ilocano</em> or <em>Ilokano</em> pertains to people, language or culture from or of the Ilocos region of the Philippines; Ilocano people are the third largest ethnolinguistic group in the Philippines</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Jeepney</strong></td>
<td>(Filipino) A converted jeep, originally left over from US military vehicles, used as a popular mode of public transport in the Philippines</td>
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<td><strong>Mabuhay</strong></td>
<td>(Filipino) Greeting; ‘Long Live’, literally means ‘Live’ from the word ‘Buhay’ which means ‘Life’</td>
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<td><strong>OFW</strong></td>
<td>Overseas Filipino Workers account for an estimated 10 per cent of the population of the Philippines. (Related to Arroyo-Macapagal’s term OFI: Overseas Filipino Investors)</td>
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<td><strong>Palabas</strong></td>
<td>(Filipino) Spectacle</td>
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<td>Term</td>
<td>Definition</td>
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<td><strong>Peso</strong></td>
<td>(Philippine Peso) Official currency of the Philippines, designated ₱ or PHP</td>
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<td><strong>Pinay</strong></td>
<td>Feminine version of the informal demonym Pinoy, referring to Filipino people, both in the Philippines and overseas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pinoy</strong></td>
<td>Informal demonym referring to Filipino people, both in the Philippines and overseas. Though the term is strictly masculine, it is often used to denote Filipinos regardless of gender</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Preso</strong></td>
<td>(Filipino) Inmates; prisoners</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Pro-am</strong></td>
<td>Professional-amateur. Refers to an intermediate, indeterminate status between amateur and professional, usually in relation to sport, but increasingly used to refer to online (inter)activity</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sinulog</strong></td>
<td>The most popular annual cultural and religious fiesta held in Cebu</td>
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<td><strong>UGC</strong></td>
<td>User-Generated-Content</td>
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<td><strong>Users</strong></td>
<td>In the context of YouTube, users are all those that ‘use’ the site – from the very active to the more passive</td>
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<td><strong>Visayan</strong></td>
<td>(Filipino: Bisaya) Pertains to people, language or culture from or of the Visayan region of the Philippines; Visayan people are the largest ethnolinguistic group in the Philippines (an estimated 33 million as of 2010)</td>
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<td><strong>YouTuber</strong></td>
<td>Although it generally designates anyone who watches YouTube, more specifically a YouTuber is defined as one who makes and uploads original video onto the site, and/or otherwise actively contributes to the YouTube community (through acts including, but not limited, to commenting, sharing, liking, disliking videos)</td>
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NOTES ON COMPANION WEBSITE

This thesis centres on one particular YouTube video, but in order to do so, mentions a considerable number of other YouTube videos. The *Dangerous Mediations: YouTube, Pop Music, and Power in a Philippine Prison Video* website provides links to each video mentioned in the thesis in order of appearance, arranged by chapters. Full URLs are also provided in the reference list at the end of this work.

The companion website is found at: www.cargocollective.com/dangerousmediations
INTRODUCTION

On June 27, 2009 within ten hours of the breaking news of Michael Jackson’s death, prison security official Byron F. Garcia arranged for a music and dance tribute to the King of Pop to be performed by over 1500 prisoners in front of a live audience of tourists and media corporations in the exercise yard of Cebu Provincial Detention and Rehabilitation Centre. Neatly dressed in identical bright orange prison jump suits with feet moving in matching black and white Chuck Taylor sneakers, the inmates dance to a ten-minute medley of Jackson’s hits ‘Ben,’ ‘I’ll Be There,’ and ‘We are the World’ piped through the prison loudspeakers, with such precision and passion that one would be forgiven for thinking one was watching a professional, if not slightly unorthodox, Broadway musical.

Such a feat might have gone unnoticed by international media in the turbulent wake of Jackson’s death, only for the fact that these prisoners were already Internet stars who became bona fide Internet celebrities following their YouTube 2007 interpretation of Michael Jackson’s 1982 epic music-video Thriller (hereafter referred to as CPDRC’s Thriller). With over fifty million views to date through the video-sharing platform YouTube, the inmate performers – known as the ‘Dancing Inmates’ of the Cebu Provincial Detention and Rehabilitation Centre (CPDRC) – have since received continuous attention from an array of mainstream news conglomerates (Al Jazeera; BBC; CNN), and independent bloggers, as videos and photographs of the

Dangerous Mediations

inmates’ dancing appear throughout the Internet, mingling alongside personal messages and professional memos, in email inboxes and on social network pages.

This research shows that new media texts, archived and disseminated through participatory, digital technology, can indicate shifting patterns in music consumption, postcolonial narrative, and prison spectacle using the case study of mediated musical performances of the Cebu Provincial Rehabilitation and Detention Centre (CPDRC), Philippines. The CPDRC inmates’ video-recorded interpretation of Michael Jackson’s *Thriller* takes pride of place in YouTube culture as one of the earliest, and enduringly popular viral videos in Internet history. As an example of a post-MTV music video, CPDRC’s *Thriller* forms part of a growing process of covering, sampling, and remediating previously recorded music. Such music videos that have become significant source texts in popular music culture.

Connecting existing scholarship on popular music and music video with emerging literature on YouTube, this dissertation combines textual analysis (favoured by much music video research), married with a holistic, critical approach, providing contextual details that serve to enhance overall understanding of this recent cultural phenomenon. While offering a close reading of one YouTube video to reveal a myriad of specific questions regarding attention, digital entertainment, government policy, and prisoner agency, this research simultaneously suggests that we should pay attention to the conditions behind YouTube videos that circulate, and often dominate, our cyber worlds.

Before going forward, the term ‘YouTube videos’ requires some explanation. Quite often the videos that appear on YouTube – from the user-generated, DIY to the professional music videos, live recordings, advertisements, films, web series, television series, gameplay, vlogs, animations, pornography, and everything else in
between — are amalgamated under the umbrella term ‘YouTube videos.’ The phrase ‘YouTube videos,’ if we care to imagine such a catchall designation, is notable precisely because it could not possibly be contained in a singular entity. Nonetheless, the category of ‘YouTube video’ that is frequently used in popular culture is so often dismissed as banal, puerile entertainment. A closer look reveals that they may not be as banal nor entertaining as they might initially seem. Or rather still, their seeming banality renders them as powerful objects that invite a range of complex meanings, which I ultimately argue, can be dangerous. Above all, this dissertation addresses the multifaceted relationship between popular music and the social, historical and technological contexts from which it is practiced. Using the CPDRC dance programme as an exemplar that fuses these categories and contexts, this dissertation traces the subtle shifts to popular music’s everyday lived reality.

The Philippines and Postcoloniality

The Philippines presents a ripe locus for an investigation on music, media and cultural history. Achieving independence from the US in 1946, followed less than two decades later by a period of Martial Law (1965-86), the Philippines has overcome centuries of oppression to become a newly industrialised country, and the fastest growing Asian economy in 2013 (BBC 2013). 3 This cosmopolitan nation with a significant diaspora — approximately ten percent of the population of the Philippines lived abroad, in addition to a growing youth population (44 percent of the population is in the 18 to 24-age bracket), has enabled the Philippines to transform from being the text-messaging capital of the world to the social networking capital of the world. In a nation where the most popular past-times include consumerism and karaoke-

3 The Philippines is the 39th largest economy in the world as of 2013 (World Bank 2013).
singing, old and new media ubiquitously exist side-by-side in the gleaming malls and back-street bars of Makati, Baguio, and Cebu. Despite high unemployment, areas of serious poverty, a geographical location along the Pacific Plate, and frequent, destructive visits from the Pacific typhoons, the Philippines boasts a sizeable online presence. As of 2011, over 33 million Filipinos are active Internet users (BBC 2013) – approximately one-third of the national population. Philippine educators are recognising the high levels of online activity students undertake, noting that Filipino youth are increasingly being educated through such online interactions (Bernabe 2013). The neocolonial education of Filipinos demonstrates the historical impact of what historian Renato Constantino (1970) deems the ‘miseducation’ of Filipinos (as discussed in detail in Chapter Two). Meanwhile the active Philippine technologically-mediated presence, due in part to the vast number of Filipino Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) (Madianou and Miller 2011), particularly on social networking and image-sharing sites (Facebook, YouTube, Instagram) demonstrates an increasingly globalised popular culture with inextricable links to the West. As such, there is a compelling nexus between the Philippines, Filipinos, and Filipino culture, with contemporary music and media practice.

Music, Power, and Violence

Music’s function within society and culture is, and always has been, extensive. The importance of music is far-reaching and not limited to the understandings in the field of musicology, as philosophers, scientists, medics and therapists alike have written of the many benefits of mankind’s exposure to music. In times of war and peace, music

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4 In line with the Philippines increasing technological, media, and socially networked culture, recent TIME research has placed Makati and Pasig City (part of Metro Manila) as the ‘Selfiest City in the World’, with 258 selfie-takers per 100,000 people. See Chris Wilson, ‘The Selfiest Cities in the World: TIME’s Definitive Ranking’. March 10, 2014. Available from <http://time.com/selfies-cities-world-rankings/>
is known for promoting physiological and psychological health, maintaining strength and wellbeing, as well as serving as a form of self-expression and social cohesion. Countless arias, anthems and albums pay homage to music’s positive healing powers. ABBA ask the impossible in their 1977 ode to music, rhetorically asking us to imagine ‘what would life be?’ without music. Indeed, without music, or specifically for ABBA, without a song or dance, what are we?\footnote{‘Without a song or dance, what are we?’ See Interlude III for the lyrics to the chorus of ABBA’s ‘Thank You for the Music.’}

Philosophers, critics, lawmakers, and artists have always argued for the power of sounds and images. Over the past several decades we have seen a major shift in how scholars understand modern power relations in terms of audio/visual sounds and images. French economist Jacques Attali asserts that with music power is born, yet he stresses that the opposite is equally true: with music is born subversion (Attali 1985: 6). The negative is, as Attali implies, always and already a fundamental part of the seemingly positive association. French philosopher Michel Foucault’s writings on the power of the panopticon and the confessional demonstrated the intricate relationship between seeing and being seen, hearing and being heard, and how these relations were thoroughly connected to modern concepts of power (Foucault 1977; 1978). In the age of new media where we assume, invariably, that many of the world’s population have the means to access sound and image-making media, the boundaries between production, circulation, and consumption have become increasingly blurred. Inextricably bound up with instances of visual and sonic power – who sees and who is seen, who hears and who is heard – are questions of politics, colonialisms and postcolonialisms. Thus my thesis is, fundamentally, centred on the relationship between music, media and power. I explore the meanings, performances and practices of music, how mediated technology and power intersect with the CPDRC’s pop-dance
performances as they are experienced in the Philippines and throughout the world. As such, my research intersects the interdisciplinary worlds of critical discourse and textual analysis, cultural studies, ethnography, new media studies, critical and popular musicology, performance studies, and postcolonial studies.

The underlying power of music, its subversive possibilities and its use as a weapon of war are not new phenomenoms, nor are they especially recent concepts. The Old Testament’s account of ‘The Battle of Jericho’ describes God instructing Joshua to have ‘men of war’ march around the city of Jericho shouting and blowing trumpets (ram’s horns) for seven days. On the seventh day, the walls collapsed, the Israelites charged and destroyed the city, and what follows paints a somewhat harrowing picture, as the narrative describes the killing of every man, woman, child and animal as per God’s commands. Whether truth or fable, the historical account of the Battle of Jericho tells us that music’s role in warfare, and use as a powerful weapon, is as old as civilisation itself; for indeed, every army in the world has music.

During the last two decades, a need has arisen among musicologists to recognise and address the ever increasing media and literature output surrounding music’s role in the areas of detention, violence, and trauma. As musicologists, scholars whose fundamental purpose is the study of music, how do we react to such uses of music in contemporary and everyday situations of violence? How do we face non-standard uses of music, and in particular, popular music – i.e. music that appeals to most people in most everyday situations – not as positive, but as ‘irritation, manipulation, pain and torture’? (Goodman 2010: 17). In the 2013 Torture Journal: Thematic Issue on Music in Detention, editors Anna Papaeti and M. J. Grant give their

reasons for the seeming neglect of this subject by musicologists, starting with the historically rooted belief in the enriching power of music. They write that

[T]he presumption that music is an invariably uplifting and ennobling art form is well established and dates back to antiquity. For the Pythagoreans and the Greek philosopher Aristoxenus of Tarentum, music carried healing powers: while medicine healed the body, music soothed the soul. In the much older Ayurvedic tradition, music was (and is) recognised for its holistic influence on both physical and mental processes (2013: 1).

For Papaeti and Grant as well as Johnson and Cloonan (2009), the positive function of music which dominates music research can be highlighted in the many ‘music as healer, music as refuge’ sayings that continue to do the proverbial rounds both online and off. As music and media scholar Steve Goodman asserts in Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect and the Ecology of Fear, music has the innate ‘seductive power to caress the skin, to immerse, to sooth, beckon, and heal, to modulate brain waves and massage the release of certain hormones within the body’ (2010: 5). Although largely overlooked in academia during the 20th century, for reasons discussed later, this research topic has been increasingly studied by an array of scholars in recent years, including publications such as John Morgan O’Connell and Salwa El-Shawan Castelo-Branco’s ethnomusicological collection Music and Conflict (2010), and Susan Fast and Kip Pegley’s focus on the paradox of music violence in the Music, Politics, and Violence (2012) edited volume.

Conceiving of music as a positive and therapeutic force, both in popular and academic discourse, has perhaps meant that music’s ‘long and equally well-founded

7 I point towards such quotes as Henry David Thoreau’s journal entry: ‘When I hear music I fear no danger, I am invulnerable, I see no foe. I am related to the earliest times and to the latest’ (1857), to Friedrich Nietzsche’s well cited avowal that ‘Without music, life would be a mistake’ (1889) to more recent quotes such as Maya Angelou ‘Music was my refuge. I could crawl into the space between the notes and curl my back to loneliness.’ (1997: 3). The internet seems persistently rife with the circulation and recirculation of such bite-sized quotations, collecting and archiving them in personal blogs (see Cybermidi Music and Midi Blog’s ‘Top 50 Music Quotations.’ (Retrieved December 3, 2013 from: http://www.cybermidi.com/news/index.php/blog/music/top-50-music-quotations) and commercial franchises alike (see GoodReads ‘Quotes about Music.’ Retrieved December 3, 2013 from: http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/music).
association with war, punishment and humiliation across diverse historical periods and cultural and geographical regions’ have been comparatively overlooked (Papaeti and Grant 2013: 1). Traditional musicology has had a (perhaps implicit and ideological) function of legitimising, valorising and canonising certain types of music, particularly those that fall into western art traditions. An implicit part of this function has been that certain types of music are deemed transcendentally uplifting, valuable, and enriching. Of course the consequence of this has occurred in the fields of critical musicology and popular music studies, which in contrast has had an anti-canonising (or in some cases at least, attempted to conceive of a counter-canonising) tendency, that attempts to broaden the musicians deemed worthy of scholarly attention. Yet the result of this, particularly in the popular music studies formative years, is that some popular music studies has tended to be overly (or overtly) celebratory.

With a number of media reports on music and violence in the post-9/11 years, as well as more frequent instances of cinematic and televisual representations of music’s use as a form of violence and torture, we are faced with such mounting questions as: ‘Can music be considered a form of torture? Is it music ‘in itself’ or the high volume and repetition that transforms it into torture or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment or punishment? Can the use of music in detention be beneficial for the prisoners, or is it always aligned with an intention to subdue, break, and often ridicule them?’ (Papaeti and Grant 2013: 1). We must reconceptualise music not only as a form of self-expression or socio-culture, but rather, we must reconcile music as a weapon, one that can assert power, inflict violence, trauma, and cultural imperialism. Musicological research has recently begun to address such questions, first and foremost by acknowledging that music is not simply a source for power, but power in

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8 The rise in mainstream media’s reporting cases of music and torture in the post-millennial era is attributed, in part, to the publicly disclosed US military use of music as an interrogation technique in internment camps in President George W. Bush’s ‘War on Terror’.
and of itself. Ending this research in music and contemporary warfare is US musicologist Suzanne Cusick, who combines ethnography, fieldwork and critical theory to provide harrowing but nonetheless critical examples of the US’ use of music as ‘no touch torture’ and cultural warfare. Cusick’s work highlights how Western popular music is intentionally used to humiliate detainees from different cultural backgrounds, and in doing so it not only degrades the human being and the cultural value of the music in question, but more significantly, serves as a component of US symbolic claim to global sovereignty (Cusick 2006: 10). Arguing that although the general premise is that sound can damage human beings, but usually without killing us, Cusick reiterates that the twofold use of music torture is as follows:

What differentiates the uses of sound or music on the battlefield and the uses of sound or music in the interrogation room is the claimed site of the damage. Theorists of battlefield use emphasise sound’s bodily effects, while theorists of the interrogation room focus on the capacity of sound and music to destroy subjectivity (2006: 5).

The dual use of music, both on the battlefield and inside the interrogation room, speaks to different functions, yet ultimately yields the same result – a torture that is embodied and thus destroys agency. Cusick’s work on music torture sparked vigorous debates on ethics, morals, and responsibility within US musicology, and ultimately led to the boards of the American Musicological Society, the Society for American Music and the Society for Ethnomusicology Contemporary passing a joint resolution in March 2008 condemning the use of music for physical or psychological torture.

There remains no clear, unambiguous legal framework regarding the use of music in

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places of detention, and generally, the public’s response to findings of music’s use against detainees in US detention camps remains at best trivial.\footnote{Upon the discovery that Barney the Purple Dinosaur’s ‘I Love You’ theme song was being used to torture Iraqi inmates, media frenzy ensued, largely deriding any notion that the use of music, especially a children’s nursery song, could be understood as a form of torture. For more details of the media’s response to music torture, see Suzanne Cusick (2006: 155) and Johnson and Cloonan (2009: 161-194).}

**Prison, Power and Spectacular Entertainment**

To understand the overwhelmingly favourable reception of the CPDRC performances on YouTube is, on the one hand, to address the age-old assumptions on music’s assumed positive function. On the other hand, it simultaneously calls for an investigation into the (imagined) Philippines that is clearly and eagerly constructed in the videos through a postcolonial project. This thesis argues that colonial stereotypes of the Filipino race as inferior, child-like, feminised, have extended from the American imperial operations at the turn of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. In part, it is this logic, born of colonialism, racism and gender discrimination, that allowed for CPDRC’s YouTube performances to be viewed uncritically, read almost exclusively as entertainment, and celebrated internationally.

This study addresses contemporary prison culture through the lens of surveillance, governmentality theory and the subject. In this thesis, government – primarily in relation to the Cebu administration and thereby by extension, the Philippine government – is used in a broad sense to refer to the ‘conduct of conduct’ (Foucault 1991: 220-221) and pertains not only to the state but also to a range of institutions, actions and forms of knowledge. Governmentality, then, concerns how we think about governing others and ourselves in a variety of contexts (Dean 1999: 209). Related to Foucault’s idea of governmentality, and central to this thesis, are the ways in which people are constituted as subjects – those inmates who are ‘compelled’
to dance for us in their prison yard, but also the YouTube audiences who spend hundreds of hours scrolling and clicking through video after video on YouTube. The term ‘subject’ has, in a Foucauldian sense, dual meaning: ‘subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge’ (Foucault 1982: 212). Interpreting Foucault, Judith Butler sees subjection as literally meaning the *making* of a subject:

> the principle of regulation according to which a subject is formulated or produced. Such subjection is a kind of power that not only unilaterally *acts on* a given individual as a form of domination, but also *activates* or forms the subject. Hence, subjection is neither simply the domination of a subject nor its production, but designates a certain kind of restriction *in* production, a restriction without which the production of the subject cannot take place, a restriction through which that production takes place (1997: 84).

Through its operations on subjectivity, power works in subtle ways in modern liberal democracy. Neoliberal discourse, through which the Philippine state governs, is promoted as ‘the mechanism for global trade and investment supposed for all nations to prosper and develop fairly and equitably’ (Shah 2010). The main points of neoliberalism also includes deregulation, privatisation of public enterprises, reducing public expenditure for social services by the government, and the change in perceptions of public and community good, to individualism and responsibility of the individual, while fundamentally remaining concerned with the rule of the market. In this thesis, I am particularly concerned with how people are constituted in such contemporary liberal democracies. I draw on the ‘pastoral power’ of the Philippine state in overseeing – and supporting the continuation of – the CPDRC music and dance programme. The pastoral power vested in (Christian) churches and related subsidiaries, is often linked to modernity, since they appeared more reciprocal than monarchies in their response to the communities and individual quests for personal salvation. We see the state, Foucault argues, positioned as ‘a modern matrix of
individualisation or a new form of pastoral power’ (1982: 783). As I later argue, in CPDRC, power has shifted to the Philippine state, on the one hand, while on the other the new pastoral power lies in the hands of the viewing public.

**Methodology**

This thesis comprehends the CPDRC phenomenon by studying the many facets that resulted in the international popularity of their video and ultimately the CPDRC’s effect on government policy. I aim to provide an interdisciplinary, holistic approach demonstrating the intimately interconnected conventions of (popular) music as rehabilitation, nation, and postcolonial culture. Accordingly, this thesis draws from the perspectives of textual and contextual analysis, new media studies, musicology, and cultural history. My research, therefore, differs to many other YouTube, DIY music videos, music and cultural history projects as I utilise both a textual and contextual approach to examine the aesthetic, cultural, ideological, and industrial implications of this powerful, independently produced YouTube video. By extension, I argue that not only do the implications of this video bear relevance to a great deal of YouTube videos, but more specifically, the ramifications are especially pertinent to our engagement with contemporary popular music practice, new digital media, and online participatory culture.

First and foremost, this thesis reads CPDRC’s *Thriller* as a performance, and thus I approach the YouTube video, and discussion of their live dance shows, as a performance text. Performance theorist Richard Schechner, whilst acknowledging that all human activity could potentially be considered as ‘performance,’ asserts that ‘to perform’ means different things depending on their contexts:

> In business, sports, and sex, ‘to perform’ is to do something up to a standard – to succeed, to excel. In the arts, ‘to perform’ is to put on a show, a play, a
dance, a concert. In everyday life, ‘to perform’ is to show off, to go to extremes, to underline an action for those who are watching (2006: 22).

Indeed, to use Schechner’s framework, CPDRC’s Thriller certainly operates as a performance text within the bounds of his description. The inmates perform, or ‘musick,’ to borrow Christopher Small’s terminology (1998: 9)\(^{11}\) – through dance, acting, clapping, and singing along\(^{12}\) – to a well-known pop composition. Although the original video captured a rehearsal, its capture on camera, and subsequent upload onto YouTube has led to the additional frame of putting on a show, however unfinished it may originally have been. To perform, then, is to convey something – a form of communication between two entities. For anthropologist Richard Bauman, performance suggests ‘an aesthetically marked and heightened mode of communication, framed in a special way and put on display for an audience’ (1992: 41). Through a close reading of CPDRC’s Thriller, this thesis aims to strike a balance between the embodied performance and the study of the musical ‘work.’ Michael Jackson’s Thriller has today become a part of YouTube’s archival texts, an interpretive construct. Indeed, as the following research demonstrates, Thriller’s multiple interpretations, covers and remediations demonstrate that while history has priviledged text over performance, ultimatley texts do not exhaust the work’s identity (Cook 2003: 207). In the age of vast and widely-accessible digital archives, the possibilities of texts and performances are constantly being renegotiated, and old works can be renewed, recirculated, and reimagined time and time again.

\(^{11}\) Small designated the verb ‘musicking’ to broadly refer to all forms of active, musical participation: the taking part ‘in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing’ (1998: 9). For Small, music’s primary, everyday meanings were based on building social, communicative relationships.

\(^{12}\) It should be noted here that the inmates who appear to be visibly ‘singing along’, may be silently mouthing the words, and not singing. One of the key features of this YouTube video, as I will later demonstrate, is the fact that Jackson’s soundtrack serves to cloak the inmates’ individual utterances, silencing them.
Troubling Statistics: A Note on Online Data

As this thesis is, in part, an investigation of YouTube and popular music practice, on occasion it required the use of figures collected by YouTube or by various music institutions that might often be at best, somewhat biased. The inclusion of such statistics is not without its methodological problems. However such statistics reproduced in this thesis are constructive, when understood with a certain critical awareness, as providing a starting point with illustrative purposes – as part of a wider discourse. For example, Appendix II lists every YouTube video of the ‘Dancing Inmates’ released from CPDRC security officer and warden Byron F. Garcia, through his own personal YouTube channel. Although this list provides a complete survey of each original videos Garcia recorded and uploaded, it represents only one platform that presents the CPDRC’s work. Thus it does not represent the full range of CPDRC’s output, nor add the many CPDRC videos that have been re-posted across the Internet within YouTube and on other video-sharing hosts such as Metacafe, Dailymotion, Facebook, Instagram, Vimeo and Youku.

Throughout my thesis, viewcounts, chart sales, and other statistical data are reproduced regarding key music and video works, as it was necessary to ascertain the YouTube view count of the CPDRC’s Thriller video that forms the heart of this study. For the sake of clarity, I report the number of views on the original posting of CPDRC Thriller – Byron F. Garcia’s uploaded video only – knowingly leaving aside the hundreds, and potentially thousands of digitally replicated as well as alternative,

13 The list provides a complete survey of Garcia’s YouTube CPDRC videos as of March 2011 (some videos listed have been removed since then – either by Garcia, for unknown reasons, or by YouTube for copyright infringement). Garcia’s employment at CPDRC was terminated (or his contract was not renewed) mid-2010, and for a while after his departure, live performances were forbidden by Cebu Governor Garcia according to media sources, which accounts for the lack of CPDRC videos from Byron Garcia’s YouTube account post 2011. However the routines soon recommenced under new CDPRC administration, and videos were once again posted online via various other channels, including the ‘CPDRC Dancing Inmates’ channel (Activated August 2010. Retreived from: https://www.youtube.com/user/cpdrc1, followed by the ‘CPDRC Dancing Inmates’ channel (Activated in January 2012. Retreived from: www.youtube.com/user/CPDRCDANCINGINMATES8)
remixed, or more recent live versions of CPDRC’s *Thriller* available on YouTube. For example, a search in YouTube for ‘cpdrc thriller’ produces about 6,170 video results on June 12, 2014. The top results include the ‘“Thriller” (original upload)’ video by Byron F. Garcia, followed by various versions of CPDRC’s *Thriller* performances taken by fans, visitors to the facility, and/or prison officials in 2009, 2008 and 2011. Additional results include CPDRC’s *Thriller* in a YouTube-curated video mix that includes such other famous viral videos as the ‘Evolution of Dance’ video, ‘Charlie bit my finger’, and ‘JK Wedding Entrance Dance (See Figure 1.1).
Apart from the impossibility of collating every single mirrored and remixed version of CPDRC’s *Thriller* and monitoring their fluctuating status, such a task is not necessary to my central thesis – but nonetheless important in understanding the implications of studying such complex, multifaceted texts. One must acknowledge the sheer multitude of replicas and remediations that YouTube’s circulation affords, and put in place necessary limitations on the scope of approaching any study of YouTube.

**Thesis Structure and Approach**

The CPDRC’s musical repertoire extends across many genres of music that I will discuss, but my primary focus is on an investigation of their inaugural 2007 video performance of Michael Jackson’s ‘Thriller’, for numerous reasons, not least because it was their ‘breakthrough’ video that led to their international fame. I have structured my thesis around five key chapters, plus an introduction and coda. I precede each chapter with a reflexive interlude, interwoven in between each chapter as a gesture towards *katakata*: the Filipino art of didadic storytelling. 14 Collectively, the Interludes detail assorted thematic narratives, from both external and internal perspectives, drawing explicit attention to specific moments of import that serve as linchpins to discussions in the subsequent chapters. Each Interlude has a practical function in describing events in a manner that is not possible in the chapters themselves, and moreover, they serve as a shared starting point for the reader.

This introduction established the key concepts on which my thesis is based. I give a brief overview on music, violence and power in Western academia, providing a brief genealogy of the idea in order to denaturalise Western constructs of it, to show the evolution of these ideas on an international stage, and to foreground theories of

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14 I am grateful to Ricardo D. Trimillos for pointing me towards *katakata*. See *Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP) Encyclopaedia of Philippine Art*, Volumes 1, 2, 5, 7, and 9 (1994).
power and violence, which I will refer to throughout this thesis. At times and in places, I rely as much on examples drawn from audiovisual arts and moving-image culture as well as from music, and include a number of illustrations and hyperlinks to a variety of media sites (most of which are collected on the companion website, see xii). Together with this thesis, these references highlight the blurred boundaries between music and new media as well as the interdisciplinary, intertextual nature of this research. There remains a tendency in audiovisual studies to consider audiovisual media made by professional bodies and/or works supported through implicit or explicit patronage (certain films, music videos, videogames, and apps), while studies in popular music often continue to reflect the hegemony of Anglo-American rock and pop at the expense of music practices from and of other people and other places. My case study reveals a kind of grey area that exists, somewhere between popular music studies, ethnomusicology and performance studies, in dealing specifically with the performances of detained individuals in the Cebu detention facility located in the Philippines. Though my initial discovery of this YouTube video was purely accidental, my decision to focus on this text – on the music and dance practice of detained individuals in a non-Western prison – is nothing but deliberate, and perhaps, provocative. Cebu, the site of my focus, lies not in the West but in the (Far) East.\(^\text{15}\) Furthermore, the musical, and mediated lives of prisoners – particularly those in non-Western countries – remain for the most part, underrepresented in scholarship.

I have organised the major theoretical issues the video evokes into the following five chapters. Chapter One: ‘Seeing Sound: Situating YouTube in Popular Music Studies’ introduces the post-millennial, popular music landscape with a focus on the rise in accessibility and affordability in Internet technologies. Understanding

\(^{15}\) Yet, as I go on to demonstrate, in many clear and unclear ways Cebu and the Philippines retain close ties with Western – and in particular, American, popular culture.
CPDRC’s *Thriller* as a ‘viral’ video requires some explanation, and here I outline the origins of such biological metaphors in media parlance. I offer a historical survey of YouTube, with a focus on its abundant musicality. I argue that this video can be considered an extension of music-video practice, albeit with notable differences in this new, digitised form. Thus I situate this case study among the growing body of music and new media scholarship, before narrowing to view the role of music in detention in the subsequent chapter.

Chapter Two: ‘Performing Postcolonialism: Popular Music and Dancing in the Philippines’ forms the heart of my study, contextualising the CPDRC performances as works made by, in and from the Philippines and more specifically, Cebu. Divided into two sections, the first examines concepts of nation, space and place, and in particular, I scrutinise the stereotypical Philippine connection to music and dance. The second section provides a detailed overview of the origins of the CPDRC dance programme, from its inception, to human rights abuse allegations, and I introduce the key players involved in organising the remarkable, regular performances. I show how essentialist tropes of Filipina/os are utilised globally, which enables such occurrences as the CPDRC performances to appear almost normative, and draw on tropes of fantasy and imagination to account for the prison’s perceived success. Following on from this, Chapter Three: ‘Behind Bars: Mediating Music and Dance in a Detention Centre’ begins with a discussion on the increasingly pervasive, mediated relationship between music and prison culture. It opens with a discussion of the insidious use of music in prisons and places of detention, and outlines possible reasons for the recent increase in academic (and popular) discourse surrounding music and/in detention. It is important to examine the CPDRC performances in relation to a wider conversation on music in detention, music, dance and discipline, and an increasing move towards a
culture of (digital) thanatourism (or dark tourism). I suggest that despite its digital residence, CPDRC’s Thriller exemplifies historic tropes of discipline and punishment. I demonstrate that it can be read as a return to the medieval spectacle of punishment, blatantly connected to the ideology of panopticonism. Noting the complex, distinctive features of how the Philippine programme operates, this chapter concludes with a discussion of the CPDRC’s lasting legacy, embodied through the work of the ‘Ambassadors of Goodwill’ programme, an off-Broadway musical, and the recent release of a Filipino ‘inspired by true events’ action film.

The subsequent chapter, ‘Thrilling: Thriller as Transmedia Text,’ builds from the preceding intertextual discussion, and transitions to an examination of CPDRC’s musical choices: how and why Thriller was their ‘breakthrough’ video, and how it connects to the YouTube (sub)genre of dance videos. I highlight the explicit role Michael Jackson’s Thriller – both the song and music video – plays in disseminating CPDRC’s performances on a global scale, through a discussion of Michael Jackson – the artist, and the phenomenon. I bring to the fore the extent to which Jackson’s legacy has impacted upon popular music and can be seen across the world, addressing how various aspects of Thriller have become adopted as an international lingua franca for the disenfranchised, how it is incorporated into a wide range of both public and private occasions – from weddings and high-school proms to large-scale protests – across disparate communities and networks. I also highlight that through selecting Thriller as a soundtrack for their 2007 video, CPDRC was in many respects, almost guaranteed to receive international attention.

The final chapter, Chapter Five: ‘Towards an Audiovisual Future: YouTube, Viral Media and Music Video’s “Second Aesthetic,”’ brings together a number of themes from the previous chapters and explores these through the context of
Dangerous Mediations

contemporary YouTube mediations. Much has changed in the digital landscape since this video was released in 2007, and indeed, since I began my inquiry of it in 2009. This chapter reflects these changes and how they have, and continue to impact the reception of *Thriller*. Online social networking, photo-uploading, and video-sharing have become ubiquitous by 2014; they are part of mass culture in near most countries and societies today, and so I reveal the lessons *Thriller* remediations can teach us in the post-digital age of uncertainty. A detailed examination of how YouTube comments create a sense of community, and connectedness is also provided in this chapter. Tracing the seductive power, and pleasure garnered through experiencing YouTube’s CPDRC’s *Thriller* video, this chapter investigates a possible post-digital music-video ‘second aesthetic,’ which I argue, is centred on themes of pleasure, nostalgia and postcoloniality. This chapter culminates with a coda that at once, reverts our attention to the Philippines under American occupation, and subsequently shifts to the present, with some concluding considerations.

To surmise then, this thesis offers several things under the scope of contemporary music scholarship. Through a textual and contextual analysis of CPDRC’s *Thriller*, I demonstrate that music’s use in contemporary detention is plural, varying across locations and in meaning, as well as subject to almost the same levels of mediation as any other aspect of modern life. I explore the vastly underexplored relationship between music and YouTube, which in the age of ubiquitous media is fundamental to all aspects of contemporary music practice – its appreciation, construction, collection, and dissemination. Lastly, by analysing CPDRC’s *Thriller* I draw attention to the many performers whose work is widely overlooked, despite the fact that such performers – the prisoner, the amateur, the Filipino, the subaltern – create real, tangible work that is voraciously consumed, but often not ‘valued’, in our
‘audiovisual swirl’ (Vernallis 2013). Such performers are frequently written out of (popular) music history, yet as my thesis demonstrates, they constitute an active – and actively contested, population of popular performers. Music is central to these works, and so it is with music that this thesis begins.
INTERLUDE I: ENTRANCE

Figure 1.2. Arm in arm, the leading protagonists skip along the concrete yard in byronfgarcia’s ‘‘Thriller’’ (original upload).’ YouTube, July 17 2007. (Hereafter, CPDRC’s Thriller)

Framed by beguiling, jumpy, hyperlinked images with intriguing titles, with the click of a play button ‘‘Thriller’’ (original upload)16 video begins with the sound of a repeated synthesised groove synched to the image of a couple walking gaily, arm-in-arm, across grey concrete slabs (Figure 1.2). Filmed from behind and high above the couple’s forward gait, the camera’s eye maintains its high position throughout, establishing its authoritarian gaze. We cannot see the couple’s faces. Instead, we watch them move forwards with a discernible synchronised spring in their step – left together, right together, arms swinging in time to the amplified, synthesized groove.

The figure on the right, sporting a dark-haired crew cut and average frame, wears a bright orange jumpsuit emblazoned with a large letter ‘P’ on the back of his t-shirt

16 Hereafter byronfgarcia’s YouTube video ‘‘Thriller’’ (original upload)’ will be referred to as CPDRC’s Thriller. In general, subsequent discussions of ‘Thriller’ refer to Michael Jackson’s single, while Thriller denotes either the album and/or the the short film.
and left trouser leg. In contrast, the feminine figure on the left wears a brown-haired ponytail, against tanned, bare shoulders in a baby pink low-back, halter-top paired with light-blue jeans and high-heeled shoes. From the beginning we know that the couple are not alone in their concrete jungle (Figure 1.3). Another dark-haired crew-cut head with orange jumpsuit shoulders briefly edges into the opening frame, but quickly the camera pulls away, preferring instead to focus, for now, on the couple as they move in unison, following their movements from above, markedly distant and apart. Three seconds into the video, and the opening credits pronounce ‘CPDRC inmates practice… Thriller,’ and we see the couple continue their forward trajectory, skipping along what is now understood to be a prison yard.

![Figure 1.3. Opening credits at 0.03 and 0.18 seconds respectively in CPDRC’s Thriller.](image)

Alongside the opening title credits, the opening ten seconds sufficiently signal the video as a remixed, remediated version of Michael Jackson’s short-film Thriller through its audiovisual markers alone.\(^\text{17}\) Framed by my old, 13-inch laptop computer-screen, the video itself takes up just over a quarter of this space – the rest jumps to life with recommended videos and seemingly endless hyperlink options. The multifaceted visual YouTube aesthetics are also echoed aurally: the

\(^{17}\) The synthesised groove is followed by Price’s sprechgesang and not the first verse of the song, thus the sequence of Price’s narration immediately alerts an informed listener that this is the soundtrack of Thriller the short film, as opposed to the album version of ‘Thriller.’ (See Chapter Four for further details on the different versions of Thriller.)
soundtrack’s tinny sound is a complex reconstruction of several audio factors. The initial, CPDRC performance consisted of playing Thriller across the prison’s amplifiers – speakers primarily tasked with conveying verbal instructions and not necessarily musical recordings. These speakers are projected across the prison’s open-air yard, losing much of the low-end bass in the process. Add in environmental sounds (neighbourhood traffic, etc.), and the fact that the video is a recording of a lower-quality sound that is re-recorded on a low-quality camera microphone means the resulting audio parameter in CPDRC’s YouTube video is significantly altered from Jackson’s Thriller. Thus in addition to the obvious shift in CPDRC Thriller’s visual aesthetics when compared to the original, its’ audio undergoes similarly drastic levels of remediation in CPDRC, so that by the time it reaches our variable ears – through laptop speakers, headphones, surround sound or other – it is already limited to mid- and higher-range frequencies. As such, although we recognise the soundtrack as Michael Jackson’s Thriller, it is changed, and in its remediation it sounds very different.

To those who know Thriller, the leading couple evidently enact the roles of Michael Jackson and his on-screen girlfriend, performed by Ola Ray. The prison couple start their performance mirroring Thriller’s graveyard sequence, but in the place of filmic props, theatrical sets and scenery, they walk past an illusory burial ground, realised through a real-life walk through a prop-less prison yard. The distinct synthesised, rhythmic loop, directly lifted from 7.23 minutes into the original Thriller short-film soundtrack, segues into Vincent Price’s infamous sprechgesung as Price proclaims, ‘The foulest stench is in the air, the funk of forty thousand years…’ As he narrates, the camera pans outwards, revealing for the first time, at least twenty bodies in identical orange prison-suits. The men, with short-orange sleeves against their
brown skin, move in from the periphery, edging toward the couple with stuttered movements, some arms outstretched in the lingua franca zombie pose, some inching forward with limping legwork and bodies moving forward surreptitiously, a soulless army of the living dead. Meanwhile, the carefree leading couple skip past the orange crowd, seemingly oblivious, her right arm linked with his left; their respective empty arms swing to their upbeat gait.

A horde of at least fifty orange-suited bodies appear, approaching from a dark distance. Some moving singularly, some in uneven clusters as Price melodiously decrees, ‘grizzly ghouls from every tomb are closing in to seal your doom.’ The camera zooms in on individual bodies, faces forward. These male, dark-brown bodies are noticeably branded; bright, white ‘CPDRC inmates’ lettering decorates the front of their orange shirts, and a large, white ‘P’ for preso (prisoner) is emblazoned on their backs and legs. As the camera pans across further we momentarily see two green rooftops framing the periphery of what appears to be a yard, one with a white basketball net attached to it, and as it zooms outwards hundreds more orange-suited bodies are revealed. The camera pans right, returning to our leading couple who, no longer skipping gaily, are slowly surrounded by a plague of orange-suited zombie-humans. Just before Thriller’s soundtrack of ghoulish, guttural groans returns, over the repeated synthesized bass groove Price recites the lyrics in a chilling tone, fluctuating between a sing-song and gravelly timbre.

‘And though you fight to stay alive, your body starts to shiver.

For no mere mortal can resist,’

Steadily, Price slowly rolls the ‘thr’, dramatically accenting the final word:

‘The evil of the Thriller.’
CHAPTER ONE
SEEING SOUND: SITUATING YOUTUBE IN POPULAR MUSIC STUDIES

Music has always been mediated. Intrinsically, music is based on an affiliation between subjects and objects, and these immaterial and material subjects and objects often ‘collide and intermingle’ (Born 2005: 7). Take, for example, the voice in music’s modern era. The voice does not sing alone; it is accompanied by, implanted in and mediated by technologies, while paradoxically just as attains the status of a unique expressive carrier, so is it accompanied by a plethora of machinery that reveal that carrier to be radically hybridised (Prior 2013). At home or on a train, listening to Thriller through an mp3 player or via YouTube, one is never listening to Michael Jackson’s voice alone, nor is one simply watching Jackson sing and dance across our screens. In these instances, sonic pleasure and audiovisual enjoyment can be triggered for a host of obvious reasons. The technologised machine, and non-human artifice afforded by technology are often the cause of our pleasure as much as the grain of Jackson’s non-verbalised vocalisations. Thus while one derives much pleasure from music ‘itself,’ one simultaneously enjoys the various technologies and practices associated with music’s mediation.

Creating music through face-to-face interaction is filled with as many cultural inflections as mediated and digitally mediated musical communication,18 yet we often fail to see the framed nature of such face-to-face relationships and social interactions precisely because these frames work so effectively, as Erving Goffman repeatedly asserted (1959; 1975). Historically the power to reproduce sound was once the reserve of...
of the gods, as Jacques Attali (1985: 87) noted, however today, with billions of smartphones now in use, such power now belongs to the majority of humanity (Sterne 2012: 1). Advancing technology affords billions of the world’s population access to experience music, thus the mediation of music would appear to be an ever more pertinent subject to study. Yet new media practices are not necessarily new mediations ‘compared to how we used to be,’ as Miller and Sinanan observe (2012: 2). More crucially, what is music mediation? And how has our understanding of mediation shifted with advancing technological developments?

Mediation can be understood in several ways: as a connecting link between forms, and/or as an intervention, reconciliation or negotiation. Music similarly encompasses a variety of social structures, from producing its own varied social relations, to inflecting existing social relations, while still remaining bound up in wider institutional forces that effect music’s production and reproduction (Born 2005: 7). Indeed theories of mediation have thus been crucial in the development of music studies, from critical musicology to the cultural study of music (Born 2005: 11). This chapter considers both aspects of music mediation – how music acts as a connecting link between forms and as an intervention, reconciliation or negotiation – and complicates the historical narratives surrounding popular music’s technological circulation, online mediation, and increasing visualisation.

Central to music’s contemporary mediation is the increasing proliferation of screen media. After Vertov’s ground-breaking film *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929), Lev Manovich argues that avant-garde film acts as a precursor to the language of new media. The (computer) screen, Manovich theorises, becomes a wider metaphor for the fundamental element of modern interface, and thus Manovich reads
post-millennial screen culture as ‘over-taking the printed word’ (2001: 86). He explains:

A hundred years after cinema’s birth, cinematic ways of seeing the world, of structuring time, of narrating a story, of linking one experience to the next, have become the basic means by which computer users access and interact with all cultural data. In this respect, the computer fulfils the promise of cinema as a visual Esperanto – a goal that preoccupied many film artists and critics in the 1920s, from Griffith to Vertov. Indeed, today millions of computer users communicate with each other through the same computer interface. And in contrast to cinema, where most ‘users’ are able to ‘understand’ cinematic language but not ‘speak’ it (i.e. make films), all computer users can ‘speak’ the language of the interface. They are active users of the interface, employing it to perform many tasks: send e-mail, organise files, run various applications, and so on (Manovich 2001: xv).

The significance of the ‘interface’ lies in the fact that it is not simply a physical nor a digital technology. Rather it functions as, what Manovich terms, a ‘cultural interface,’ a carrier of cultural messages that users interact with across various media types (2001: 64). Computers have evolved from ‘work’ machines to ‘universal media machines’ and as such bridge the gap between users and cultural data, yet these universal media machines continue to refer and relate to older media and cultural traditions – not least through skeuomorphic design19 (see Manovich 2001: 67). Indeed while Manovich pays close attention to how concepts of the screen influence user experiences of viewing, telling us that a key proponent of new media lies in its existence in different, and potentially infinite versions (2001: 36), he fails to address the concept of scale within these infinite versions.

As contemporary critics have argued, digital media has shifted the scale and categorisation of screen culture, however futile, volatile and transient such classifications may seem since screens have migrated from their once native residences in public cinemas and domestic living rooms (see Simon 2011). In addition

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19 Early computer interfaces and web design often attempt to manipulate their two-dimensional surfaces to appear three-dimensional through skeuomorphism, which is still prevalent in many computer interfaces; e.g. web pages appearing as magazine pages; computer word processors designed to look like a notepad; computer desktop material stored in office-like ‘files’ and ‘folders.’
to traditional, domestic screen locations, Manovich’s computer screens, and mobile, small screens on iPhones and personal games consoles, I invoke Jan Simon’s inclusive conceptualisation of the screen and screen media here, which considers a multitude of screen manifestations including ‘urban screens’ such as billboards that adorn skylines and streets, ‘skinned walls’ or buildings with video walls in, wide-screen televisions and digital signage spread across public spaces and public transport (Simons 2008: 101-2). For Simons, all screens—regardless of their size or technology—present specific concerns, but most crucially, display a hierarchy of content that is deemed worthy of attention and content that is not.  

This chapter charts music’s contemporary mediation, focussing on its increasing visualisation and subsequent digital spreadibility, to contextualise the conditions surrounding the production of a YouTube work such as CPDRC’s Thriller. Central to this chapter’s development is the rise of popular music through video, a format that became commercially available in the Western world from the late 1960s, which enabled novel forms of audiovisuality; composers were not only able to visualise their music and artists to sound their images, but for the first time such audiovisual actions could be recorded and transfixed onto a technologised medium that could be circulated privately and publicly, far and wide (Rogers 2013). Technological developments from this point on have served to further imbue the audio and the visual to the point that today, YouTube has become the world’s number one streaming service, of which music accounts for a significant proportion. Listening to music via YouTube, though, is not without complexities. It can often be a convoluted, frustrating, and even unpleasant aural activity, as users must overcome pop-up, rollout advertisements, and jumpy navigation panels. Audiophiles find that YouTube’s

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20 Recent discussions on mediation, attention, and ubiquitous sounds include Kassabian’s Ubiquitous Listening: Affect, Attention, and Distributed Subjectivity (2013) and Quiñones, Kassabian and Boschi’s Ubiquitous Musics: The Everyday Sounds That We Don’t Always Notice (2013).
sound is habitually highly compressed, thereby affecting pleasure and enjoyment of listening to music via YouTube’s online platform. This chapter aims to understand the idiom ‘YouTube videos’ in all its polysemy, and offers insights into YouTube’s music video reception through a case study of YouTube user comments left underneath CPDRC’s *Thriller*. Lastly, this chapter calls for awareness to YouTube’s frequent musical intermingling, which remains, for the most part, overlooked across academia.

Before going further, attention must be drawn to the historically unique, post-millennial climate that enabled works such as CPDRC’s *Thriller* video to surface in the first place. Over the past decade, media communications systems have advanced and possess perceptible attributes, with profound affect on new media content. As digital media scholar Aram Sinnreich observes in his study of configurable culture, there are key features of new media, which he describes as instantaneous, global, multi-sensory, archival, transmissible, permutable, editable, networked, interoperable, customizable, and hackable (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Instantaneous</strong></th>
<th>Electronic and digital media transmit information at light speed.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Global</strong></td>
<td>Although there are still countless individuals, communities and even regions of the globe with limited or no access to telephones, let alone the Internet, the number and geographic span of those that are connected is greater than at any point in history.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Multi-sensory</strong></td>
<td>Standard media technology delivers video, spatialised audio, and text. Experimental technology also provides olfactory and kinesthetic/haptic information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Archival</strong></td>
<td>Older media elements may be stored and retrieved at virtually zero incremental cost or effort.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transmissible</strong></td>
<td>Media elements may easily be transmitted between two individuals, or multicast from one individual to many. Greater distances no longer introduce significant noise into signals, nor do they represent significant cost increases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Permutable</strong></td>
<td>Media elements (such as songs, articles, photos, etc.) may be accessed in any order, or used in conjunction with any other media elements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Editable</strong></td>
<td>Media elements may be easily broken down into smaller components (such as samples or quotes), which in turn may be re-assembled, permuted, or</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
broken down further. The Planck-length equivalent for media elements (e.g. the smallest possible irreducible kernel) is often below the range of human perception, and becomes ever smaller as higher-definition encoding, storage, and rendering technologies continue to emerge.

**Networked.** The new communications infrastructure is networked, rather than hierarchical, permitting one-to-one, one-to-few, or one-to-many contact between any connected individuals. This infrastructure is crucial to what Castells calls ‘network society’ and ‘the space of flows.’

**Interoperable.** Unlike earlier technological eras, in which separate communicative functions were served by distinct technologies (e.g. electromagnetic broadcasts for TV/radio, film for video editing, copper wires for phone calls, etc.), all functions are now converging on the same digital platform. This means that, for the first time, all cultural participants can create, retrieve, edit and share audio, video, images and text using a single tool (e.g. an Internet-connected computer).

**Customizable.** Database software, menu-based interface design, and other technologies offer users of communication technology an unprecedented degree of customizability and control over the nature and presentation of the information they send and receive. However, these same technologies also allow third parties, such as marketing companies, an unprecedented ability to ‘target’ messages to individual recipients.

**Hackable.** Every technology is hackable (e.g. can be reverse-engineered, or used for purposes other than those it was created for), but new media technologies, by virtue of being built on a common digital platform, require fewer skills and tools to be hacked. This fact is further compounded by the networked communications infrastructure, allowing hacks (many of them malicious, such as trojans, worms, and viruses) to travel autonomously throughout the network.

**Table 1. Sinnreich’s eleven key features of new media (2007: 135-7)**

Of Sinnreich’s key features of new media, it remains crucial to consider how such new media technologies have resulted in the existence of YouTube videos such as CPDRC’s *Thriller*, as they feature various degrees of the instantaneous, the global, the archival, the transmissible, the permutable, the editable, the networked, and the interoperable.

The relationship between music and recorded moving image is historically intertwined, and has served as the basis for popular music and music video literature (see Goodwin 1993; Frith et al 1993; Banks 1997; Vernallis 2004). From the turn of the 20th century, George Thomas’s combination of music and image on hand-coloured glass slides produced what is believed to be the first ‘illustrated song’ (1894), while
the first cinematic ‘talkies’ of the 1920s blended live music and film practice. Early proto-music video can trace its origins to the Busby Berkeley-style choreographed scenes from Hollywood film musicals such as *Top Hat*[^22] (dir. Mark Sandrich, 1935), Disney’s *Fantasia* (1940) and *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953). Music video can also locate a historical connection to early 20th century film and video art, particularly the work of surrealist filmmaker Luis Buñuel.[^23]

With more than a subtle hint of irony, The Buggles’ music video ‘Video Killed the Radio Star’ officially launched the world’s first music video cable television channel in America on August 1, 1981. A major breakthrough in music broadcasting and distribution, MTV defined a generation by offering popular music videos 24-hours a day, seven days a week (Denisoff 1988: 1). Initially targeting an age group of 12-34, MTV intended to appeal to a young demographic, with its bite-sized, fast-pace design.[^24] Although the origins and concept of music video pre-dates MTV by several decades,[^25] the dramatic rise of MTV in the 1980s and early 90s has led to the addition of moving image to music becoming ubiquitous in popular music practice.[^26] Alongside capitalists interests, MTV was created out of a desire to use short promotional films that would allow TV audiences to see a pseudo-performance of a song in the absence of a live appearance. Widely recognised as the ‘most pervasive and significant form of musical audiovisual text’ (Shuker 2008: 107), the

[^22]: Many contemporary music videos pay homage, consciously or subconsciously, to Fred Astaire’s famous choreography and dance sequence ‘Top Hat, White Tie and Tails’ from *Top Hat* (dir. Mark Sandrich, 1935), as the recent *Art of Pop Video* exhibition highlighted (FACT 2014).

[^23]: Buñuel’s surrealist style is most famously seen in his collaboration with Salvador Dali in the silent short film *Un Chien Andalou* (1929). Several scholars have pointed to this film, along with the work of the surrealists, as greatly influencing the art of contemporary music video (see Austerlitz 2007; Dacyger 2002; Richardson 2012; Rogers 2013).

[^24]: The music video channel, VH1, was launched in January 1985, aimed at an older viewer demographic.

[^25]: It is beyond the remit of this thesis to trace the a complete history of music video; for excellent texts on the history of music video, see Kaplan (1987), Goodwin (1992), Frith, Goodwin and Grossberg (1993), and Vernallis (2004).

[^26]: The relationship between music and moving image is, of course, not limited to popular music practice. On the use of video in a range of musical styles and genres, see Holly Roger’s *Sounding the Gallery: Video and the Rise of Art-Music* (2013).
music video experienced a decisive shift in development in 1983, when the 14-minute video for Michael Jackson’s ‘Thriller’ (dir. John Landis) became the first music video with a budget of US$500,000 (although it is often exaggerated to have cost over a million dollars).  

By the mid to late 1980s music videos flourished and became a reputable, and more crucially a profitable, enterprise. After Landis’s triumphant success with Michael Jackson, Hollywood directors ‘began to moonlight as videomakers, offering a touch of their sensibility to sympathetic artists,’ and as such ‘the ranks of its directors expanded and fashion photographers, filmmakers and artists began to take up the video’s reins’ (Austerlitz 2007: 40-1). Before long, Hollywood’s influence and impact led to a pattern of rapidly spiralling production costs as video makers sought to focus attention on their particular product in an increasingly congested market. As such music videos will forever be marked as those that were made before ‘Thriller’, and those videos that came after, such as Duran Duran’s ‘Wild Boys’ in 1986 which purportedly cost US$1.2 million, Michael Jackson’s ‘Bad’ (dir. Martin Scorsese 1987) costing US$2.2 million, and Madonna’s ‘Bedtime Story’ (dir. Mark Romanek 1995) costing US$5 million to produce. Indeed, music – and in particular popular music – was increasingly presented as imbued with the visual (see Holt 2011; Railton & Watson 2011). By the turn of the 20th century, most record labels curtailed such flamboyant spending on music video, citing various reasons from declining viewership to declining budgets due to music piracy. With the scale and scope of major patrons removed from the equation for all but the minority of international pop stars, music video transformed and subsequently relocated to various other sites, particularly with the advent of digital platforms. While music video has experienced

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27 The specifics and impact of Michael Jackson’s Thriller are discussed in depth in Chapter IV.
periods of fluctuating mainstream popularity over the past two decades – and notwithstanding MTV’s recorded decline in audience figures since the early 2000s – the demand for music video never truly disappeared; rather it migrated online.

Web 2.0, Participatory Culture, and the Age of the Amateur

Current understandings of Web 2.0 encompass a broad categorization representing a general shift towards user-generated content, participatory cultures, and open-sourcing as it moves towards interactive, decentralised and multi-media frameworks. Certain scholars have argued that a sociology of and in Web 2.0 is necessitated (see Beer & Burrows 2007). Advancing this argument further and in the case of a sociological approach to music studies, sociologist David Beer research on Web 2.0 music culture and practice suggests four key interrelated types of Web 2.0 application categories: Wikis, Folksonomies, Mashups, and Social Networking Sites (2008).

Wikis, taken from the Hawaiian term ‘wiki wiki’ meaning quick, is an application that draws together open input to form communal projects. A key example would be Wikipedia, the online ‘collective intelligence’ encyclopaedia comprised of the collaborative and collective efforts of many individuals. Beer classifies folksonomies as vast archives that function through systems of metadata (primarily through ‘tagging’ the media content with descriptive keywords, on sites such as YouTube and Flikr). Web 2.0 mashups, according to Beer, are appropriated from the popular music technique of combining two different materials to create something new. Social Networking Sites (SNS), Beer’s fourth category, are distinctive in their real-time interactive, transnational, mobile, networked, built-for-purpose for costless copying and sharing, with a clear commercial interest in maintaining the simulation of
community, while simultaneously providing new opportunities for fashioning performances of the self.

Countering the drive for a sociology of Web 2.0, social media scholar Christian Fuchs argues that what is primarily needed is not a phenomenology or empirical social research of Web 2.0; but instead a wider critical theoretical approach to the Internet and society is needed (2008). Fuchs posits that changing societal circumstances create situations in which new concepts need to be clarified and social problems need to be solved. In his theorisation of Internet socio-culture, he identifies three evolutionary stages in its development – Web 1.0, 2.0 and 3.0, each based on the idea of knowledge as a threefold dynamic process of cognition, communication, and co-operation (Fuchs 2010: 767; see also Hofkirchner 2002; Fuchs & Hirkirchner 2005). Fuchs’ three levels of Internet development each correspond with specific Internet features. The previous Web 1.0 can be remembered as a tool for cognition; our current Web 2.0 as a medium for human communication; and Web 3.0 is framed as a digital technologies network that will support human co-operation. Although not yet in existence, Web 3.0 ‘shines forth already in online co-operation systems’ (Fuchs 2010: 767). In short, stemming from intertextual cultural practices of old, Web 2.0 offers an extension to existing mass media, popular and participatory cultures of screen media, literary print traditions – those inherited from Web 1.0 and of course, those that originate from long before. Yet Web 2.0 phenomenon do offer communications that is transformative in terms of speed and scale. As such they are widely celebrated as a location for the articulation of individual and collective social power as they enhance the general public’s participation in media production and cultural expression as well as positively impacting and empowering individual interpersonal interactions, both socially and politically (Jarrett 2008). However such
celebrations are not without noticeable detractors who lament Web 2.0 as extolling an apparent democratization of society. One such critic Andrew Keen, writes in his book *Cult of the Amateur: How Blogs, Wikis, Social Networking, and the Digital World are Assaulting our Economy, Culture and Values* that democratization, despite its lofty idealization, is undermining truth, souring civic discourse, and belittling expertise, experience and talent (Keen 2007: 15).

What Web 2.0 offers is quick and superficial remarks in the place of considered, gradual judgement. Thus, Keen argues, democratisation threatens the very future of our cultural institutions.

Debates like Keen’s are worthy of consideration, particularly among the sheer noise of YouTube’s digital archive and interactive conversations as users simultaneously fight for clicks, subscriptions, comments and likes. However Web 2.0 platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram should not be readily dismissed nor relegated because of the action of the noisy crowd. Functioning as communication device, an ideology, a form of commodification and marketing strategy rather than a specific technological change, Web 2.0 represents ‘cumulative changes in the way Web pages are made and used’ (Fuchs 2010: 767; Wikipedia 2013).  

Web 2.0 is centred on participatory culture, collective intelligence, and neoliberal ideologies, and these sites offer new levels of social interaction, media consumption, online presentations of the self, and opportunities for the production of new texts, new cultures, and new communities, all of which reconfigure cultural production rather than eliminate previously held hierarchies (see boyd 2006; Jenkins 2006; 2008).

Participatory culture, understood here as a culture in which private persons do not act as consumers only but also as contributors or producers of content, is a key facet of Web 2.0’s use of collective intelligence. In Web 2.0, participatory culture

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28 I purposefully refer to Wikipedia here to define Web 2.0, for Wikipedia demonstrates one of Web 2.0 most popular inventions, and a leading example of online collective intelligence at work.
refers to Internet published media, defined by media scholar Henry Jenkins et al as a culture with

relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one’s creations, and some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices (Jenkins et al, 2006: 3).

Crucial to participatory culture’s success is the deeply held belief of individual members that their contributions matter, and thus, participatory cultures thrive when members feel a social connection with each other.29 To expand further, Jenkins et al conceptualise of participatory culture into four key facets: affiliations, expressions, collaborative problem solving, and circulations (Table 2).

| **Affiliations:** memberships, formal and informal, in online communities centered around various forms of media, such as Friendster, Facebook, message boards, metagaming, game clans, or MySpace. |
| **Expressions:** producing new creative forms, such as digital sampling, skinning and modding, fan videomaking, fan fiction writing, zines, mash-ups. |
| **Collaborative Problem-solving:** working together in teams, formal and informal, to complete tasks and develop new knowledge (such as through Wikipedia, alternative reality gaming, spoiling). |
| **Circulations:** Shaping the flow of media (such as podcasting, blogging). |

*Table 2. Forms of Participatory Culture (Jenkins et al 2010: 3)*

Using the above four categories as a framework, we understand how YouTube undoubtedly operates as a participatory culture as it combines aspects of affiliation (a community of users, some – but not all – identifiable by usernames and YouTube profile pages), expression (as a site for videomaking), collaborative problem-solving (as demonstrated in the discussion of YouTube comments in Chapter Five), and, of course, widespread circulation (through its inbuilt, URL-sharing functions).

29 At the very least members of a participatory culture care, to some degree, ‘what other people think about what they have created’ (Jenkins et al 2010: 3).
Scholars have argued that Web 2.0 can, in many ways, be considered television’s successor – a territory where ‘old and new media collide, where grassroots and corporate media intersect, where the power of the mediaproducer and the power of the media consumer interact in unpredictable ways’ (Jenkins 2006: 2). As mentioned previously, the key features of Web 2.0’s new ‘convergence culture’ include a more active participation based around participatory culture. However in such discussions of participation, the widening inequalities inherent in these kinds of access must be addressed. Media scholars have recognised that participatory culture is not always progressive, nor does it necessarily represent a diverse culture (see Ivey & Tepper 2006; Burgess & Green 2009; Jenkins 2010). National and regional digital divides exists, in addition to a global digital divide that separates individuals from access to technology, information and culture, which has been debated by academics, policy makers and concerned citizens alike. Creativity and cultural expression go hand in hand with access, economy, education, and technology and, despite some attempts to redress such inequities, such opportunities for creativity and cultural expression remain the preserve of those with the necessary resources. The digital divide is important, state Ivey and Tepper, because it affects citizens in a wide range of significant ways. They continue:

Increasingly, those who have the education, skills, financial resources, and time required to navigate the sea of cultural choice will gain access to new cultural opportunities. They will be the ones who can invest in their creative hobbies, writing songs, knitting, acting, singing in a choir, gardening. They will be the pro-ams who network with other serious amateurs and find audiences for their work. They will discover new forms of cultural expression that engage their passions and help them forge their own identities, and will be the curators of their own expressive lives and the mavens who enrich the lives of others; they will be among [the] creative class (2006: B6).

Although referring specifically to the United States in this case, Ivey and Tepper’s observations have far wider implications, across towns and cities, regions and nation
states. In discussions of digital media and its vast potentials, we simultaneously cannot neglect the other side of the socio-cultural coin. Global citizens with fewer resources – those with less time, less money, and less knowledge about how to navigate the cultural system – are relegated to rely on the cultural content offered to them by multinational media and entertainment businesses; indeed, such citizens of the United States will have little choice but to engage with arts and culture through large portals like Wal-Mart or Clear Channel radio. They will consume hit films, television reality shows, and blockbuster novels, their cultural choices directed to limited options through the narrow gates defined by the synergistic marketing that is the hallmark of cross-owned media and entertainment. Finding it increasingly difficult to take advantage of the pro-am revolution, such citizens will be trapped on the wrong side of the cultural divide (2006: B6, italics added).

In conceptualising access to digital cultural interfaces, we must consider how can a nation or region prosper if (and indeed when) its citizens experience such varied and unequal culturally lived experiences? (Ivey & Tepper 2006). Such observations on the increasingly polarised environment that faces digital media users only serves to demonstrate how Web 2.0 technologies, in tandem with economic change, are uniting to create a new cultural elite and a new cultural underclass.

In addition to increasingly polarised digital experience, the configurable practices of culture brought about through advancing Web 2.0 technology are gaining increasing levels of mainstream acceptance. Dynamic, interactive and collaborative characteristics are quickly becoming the normative Web 2.0 experience. Consequently therein lies inherent dangers in terms of potential social factors that may affect accessibility, accuracy, and consistency. Problematising Web 2.0’s neoliberal foundation on collective intelligence by questioning its internal qualitative, objective and consistent logic, Sinnreich writes:

If each of us has the ability to select and reject the nature of the information we encounter based on our individual tastes and preferences, the argument holds,
then each of us will have a completely different sense of what is going on in the world around us. […] if each of us has the ability to alter and recirculate information as we see fit, there can be no confidence in the quality, veracity, or objectivity of the information we encounter (2007: 142-3).

In the era of participatory culture’s innate democratisation, questions regarding authoritative, quantifiable facts among the sea of collective ‘intelligence’ (to follow Sinnreich’s pessimistic view), democratic society is perhaps ‘doomed in the era of the blog and the remix’ (2007:143). Yet while observing the ease in which new media tools enable the endless proliferation of material, others have argued that Web 2.0’s neoliberal ideology is fundamental to understanding how it operates, as such rhetoric underlies each and every online activity (see Jarrett 2008; Fuchs 2010). Media scholars such as Kylie Jarrett (2008) see interactivity in Web 2.0 as a technical reproduction of neoliberal or advanced liberal dominance. As such, they serve as disciplining technology founded on the liberal ideal of subjectivity and centered on ideas of freedom, choice and activity. Noticing the speed at which normativity and standardisation of expectation can form around such new media practices, Miller and Madianou (2010) highlight the flow in identity practice that online platforms offer. While paying caution to neologisms, they describe and define the proliferation of communication technologies over a wide range of platforms as a ‘polymedia’ environment, and call for the term to be used to encompass the recent, widespread possibilities of communications between separated persons (Miller and Madianou 2010). Identities across online platforms may be broadly similar or may shift in emphasis (e.g. from a professional identity to a social identity), and between media (such as text messaging versus face-to-face conversations via a webcam) (Foresight Future Identities 2013: 25). In our polymedia environment, communication – between individuals and industries – is key; however, publically and efficiently navigating a communicative message through this densely populated terrain is fast becoming
logistically troubled. In the networked era of memes and viral video, as the saying goes ‘if it doesn’t spread, it’s dead.’

**Memes, media viruses, viral videos: Speed and Biological Metaphors in Web 2.0**

Contemporary advertising, marketing and media industry language is filled with biological and genetic metaphors, such as memes, viruses, and viral media, that loosely serve to illustrate how media content moves within cultures, and especially in Web 2.0 culture. With the arrival of Web 2.0’s convergence culture, new media content sought to compete in an increasingly saturated market, yet the ‘if it doesn’t spread it’s dead’ ethos continues (Jenkins, Li, Krauskopf & Green 2006). Speed and veracity are key to contemporary ubiquitous consumption of memes and viral media; those with the necessary resources have abolished the wait almost in its entirety. Pleasure in this recent shift in forms of consumption is gained, for sound and media expert Michael Bull, in the very act of purchasing, not in consuming the material anymore (Bull 2013). In the age of Web 2.0 mediation, ubiquity – which was also located pre-digitisation – is now expanding ever more so as media-makers vie for attention through creating content designed to achieve ‘viral’ status.

The etymology and evolution of these biological metaphors stems from biologist Richard Dawkins’ coinage of the term ‘meme’ in his influential thesis on cultural evolution and memetics (1976). Dawkins’ applies the genetic metaphor to cultural practice, corresponding the key to successful memes with the key to successful genes in their propensity to replicate. The most successful memes are namely those that remain and spread, are subject to transmission *and* evolution. In Dawkins’ words,

> Just as genes propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs, so memes propagate themselves in the meme pool by
leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation (Dawkins 1989: 192).

Initially, Dawkins defined a meme as a noun that communicates the ‘idea of a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of imitation’ (1989: 352). Crucially, for Dawkins, cultural memes do not necessarily survive because people want them to, or because they suit any specific needs in human society. Successful memes survive simply because they do not die out, while unfit memes wither and are soon forgotten. Dawkins consistently conceptualises memes across varying levels of organization, regardless of scale or society, as a single, discrete unit with no prescribed size. The fact that Dawkins’ understands memes as indivisible units has been problematised by subsequent authors working in memetics, and is not without its’ detractors. Building from Dawkins’ work, Douglas Rushkoff described how media viruses are conceptually linked to biological ones; that media viruses spread through the datasphere instead of the body or community (1994). However,

instead of traveling along an organic circulatory system, a media virus travels through the networks of the mediaspace. The ‘protein shell’ of a media virus might be an event, invention, technology, system of thought, musical riff, visual image, scientific theory, sex scandal, clothing style or even a pop hero— as long as it can catch our attention. Any one of these media virus shells will search out the receptive nooks and crannies in popular culture and stick on anywhere it is noticed. Once attached, the virus injects its more hidden agendas into the datastream in the form of ideological code — not genes, but a conceptual equivalent we now call ‘memes’ (Rushkoff, 1994: 9-10, emphasis his).

In the case of CPDRC’s Thriller, the ‘protein shell’ may refer to a great many elements of the audiovisual content of the viral media, which is discussed in Chapter Four. In addition Rushkoff’s observation of the various ideological codes embedded within such media viruses is telling. The defining characteristic of memes and viral media, then, lies is the ‘spreadibility’ of the media content, that which ‘acts as a hub for further creative activity by a wide range of participants in this social network’
Yet according to Rushkoff, hidden agendas and ideological code can infiltrate our mediasphere through the spread of seemingly innocuous cultural memes.

Viral media has been the topic of recent discourse, from the biological to business and marketing, and social scientists (see van Dijk 1999; 2001). Media scholars Jean Burgess, Joshua Green and Henry Jenkins have written about the defining features of viral media in Web 2.0 culture (Burgess 2008; Burgess and Green 2009; Jenkins 2009), while Jenkins, Li, Krauskopf and Green’s white paper on the spreadable marketplace acknowledged how the vague use of the term ‘viral’ is unhelpful to the point of confusion. They assert that because the term ‘viral’ is used so frequently and freely today, it can refer to everything from word-of-mouth marketing efforts to remix videos to popular content in ways that don’t help us understand the nature of these different activities and the potential relationships between them (Jenkins et al, 2006: 2).

The term ‘viral’ places an emphasis on the replication of the original idea, seeking to explain the process of cultural transmission but does so in such a way that it strips aside the social and cultural contexts in which ideas circulate, and, as Jenkins et al contend, this can often omit the human choices that determine which ideas get replicated (2006: 2). Certainly such vague uses of the term ‘viral’ fail to consider the everyday reality of human communication and relations, the actuality that ‘ideas get transformed, repurposed, or distorted as they pass from hand to hand, a process which has been accelerated as we move into network culture’ (2006: 2). Viral phenomenons, then, are neither straightforward nor wholly predictable, but rooted in the cultural politics of digital networks.

‘Broadcast Yourself’: Tracing the rise of YouTube
Founded in February 2005 by three former PayPal employees looking for a way to upload, view and share video content, YouTube is today the world’s leading – but not the world’s first – video-sharing website. Initially launched with the tagline ‘Broadcast Yourself,’™ from the outset YouTube was designed, and made its mark on the Internet landscape, as a site for sharing user-generated content (Figure 1.4).

YouTube’s early rise to fame hinged on its association with ordinary people sharing everyday experiences, a view confirmed by one of YouTube’s founders, Chad Hurley. In an interview with The New Yorker, Hurley states that in YouTube’s early days all the content on the site was user-generated: ‘Real personal clips that are taken by everyday people,’ as Hurley described his vision (The New Yorker 2012).

![YouTube Logo](figure1.4.png)

**Figure 1.4.** ‘YouTube: Broadcast Yourself’™ logo was in use from 2005-2012, after which the ‘Broadcast Yourself’ slogan was removed from YouTube’s trademark.

By extension YouTube’s ‘Broadcast Yourself’ motto became synonymous with constructing, communicating, and ultimately mediating varying degrees of self-identity, capitalizing on individuals desire for fifteen minutes of fame. As a result, those community members, known as YouTubers – who actively uploaded much everyday user-generated content – commandeered YouTube’s formative months and years. Alongside the banality of everyday content grew various niche communities, and users soon discovered videos that they found interesting and obscure. As such
these non-professional video-makers played a crucial role in the website’s success in establishing it as the world’s foremost video-sharing platform.

Since YouTube’s official launch on December 15th 2005, YouTube’s audience soared from 2.8 million unique users in 2005 to 72 million users the following year, overtaking every other online video platform, including Google Video (ComScore World Metrix 2006). Writing four days before Google announced its acquisition of YouTube, Internet entrepreneur Jay Meattle summarised YouTube’s distinct advantages over Google Video, stressing the fact that not only do more people visit YouTube, but more people come back to the site more often, and spend more time on the site each time that they visit (Meattle 2006). YouTube also offered audiences an alternative to television as a source for audiovisual entertainment and information, empowering audiences with a degree of choice most television schedules could not offer.30

YouTube has emerged both as a central archive for media content, including that produced by various communities of amateur and professional-amateur (pro-am) media makers as well as content appropriated from mass media sources, and as a distribution hub through which this content flows outward through a range of social networks (Jenkins et al 2006: 40). YouTube is self-described and publically identifies as a kind of public, service-provider: ‘a forum for people to connect, inform and inspire others across the globe and acts as a distribution platform for original content creators and advertisers large and small’ (YouTube 2013). In addition YouTube’s acquisition by Google in October 200631 served to reinforce YouTube’s increasing

30 Over the past several years, increasingly interactive televisions have become more affordable, with most new appliances serving dual functions as Web browsers, interactive devices with built-in memory cards.
31 Google acquired YouTube in October 2006 for over USD$1.65 billion, with Google CEO Eric Schmidt announcing at the time that it was ‘the next step in the revolution of the Internet. It’s [video’s] a natural next step’ (McManus 2006).
capitalist logic, which inherently values quantitative feedback above qualitative. Google’s YouTube sought to monetise their website and share the profits with non-professional content partners as well as the already distinct ‘professional content partners,’ which was initially done by introducing its ‘Partner Program’ in May 2007. This service ‘elevates’ YouTube’s most popular users – those who have built up consistently large and loyal audiences through the creation of ‘engaging videos’ – to become YouTube Partners, whose content has ‘become attractive for advertisers’ (YouTube 2007a). YouTube publicly state that in their primary role as service providers, they ‘allow billions of people to discover, watch and share originally-created videos’ (YouTube 2013).

Indeed YouTube certainly holds the potential to offer billions of people the opportunity to discover, watch and share video, but the percentage of uploaded video that is originally-created or exclusively user-generated remains disputed. A recent study of popular YouTube videos found that the majority of content on YouTube is not user-generated; their research implied that 63 per cent of the most popular videos are in fact made up of user copied content – video content made by professional users or duplicated from other YouTuber’s original videos (Ding et al 2011: 366). Even so, YouTube represents a platform where amateur curators assess the value of professional and commercial content and re-present it for an assortment of niche communities of consumers; thus participants or ‘users’ create value around uploaded video content in two key ways (Jenkins et al 2006: 41):

1. They may focus greater attention on content which otherwise might have gotten lost, holding it in storage so that word of mouth can attract greater viewer interest

2. They actively respond to the media content through the production of new media, often embedding it much deeper into public consciousness through this process of repetition and variation.

The creation of value on uploaded YouTube video, then, is multifaceted, constructed in a variety of ways, and inherently intertextual. YouTube’s perceived value can vary from place to space. Through active repeated and varied remediation and circulation, both on and offline, YouTube videos can become deeply embedded into public consciousness as valuable social and cultural constructs that raise important questions regarding attention, participatory culture, and everyday new media practice.

To extend YouTube’s overwhelming statistics, for they serve as a general illustration of YouTube’s growth and situate the site within Web 2.0’s context, at the time of writing more than one billion users visit the video-sharing platform each month, and over 100 hours of video are uploaded every minute. Now firmly located in the top three most visited websites in the world, YouTube’s amateur-video origins have been countered by the sites’ increasing commercialisation that started to escalate mid-2007. Perhaps it is no coincidence that Google first introduced embedded, rollout advertisements in YouTube at the same time that Byron F. Garcia uploaded CPDRC’s *Thriller* video – July 17, 2007. By August 2007 YouTube announced that they were now offering ‘select partners the ability to incorporate YouTube InVideo ads into their content,’ interactive, animated, hyperlinked overlays which appear over the bottom 20 per cent of a video (YouTube 2007b). YouTube’s function as a ‘versatile and hybrid website which can meet users’ plural needs in their social life’ (Gu 2014: 33)
3) stands apart from other Web 2.0 platforms for several reasons, and for the most part, despite YouTube’s steady media corporatisation and professional commodification, it remains primarily associated with user-generated and amateur content.

In some ways YouTube operates in a manner similar to musical and artistic ideologies, such as the Seventies punk movement, or Dadaism for instance, whereby new expressive practice was enabled by the very act of abandoning conventional requirements of artistry, expertise, and technical ability. In Inglis and Hearsum’s essay ‘The Emancipation of Music Video,’ they argue precisely that, that in YouTube we have found a place where those ‘without formal training, up-to-date equipment, and professional qualifications can actively engage in the audiovisual representation of popular music’ (2013: 487). However, their assessment of YouTube’s accessibility fails to account for the so-called second-level digital divide or production gap that separates those who consume Internet content from those who produce Internet content. Repeated studies of Web 2.0 users have found that most users are nominal content creators who interact with the existing technology but rarely contribute (Nielsen 2006; Ang & Pothen 2009). Although different studies have produced various degrees of difference dependent on the Web 2.0 community in question, the standard distribution rates set out by Jakob Nielsen in 2006 serve as a general indication for participation ratios: 90 percent of users are lurkers35 who never contribute, nine per cent contribute intermittently, while one percent account for most user contributions – in short, most online communities follow a 90-9-1 rule. There are many reasons for this second-level digital divide, often related to material factors such as the type and frequency of Internet connection, as well as those relating to the

35 Lurkers are defined as those who actively follow by reading and observing the online activity but do not contribute.
cultural markers of class and socioeconomic status. YouTube undoubtedly offers access to those previously marginalised by the music industries previous modes of practice, yet even so it remains nowhere near as egalitarian as certain reports claim of it for the varying levels of access, consumption and production must be accounted for.

Music and/on YouTube

As the above account has illustrated, YouTube has quickly evolved to become the most viewed video Internet site, and its cultural presence is recognisable, to varying degrees, in almost every part of the world.\textsuperscript{36} As a vast video-sharing, archival, and social networking service with hundreds of millions of users and hundreds of thousands of professional and amateur video content being uploaded every day, defining YouTube videos as anything more specific than a catchall for all videos that appear on YouTube becomes an arduous task, riddled with subjectivity. We may struggle to define YouTube videos within a set of clearly defined parameters, but very often we know it when we see it.\textsuperscript{37} Thus in many senses, using the contemporary category of ‘YouTube videos’ is a redundancy, as YouTube videos encompass the widest possible range of themes and genre content, including vlogs, parody videos, pet/animal videos, unboxing\textsuperscript{38} videos, live concert footage, food preparation, gameplay, tutorials, shout-out videos, celebrity gossip, excerpts of television shows and films. Yet simultaneously the phrase ‘YouTube videos’ is used and deemed useful, to some degree, within popular culture to denote a specific kind of online video, generally synonymous with the video-sharing platform’s early amateur, user-\textsuperscript{36} It must be noted that access to YouTube is still restricted in many countries, and outlawed in others. YouTube’s accessibility and global impact is discussed in more detail in Chapter Five.
\textsuperscript{37} Indeed many user-generated YouTube videos, like definitions of pornography, can be considered to possess a certain ‘I know it when I see it’ quality (Stewart 1964).
\textsuperscript{38} Unboxing videos are those that record the unpacking of new products, in particular technology and videogame-related products. The term can be traced to the growing popularity of YouTube, gaining momentum by late 2008, and is related to the YouTube practice of haul videos (which trended from 2007 to 2010).
generated content stage. Common myths surrounding YouTube quality and content prevail, as summarised succinctly by self-described YouTube guru and video marketing expert Greg Jarboe (Table 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perception #1: YouTube is limited to short-form user-generated content.</th>
<th>(Reality #1: Thousands of full-length feature films, television episodes and albums can be found among YouTube’s thousands of professional media partners, including Disney, Channel 4 and VEVO).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perception #2: YouTube videos are grainy and of poor quality.</td>
<td>(Reality #2: By 2011 YouTube had more HD (higher definition) videos than any other video site).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception #3: Advertisers are afraid of YouTube.</td>
<td>(Reality #3: YouTube continues to monetise billions of videos per week, and the number of advertisers using display ads on YouTube increased tenfold between 2010-’11).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Three commonly held perceptions about YouTube (Jarboe 2011: 26)

Despite evidence to the contrary, in many contexts, and due in part to the arrival of many other niche video-sharing sites such as Vimeo, Vine, and Netflix, in everyday parlance, ‘YouTube videos’ are understood as designating only music videos or comedic, obscure, and/or absurd short, amateur or user-generated videos of poor, grainy quality.

The interplay between popular music and media is of increasing interest to music and audiovisual media scholars in recent years. For music aficionados, YouTube represents vast potentials, not least as an unlimited, open-access, digitised media archive. For many YouTubers, YouTube’s primary function is that of an online music archive, a free listening library where many songs (and often many different versions – live, studio recorded, covers and so on – exists side by side) are accessible as live streams or data that can be downloaded as an mp3 file and played back on an mp3 device, whether as a form of ‘try before you buy’ or not. Accessing music via free platforms like YouTube serves educational and music appreciation functions, as it ‘broaden[s] people’s taste’ in music in many, many ways (Bergh, DeNora & Bergh 2014: 322). Music and YouTube’s relationship is inextricably linked, yet one that is
often taken for granted and/or overlooked. In Burgess and Green’s foundational study of YouTube they established that music videos were prominent in the ‘Most Favourited’ category (2009: 50). A 2012 study found that of the Top 1000 YouTube Channels, 25 per cent were categorised by the users as ‘Music’ channels – the largest category among YouTube’s Partner Channels. This categorisation, of course, fails to take into account other video categories that feature music, however explicitly or implicitly, thus music may often be the foundation of the other 75 per cent of YouTube channels not listed in the ‘Music’ category. YouTube statistics for the Top 10 Most Viewed YouTube Channels reveals that seven out of ten of these channels mediate music content, while the other three categories – Games and Entertainment – contain varying degrees of music and musical content (Table 4).39

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Username</th>
<th>Channel Type/Category</th>
<th>Video Views</th>
<th>Subscribers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Emimusic</td>
<td>Music</td>
<td>6,127,269,911</td>
<td>2,202,124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. PewDiePie</td>
<td>Games</td>
<td>5,354,293,949</td>
<td>29,119,450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. RihannaVEVO</td>
<td>Music</td>
<td>5,229,401,253</td>
<td>14,253,928</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Machinima</td>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>5,046,774,895</td>
<td>11,610,999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. JustinBieberVEVO</td>
<td>Music</td>
<td>4,983,090,279</td>
<td>9,824,489</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Officialpsy (PSY)</td>
<td>Music</td>
<td>3,920,350,960</td>
<td>7,337,074</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. EminemVEVO</td>
<td>Music</td>
<td>3,805,735,243</td>
<td>12,916,118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. shakiraVEVO</td>
<td>Music</td>
<td>3,605,634,040</td>
<td>5,099,129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. smosh</td>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>3,465,511,071</td>
<td>18,386,631</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Top 10 Most Viewed Video Channels on YouTube, compiled using data from Social Blade.com (March 23, 2014).40

Additionally and perhaps unsurprisingly, in a recent inventory detailing the 30 most viewed YouTube videos of all time, 29 of these videos are music videos from artists

39 For example the non-musical channels in this Top 10 list include YouTuber PewDiePie, a Swedish videogame commentator, often features musical jingles during his videos, while YouTube channel Machinima (a portmanteau of ‘machine’ and ‘cinema’) hosts thousands of original videos including trailers and reviews, which occasionally cover music and/or extra-musical content (i.e. Machinima’s review of MTV’s Video Music Awards 2013).

including Psy and Katy Perry (with three music videos each), Eminem, Miley Cyrus and Justin Bieber (with two music videos each). As YouTube became part of everyday media life, it is of great significance that music videos feature so prominently in the Most Favourite, Most Viewed Channels, and Most Viewed Videos categories. As Simon Frith points out, music plays a central role for postmodern identity formation, and its significance and usefulness lie in its ‘dual status as a marker of individualism and a signifier of group participation’ (Frith 1996: 110-11 qtd in Burgess & Green 2009: 50-1). YouTube has evolved into a site where social identity flows into musical expression and appreciation and in many cases, experiencing music through YouTube – particularly for those who take up YouTube’s early invitation to ‘broadcast yourself’ – construct and communicate various degrees of self-identity. Despite palpable evidence to support music and YouTube’s symbiotic relationship, little has been written about their mutually advantageous reliance.

At the turn of the 21st century with twenty years’ experience, MTV was supplying music television to an estimated 342 million homes around the world and generating annual revenue of more than US$3 billion, while producers and consumers (real or imagined) were restricted by material and ideological codes that appeared resistant to change (Inglis & Hearsum 2013: 487). Yet in a matter of a few years, YouTube proved to be an instrument ‘through which many of those apparently entrenched codes were actively confronted and challenged’ (Inglis & Hearsum 2013: 487). Continuous and uninterrupted access to music videos in the post-YouTube world provided a significant change from how their previously confinement to scheduled television time slots. As Jenkins posits in the Afterword of *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*:

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41 See Appendix 1.
By providing a distribution channel for amateur and semi-professional media content, YouTube incites new expressive activities... Having a shared site means that these productions get much greater visibility than they would if distributed by separate and isolated portals. It also means that they are exposed to each other’s activities, learn quickly from new developments, and often find themselves collaborating across communities in unpredictable ways (Jenkins 2006: 274-5 qtd in Inglis & Hearsu 2013: 487).

By voicing the early optimism of possibilities YouTube offered media scholars and practitioners, YouTube, much like other new media formats, offers in theory perhaps no new kinds of fan and media experience. Rather, in practice it offers collectors the opportunity to share their vintage materials to a wider audience, a chance for fans to create art through remixing contemporary, mediated content, and as such, YouTube delivers a platform that enables everyone to ‘freeze a moment out of the ‘flow’ of mass media’ and to focus greater attention onto the moments that matter most to that individual (Jenkins 2006: 275). Jenkins also stressed the importance YouTube’s distribution qualities, laying the foundations for his later work on spreadable media and participatory culture – a culture that both creates content and consumes it.

Indeed as Jenkins prophesised, YouTube’s sublime, promiscuous and open-accessibility ensured that video creativity was no longer the reserve of the industry.42 Consequently, music video was no longer the patron art of the recorded artist or label conglomerate, and with the availability of cheap, more accessible technology, those with the necessary skills but more importantly, free leisure time, could create independent music videos that are not primarily tasked with selling the song, and therefore hold no responsibility to the record company. No longer seen as primarily the promotional tool it once was in the heady days of MTV, the digital era’s music-like videos represent new revenue opportunities for artists and labels alike. Free from the traditional censorship means of MTV, CPDRC’s Thriller is demonstrative of how

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42 I borrow Richard Grusin’s evocative description of YouTube as a promiscuous medium here, as for Grusin, YouTube’s promiscuity lies in the fact that any YouTube video can so ‘easily be embedded within virtually any digital medium’ (Grusin 2009: 60).
YouTube music videos enable an approach and exploration of different identities that remain under-represented in mainstream televisual and cinematic media, such as the Filipino and the Filipino male body (and by extension, the Asian male body), as well as ostensibly queer and transgender figures. Indeed, as Vernallis has noted and I extend her argument later in Chapter Five, it is precisely because of YouTube’s short and often miniature music-like videos, that serve to quell further investigation or ‘extended dialogue’ (2013: 150). Thus from patronage to prosumer, YouTube has provided a systematic space for new music (and music-like) video to flourish.

Lastly, as a video-based platform, YouTube remains widely regarded as a visual genre – a hierarchy, no doubt, inherited from widespread television and cinematic practice. Yet sonicity’s intertwined relationship with YouTube’s visuals, and vice versa cannot be underestimated, particularly when confronted by YouTube’s music-related statistics. YouTube’s pervasiveness has led it to becoming the second most popular Internet search engine, processing three billion searches a month, following only behind its parent company Google. YouTube users are not required to register before viewing YouTube video; registration is only necessary to upload content, and the amount of content one may share remains, at present, unlimited. As Comscore’s Dan Piech’s 2013 statistical presentation revealed (based on data from the US), online video is the most consumed content format online. Examining the future of online video as an industry, Piech further demonstrates that the number of videos watched online has increased by 800 per cent in the last six years.

Furthermore, unlike some online platforms YouTube statistics suggest that it attracts genders equally, making it an accessible site whereby men and women are equally likely to watch, share, create, and upload online videos.
Cover songs, fan videos, bootleg recordings of performances, talent show auditions...as so on, account for over half of all of YouTube uploads. Such new opportunities have substantially reshaped traditional understandings – industrial, ideological, and technological – of the ‘music video aesthetic’ (although, as Vernallis is quick to point out, music video was and is ‘irreducibly strange’ (2007: 111), thus the concept of a ‘music video aesthetic’ therefore has never been regarded as straightforward or unproblematic). The global spread of capitalism means that we are selling music to international locations as never before, accompanied by the rise of new structures intended to protect prevailing media industry interests. With the onslaught of YouTube and other participatory cultural spaces, the result is one of quasi-global homogenisation. But as we look to the possibilities and vast material shared on sites like YouTube, it just might also point towards a more democratic, international creative environment.
INTERLUDE II: TRANSITION

Darkness falls across the land, the midnight hour is close at hand. Creatures crawl in search of blood, to terrorise y’all’s neighbourhood (Temperton 1983). A quarter of the way into CPDRC’s Thriller performance, the camera zooms in to our leading characters faces, and we notice their feigned frightened facial expressions. Thanks to Garcia’s personal and at times intimate proxemics for the first time we also see that the role of the girlfriend, in her baby-pink halter-top embellished with gold earrings and decorative bracelets, is sporting an obvious receding hairline, broad face, strong jaw line. Although hard to discern among the highly compressed digital image, we picture the subtle trace of an Adam’s apple, which leads many viewers to comment that she is a he. Simultaneously, the girlfriend’s display of finely arched eyebrows and hair-accessories means she can, with relative ease, ‘pass’ as ‘the girlfriend. For Filipinos, the girlfriend bears the recognisable markers of an effeminate, cross-dressing male, a bakla, who occupies a unique – but often oppressed – place within Philippine socio-culture. Through performing the role of the girlfriend he mimics not only the female sex, but at the same time impersonates an imagined American pop culture. The gritty realities of years spent awaiting trial and conviction are instantaneously transformed by a drag queen’s fantastical gestures.

The video’s soundtrack, now featuring Elmer Bernstein’s orchestral incidental, ‘scary music,’ builds to a dramatic climax as the girlfriend utilises melodramatic body language and facial expressions associated with the damsel in distress. She raises her forearms so that her hands frame her furrowed face in an exaggerated act of feigned fear (Figure 2.1).

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A discussion of the YouTube comments, including those user comments that explicitly refer to the girlfriend’s gender, appears in Chapter Five.
Figure 2.1. The girlfriend (played by Wenjiel Resane) with raised forearms, framing her face to signify the classic ‘damsel in distress’ pose, using both medium shots and close-ups in CPDRC’s Thriller.

Figure 2.2. A more muted girlfriend and Michael Jackson surrounded by zombies (8.18 minutes) in Michael Jackson’s Thriller, directed by John Landis. Epic Records/Vestron Music Video, 1983.

CPDRC’s girlfriend’s obvious overacting fulfils two distinct, intertextual functions. First and foremost, his performance (played by inmate Wenjiel Resane) serves to directly connect audiences with Michael Jackson’s girlfriend (played by Ola Ray) in the original Thriller short-film (Figure 2.2). But Resane goes beyond mimicking Ray’s subtle gestures. He imitates the character of the ‘girlfriend’ but in doing so, exaggerates that which constitutes the ‘girl.’ To read Resane’s overwrought
Impersonation of a source – in this case, Michael Jackson’s *Thriller* girlfriend – as an act of drag, the subversive power of her act becomes clear. Resane’s drag performance destabilises and parodies the original *Thriller*, accentuating the radical features of this reinterpreted, remixed, reimagined prison *Thriller*. Indeed many of the YouTube comments highlight the many pleasures his performance activated, revealing the overall subversive reception of his role as the girlfriend.\(^{44}\)

Secondly, the girlfriend’s melodramatic mimicry highlights the video’s fundamental, metaphorical contradictions: *Thriller*’s obvious narrative binary opposition between good (the girlfriend) and evil (the zombies), and Resane’s dual inability to transform into an emancipated ‘girlfriend’. The melodramatic impersonation of the girlfriend’s ‘feminine’ markers (the damsel in distress movements, her distinctive clothing – the only one of the inmates in ‘civilian’ clothing among hundreds of men in orange-jumpsuits – as well as her long hair, padded top, and high heels), serve to amplify the visual markers of us (the civilians) and them (the incarcerated and/or zombies). Resane’s performance troubles underlying social and gender binaries, and thus goes some way to fulfil what Judith Butler calls the ‘critical promise of drag’ (1993: 26). Resane’s exaggerated performance as the girlfriend highlights a series of binary oppositions, and according to media reception and YouTube’s comments, audiences readily construe. Therefore it is in CPDRC’s *Thriller*’s metaphorical contradictions that we can gain an understanding of the video’s universal accessibility and activator of pleasure.

Just over a minute into the video *Thriller*’s instrumental groove returns replacing Bernstein’s orchestral crescendo. The camera zooms in, closely profiling the male protagonist, as he stares forward, right arm outstretched, body shambling –

\(^{44}\) The comments are discussed in more detail in Chapter Five; see also Appendix IV.
body language that conveys that he has ‘turned’ from dancing human to dancing zombie. CPDRC’s Michael Jackson, performed by Crisanto Niere, takes his place at the apex of the triangular formation, flanked by 22 men in identical suits who have additionally transformed into dancing zombies. Together the men move in near unison, closely following the movements of their Michael Jackson. Niere and his posse nod their heads to the right and pop their shoulders in time to the beat of Thriller’s pulsating rhythm, signalling the opening sequence of Michael Peter’s hallmark Thriller choreography (see Figure 2.3).

As the camera pans outwards we see all the surrounding inmates align the prison yard in neat, compressed lines, bordered by a two-story building with the first floor’s metal bars glistening in the sunshine (Figure 2.4). Row after row of hundreds of inmates flank the core triangle, and the yard is awash with tiny orange and black pixellated dancers, concurrently moving their heads and shoulders in time to the beat, but with both arms remaining horizontally outstretched in classic zombie imagery as they perform a static reduction of Thriller’s choreography.
The combination of low-resolution video recording with YouTube’s high-compression results in a pixellation that although very much the norm in 2007, is rendered almost unwatchable a mere few years later once high-definition video became the norm (as several YouTube users note). This pixellation, a kind of ‘digital grain’ if you will, only serves to add a further layer of intrigue as it becomes difficult to decipher precisely how many dancers twirl to Thriller. The pixellation, combined with an elevated, distant camera angle, makes it equally difficult to read individual dancers facial expressions or to make out the moves of the dancers in the furthest distance, those half-hidden under the yard’s dark arches.

Halfway through the video the camera quickly pans to the right, where grasp for the first time the magnitude of this performance – rows of hundreds of men in orange move their arms and twist bodies to make the famous Thriller ‘claw’ choreography in time to the chorus. On the beat of the chorus, Niere – CPDRC’s

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45 It is imperative to highlight how rapid developments in this technology have dramatically altered our normative experiences of user-generated screen media over the course of seven years, from advances in personal video recording devices and computer graphics cards, to better access to affordable Internet and increased bandwith.
‘Michael Jackson’ – performs a solo pivot, and dramatically faces the camera while the remaining dancers follow suit a split-second later.

‘You’re fighting for your life inside a killer, thriller.’

Michael Jackson’s voice rings clear over the prison amplifiers, as the core triangular ensemble drop to the floor leaving only Niere to perform a triple-spin, drop kick solo with unmistakable flourish. The surrounding corps steadily rise to standing positions, arms stretched upwards with dramatic flair. These uncanny, fragmented zombie-inmates do not embody the living or the dead, but instead roam the borders of this concrete purgatory, trapped as the eternal undead.
CHAPTER TWO

PERFORMING POSTCOLONIALISM: 
POPULAR MUSIC AND DANCING IN THE PHILIPPINES

[T]he entrance of the speech-act into historical statement, through *shifters of organization*, has as its goal not so much to give the historian a chance to express his ‘subject’ as to ‘complicate’ history’s chronicle time by confronting it with another time, that of discourse itself, a time we may identify as *paper time*; […] for to remember is also to acknowledge and to lose once again what will not recur (Barthes 1989: 130-360).

After a history steeped in colonial oppression, the Philippines, and Filipinos, are frequently half-jokingly dismissed as a ‘people with no culture’ (see Rosaldo 1988). Meanwhile others have conceived of Filipinos as a people homesick for a ‘world they never lost.’ For Arjun Appadurai, the Philippines presents a unique case of nostalgia without memory, where there are ‘more Filipinos singing perfect renditions of American songs (often from the American past) than there are Americans doing so…[in spite of] the fact that the rest of their lives is not in complete synchrony with the referential world that first gave birth to these songs’ (1996: 29). Alongside this ‘ersatz nostalgia’ (Appadurai 1996: 82), Filipinos are widely stereotyped, from news and media reports to global tourist literature, and indeed promoted by their own government, as an ever-smiling, ever-singing, nation:

Although years of injustice at the hands of colonial and homegrown rulers, and despite being for the most part dirt poor, Filipinos are the happiest people in Asia. This incongruous *joie de vivre* is perhaps best symbolised by that quirkiest of national icons, the jeepney. Splashed with colour, laden with religious icons and festooned with sanguine scribblings, the jeepney openly flaunts the fact that, at heart, it’s a dilapidated, smoke-belching pile of scrap metal. Like the jeepney, poor Filipinos face their often dim prospects in life with a laugh, a wink and even a song (Bloom et al 2006: 33).
Leaving aside, for now, the crude association made between poor Filipinos and dilapidated scrap metal, this quotation, entitled ‘The National Psyche’ in a recent edition of the *Lonely Planet: Philippines* – arguably the world’s leading international tourist literature brand – blatantly connects the poor (read: mass) Philippine psyche with laughter and music. This categorisation that Filipinos are among the happiest and most musical nation of people in the world is widespread,46 and indeed plays a crucial role in the establishment and pervasive acceptance of CPDRC’s *Thriller*.

This chapter is arranged in two parts. Part One details a socio-cultural history of the Philippine nation. Due to space restrictions, this section provides a brief, but nevertheless holistic overview to contextualise contemporary Filipino post/neo-colonial, socio-culture, with a focus on the role of music and dance in Philippine history. Outlining the unique Filipino – and more specifically, Cebuano – relationship between popular music and dance performance, this chapter balances descriptions of the Philippine nation in a globalised, mediatised world. Part Two situates the CPDRC, contextualises their ‘rehabilitation’ programme, tracing its’ origins, founders, media interactions, and public reception. From the sixteenth century to today, I discuss how the Philippines is, and for a long time has been, a centre for intercultural exchange between peoples: in this case American popular music, Filipino dancers, and an international audience enabled through digital technology’s ubiquitous reach.

Through the lens of the CPDRC video, this chapter argues that popular music plays a vital role in everyday Cebuano life, shaping how these Filipinos perform identity, and how it shapes lived experience. To examine the context surrounding the international viral video phenomenon that is CPDRC’s *Thriller*, this chapter takes as

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its starting point the American colonial project in the Philippines from the beginning of the 20th century, discussing how US education policies helped shape a century of US cultural influence over an archipelago located some thousands of miles away.

Following this, I examine the fundamental essentialism that continually takes place because of this crucial link between Filipinos and popular music culture, tracing it to pre-Hispanic Philippines and following it all the way through to today. I address how and why this portrayal of the Philippines and Filipinos is continuously circulated among national and international academic, commercial and colloquial discourse, and connect this to how and why a video such as CPDRC’s *Thriller* is so easily, and readily perpetuated. But more significantly, the heart of this chapter asks the question from the perspective of the internationally popular CPDRC videos: whose interests are being served from portraying these inmates as inherently musical, innately happy Filipinos? Thus I examine the reception and impact of CPDRC’s *Thriller*, probing how the distinctive conditions preceding the introduction of this programme alongside the exceptional circumstances within Cebu led to the creation of a video that is in itself considered ‘inherently Filipino.’
PART ONE

I want no prisoners. I wish you to kill and burn; the more you kill and burn, the better you will please me (General Jacob Smith).47

To end the Spanish-American conflict of 1898, representatives of Spain and the United States signed the Treaty of Paris on December 10 1898, allowing the US to purchase the Philippine Islands from Spain for US$20million. The seizure of the Philippines by the US proved a logical extension of the nation’s plan to participate directly in Asian markets, yet ultimately led to the Philippine-American War (1899-1902). Rich in natural resources including hemp, copper, gold, silver and iron, the Philippines’ 7,100 islands provided the US with an attractive base in the Far East. As economic historian Niall Ferguson (2003) argues, the US can be considered an ‘empire in denial,’ an imperial power that operated in a vastly different manner to previous European empires.48 The US was, according to sociologist Julian Go, an ‘exceptionalist paradigm,’ widely considered an exercise in effective benevolence – a benign, civilizing mission rather than one of conquest aimed at ‘transplanting the ideas and improvements of one civilization on another’ (2003: 1-2). Scholars, activists and journalists have noted that today most Americans are unaware of the fact that the Philippines was part of the US empire until the end of World War II (see Campomanes 1995; Cooper 2013), for the US colonization of the Philippines remains largely omitted from most US history books.

Musicologist Christi-Anne Castro argues that colonial rule over the Philippines is often overlooked by Americans, despite the fact that it served as an early case study of US influence on nation-building abroad as well as a fundamental factor in the rise

47 General Jacob Smith’s instructions to the US military in Balangiga, Samar, 1901
48 Of course, there is not European empire-building of the same period as the US imperial projects. As the US neo-imperialist project was developing, what remained of European empires began to unravel.
of US international power (Castro 2011: 6). Today, Filipino-Americans are the second largest population of Asian Americans, and over 3.4 million people in the US trace their ancestry to the Philippines (US Census 2010). Yet the Philippines, and Filipinos, remain an exotic Other for many Americans, unaware of the colonial heritage America left behind on the Far Eastern islands; Filipinos and Filipino-Americans remain near-invisible in mainstream American culture today, ‘alienated from whites (for being nonwhite), blacks and Latinos (for being Asian), and Asian Americans (for being insufficiently Asian)’ (Pisares 2006: 191). Despite a history that is deeply intertwined with the US, and a significant diaspora population in many countries, from Singapore to Spain, UAE to the UK, Filipinos remain, by and large, under-represented in mainstream global culture.\textsuperscript{49}

My purpose in this chapter is to section a number of aspects of the CPDRC performances to show that the legacy of colonialism, and US neocolonialism in particular, lives on in contemporary Filipino experience. I make the case throughout the work, through a nuanced reading of the performances, that CPDRC audiences display their power and disciplinary policing over the inmates through the medium of banal entertainment and mass media. I explore this distinctive case study’s postcolonial themes in relation to new media and critical theory and in the context of contemporary Philippine studies. The interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary field of

\textsuperscript{49} There is an exception to the near-invisibility of Filipinos in international media culture. In the wake of the Typhoon Yolanda/Haiyan in 2013, a barrage of images of Filipinos circulated across an array of international screen media, from televisions to large-scale billboards, depicting Filipino tragedy in light of the natural disaster. Scholars have questioned the ethical framework behind such often-invasive depictions; I point recent work such as Jonathan Corpus Ong. (2014). “‘Witnessing” or “Mediating” Distant Suffering? Ethical Questions across Moments of Text, Production, and Reception,’ Television and New Media, 15(3), 179-196. In addition, at the time of writing there are small but increasing signs of increased opportunities for Filipino representation in more mainstream music media. Two examples include the predominantly Filipino/Asian cast of the current popular Broadway, and starting September 2014 West End production of the disco-musical Here Lies Love (David Byrne and Fatboy Slim), which is based on the life of former Philippine First Lady Imelda Marcos. In July 2014 the Mid-Atlantic Foundation For Asian Artists presented the rarely-performed Filipino opera Noli Me Tangere, at the Kennedy Centre, Washington DC, featuring a cast and crew of 100, mostly of Asian/Filipino heritage.
Philippine studies, understood here after Priscelina Patajo-Legasto, incorporates enquiry about the Philippines and Filipinos through the critical lens of Western hegemony, including discourses surrounding Filipino cultural practices. It includes the work of those in the Filipino diaspora, and as Patajo-Legasto affirms, Philippine studies aims to liberate ourselves from the legacies of Spanish and American colonist discourses and the continuing power of Western hegemony, that have metamorphosed into discourses of globalization (Patajo-Legasto 2008: xxii).

Not limited only to Filipino scholars, from the late 1980s to today Philippine studies scholarship has witnessed a wave of foreign academic attention, with particular focus on Philippine politics and society and anthropological ethnographic studies including the works of Fanella Cannell (1999), Sally A. Ness (1992), and Michael Pinches (2005).

The following section situates the CPDRC programme, describing the historical foundations of this unique approach and its’ relationship to its location. I assert that such a programme can only be approached through an understanding of the socio-historic, economic and cultural actualities of not only the Philippines, but specifically Cebu. To achieve this, I explore notions of the complex American-Philippine relationship using the case study of the foundation of an American colonial education system in the Philippines in the early 1900s, an educational mission that has been lauded and condemned in equal measures. This section considers what Renato Constantino declares the ensuing ‘miseducation’ of the American civilising programme and the real-life consequences of this mission (see Constantino 1970; Kramer 2006; Rafael 1997; Roma-Sianturi 2009).

Philippine scholar, postcolonial critic and feminist Neferti Tadiar describes the Philippines as a complex country dominated by misplaced dreams and ironic
juxtapositions. It is, she says, ‘a place of ironic contrasts and tragic contradictions, where politics is a star-studded spectacle set amid the gritty third world realities of hunger and squalor. A third world place in first world drag’ (Tadiar 2004: 1-2). This chapter reads the digital sharing of the Cebu prison pop performances as an example of Tadiar’s third world space in ‘first world drag,’ a complex extension of the colonial education experience as 1500 inmates continue to shake their hips in time to the disco beats and sing along to hits in a foreign, colonial language – English. I posit that through a drilling of colonial values upon the Filipino people, CPDRC’s performances demonstrate an aspiration to the American fantasy-dream of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness despite these prisoners never being promised such fantasies in the first place.

The subsequent section locates Philippine cultural and musical identity amidst its contemporary neocolonial legacy and lastly, I highlight the paradox faced by new, mediated subjects in the neocolonial world. On the one hand, digital media platforms have given a voice to postcolonial and subaltern subjects, while it simultaneously problematises the Filipino performers, presenting them as uniform, ‘highly trainable’, Orientalist stereotypes. I suggest that this quasi-MTV style video, with hundreds upon hundreds of clearly marked Filipino prisoners at its core, becomes a metaphor for 21st century postcolonial Philippine attempts to assert its independence from the United States.

‘The Miseducation of the Filipino:’ Postcolonial subjugation through education

Take up the White Man’s burden, Send forth the best ye breed
Go bind your sons to exile, to serve your captives’ need;
To wait in heavy harness, On fluttered folks and wild –
Your new-caught, sullen peoples, Half-devil and half-child
(Kipling 1899).50

50 The original, complete title for Rudyard Kipling’s poem was ‘The White Man’s Burden: The United States and the Philippine Islands.’
At the dawn of the 20th century, the St Louis World’s Fair (also called the Louisiana Purchase Exhibition) constructed the Philippine Exhibit – the largest, most expensive and most popular of all the displays. Incorporating 47 acres, 100 structures and 1200 indigenous Filipino representatives who were unwillingly plucked from the recently acquired Philippine archipelago and shipped to the US to be viewed and to perform hourly ‘exotic’ rituals for the pleasure of the American masses (see figure 2.5).

Figure 2.5. Brochure cover of the Philippine Exposition at the World’s Fair St Louis (1904), Right: front cover with the native ‘savage’ Filipino; Left, back cover with the militaristic, ‘civilised,’ Filipino.
Tasked with entertaining the Fair’s crowds of daily visitors, the ‘Philippine Exhibition’ brochure promised visitors an experience that is ‘better than a trip through the Philippine Islands (Delmendo 2005: 52). As such, the imported Philippine ‘savages’ were forced to repeat rare sacred tribal rituals into a monotonous daily routine, with the main attraction being the display of dog-eating undertaken by members of the Igorot tribe. To further demonstrate the American civilising prowess over Filipino subjects, the presentation concluded with a musical performance, which culminated in a stirring rendition of ‘The Star Spangled Banner’ (Stevens 1903:146 qtd in Delmendo 2005: 52).

The 1904 Fair displayed the displaced Filipinos in loincloths, promoting their ‘new-caught, sullen… half-devil and half-child’ (Kipling 1899) acquisitions in a grandiose project showcasing new imperialist America. The Fair sought to justify the US colonial and orientalist discourse, as indicated through the Fair’s binary markers of difference between the ‘Occident’ and the ‘Orient,’ between the Western individual and the colonised ‘Other’ as substantially or ontologically different (Patajo-Legasto 2003: xvi).

United States history pitches the acquisition of the Philippines as part of an ‘informal empire,’ as mentioned earlier – one that was markedly different from the European imperial territories. Historian Paul Kramer writes that

US colonial rule in the Philippines has frustrated accounts of American uniqueness: ushered in with a war that looked much like Europe’s colonial wars. It involved the United States in colonial state-building and international politics of a kind undertaken by European powers during the same period (2006: 15).

51 With the exception of the Philippine Exhibit brochure, I have resisted reproducing photographic images from the World’s Fair here, in doing so drawing attention to the ease and casualness with which such images are circulated, particularly in the digital era.

52 For further details about the Fair see Vargas 1995 and Fuentes 1995 film for further details of the World’s Fair. In one particularly distressing scene from Fuentes’ compelling mockumentary, the crowds gawked at the Ifugaos ‘exotic ritual,’ unaware that the displaced people are actually mourning their fellow tribe members who froze to death on the journey to Louisiana.
Indeed the Second Assistant Chief of Constabulary W.C. Taylor confirmed of the purpose of the US imperial project, stating that ‘America took these islands with the avowed intention of lifting them up out of (...) savagery’ (Bureau of Education 1902: 162). Thus in view of the fact that military victory alone does not equate with victory, the most effective means of subjugation used by the US colonial rulers over the Filipino population was the establishment of a public education system that truly ‘captured the minds’ of the Filipinos (Constantino 1970: 21-25). The Education Act of 1901, part of the Taft Commission (or Second Philippine Commission) established by the US President William McKinley in 1900, provided free primary instruction to all Filipinos\footnote{See Act No. 74 of the Educational Act (1901). Retrieved February 2, 2014 from: <http://philippinelaw.info/statutes/act74-education-act-of-1901.html>} and sought to train them to be citizens of a new American colony. A pacification effort took place whereby US soldiers were enlisted as teachers, thus trading the image of a figure of violence with that of paternity (Roma-Sianturi 2009: 7). The early education of the Philippines by US voluntary teachers is frequently considered as a commendable project; however as Dinah Roma-Sianturi argues in her insightful essay ‘“Pedagogic Invasion”: The Thomasites in Occupied Philippines’, education can indeed be a deceptive gift.

In 1901 a group of 509 American public-school teachers landed in the Philippines aboard the \textit{USS Thomas}, tasked to ‘carry on the education that shall fit the Filipinos for their new citizenship’ and close ‘a chasm’ between Americans and Filipinos, so that Americans and ‘a people who neither know nor understand the underlying principles of our civilisation,’ yet ‘must be brought into accord with us’ (Kramer 2006: 168-9). The Thomasites, a group of 1,000 American teachers in total, and their followers, were meant to restore the fabric of US nationalism among Filipinos still in recovery from Emilio Aguinaldo’s First Philippine Republic defeat in
the violent war of 1898-1901 that displaced tens of thousands of Filipinos and destroyed the economy (Kramer 2006: 169-70). Comprised primarily of young men and women from middle-class backgrounds, lured by the promise of travel and adventure, the Thomasites were deployed across the archipelago to teach Filipinos the rudiments of egalitarian education (Roma-Sianturi 2009: 8). The physical violence of the Philippine-American War that killed at least two hundred thousand civilians was only to be replaced by American colonial ideology, the key to which was the introduction of a new foreign language, and to enforce it as the mandatory medium of instruction. The English language thus became the ‘wedge that separated the Filipinos from their past and later was to separate educated Filipinos from the masses of their countrymen… This was the beginning of their education. At the same time, it was the beginning of their miseducation, for they learned no longer as Filipinos but as colonials’ (Constantino 1970: 25). As Constantino eloquently explains,

> The new generation learned of the lives of American heroes, sang American songs, and dreamt of snow and Santa Claus… Thus, the Filipino past, which had already been quite obliterated by three centuries of Spanish tyranny, did not enjoy a revival under American colonialism. On the contrary, the history of our ancestors was taken up as if they were strange and foreign peoples who settled in these shores… We read about them as if we were tourists in a foreign land (1970: 25).

The results of colonisation, and in particular, a highly technologically mediated form of US imperialism, was that Filipinos, their history and their culture, were left to feel as strangers in their own home. Advances in media technologies at the turn of the century included print, gramophone recordings, radio broadcasting, and cinematic developments, and as such, the tempo at which the introduction of the English language abruptly disconnected the Philippines from Spanish influence was indeed remarkable. Education united both the highland and lowland in embracing the US colonial presence, as Roma-Sianturi notes (2009: 6), thus comprehensively ensuring
the oppressor’s ideology was benignly conveyed through entire systems. As postcolonial theorist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o remarks,

> The maintenance, management, manipulation, and mobilization of the entire system of education, language and language use, literature, religion, the media, have always ensured for the oppressor nation power over the transmission of a certain ideology, set of values, outlook, attitudes, feelings, etc., and hence power over the whole area of consciousness (Thiong’o: 51, qtd in Roma-Sianturi 2009: 6).

Such insidious manipulation through mandatory primary education and language, as Thiong’o observes, is precisely how American ideologies effectively took root across the archipelago in such a short period of time, to the extent that most Filipinos remained loyal to the United States during the post-Pearl Harbour Japanese occupation of the Commonwealth of the Philippines (1942-45). Through the work of the Thomasites and ‘those who came in their wake, Filipinos were led to think of themselves as if they were Americans, that is, as other than who they were supposed to be’ (Rafael 1997: 271). The Thomasites operated as an army ‘of education,’ as Thomasite teacher Adeline Knapp wrote in her memoirs (Official Website of the Republic of the Philippines 2003). They built upon the previous contributions from the US Army soldiers who began teaching English to Filipino students, and transformed the Philippines into the third largest English-speaking nation in the world.

Today, current practice remains not wholly dissimilar to American colonial practice. From Grade 3 through college, English is the medium of instruction in a significant number of Philippine education courses. In line with other globalised nations, there is an increasing wealth of employment opportunities in the Philippines afforded to those with proficiency in English, from the international call centres of

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54 See for example, Fullmer’s 2012 article on literacy in contemporary Philippines classroom.
Manila, Cebu and Baguio,\textsuperscript{55} to a host of international employment destinations. Although the Philippine economy is the 40\textsuperscript{th} largest in the world (IMF 2013), the rapidly increasing Filipino population means that the Philippines continues to rely heavily on sending 10 per cent of its 100 million population to work abroad. As such, today education in the Philippines hinges on catering to the demands of an overseas employment market.

Since the US-supported Marcos regime (1969-1986), the comparative advantage of the current Philippine economy is founded on the exportation of Filipino bodies throughout the world as cheap labour. The culture of Filipino \textit{balikbayan} is intertwined with a steady tradition of sending overseas Filipino workers (OFW) to far off lands in search of higher-paid work. Overseas Filipino workers, of which some three million reside in the US alone, are widely praised as being among ‘the best workers in the world.’\textsuperscript{56} Such is the reliance on OFWs that former President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo coined the term Overseas Filipino Investor (OFI) for Filipino expatriates whose annual remittances create business, purchase property and repay interest from the World Bank debt. Therefore proficiency in English remains highly valued as many of the colonised are still being processed for ‘integration into First World developmentalism through transnationalisation and the global division of labour’ (Tolentino 2008: 673). The price of transnationalisation is paid for dearly by Third World people, argues film theorist Rolando Tolentino, most especially women, and thus feeds into the logic of colonialism that is, in fact, neocolonialism (673-4). Indeed, the lure of better-paid employment abroad combined with an historical culture of Filipino workers sent around the world as domestic workers, sea-farers, and mail-

\textsuperscript{55} Statistics released in 2012 officially counted some 600,000 call centre workers in the Philippines, thus overtaking India as the world’s call centre capital.
\textsuperscript{56} Such overt generalisations are, again, widely perpetrated, as Filipinos are often cited as the world’s best fishermen (Francisco 2002), nurses, and service providers (Concepcion 2009)
order brides means that Overseas Filipino Workers are just as prevalent as ever today.

Centuries of dealing with a range of colonisers, missionaries, and traders have left their mark on the political, cultural and economic life of Filipinos. The periods of Spanish colonialism (1521–1898), American imperialism (1898–1946), the post-colonial state (1946–1966) as well as the Marcos dictatorship (1966–1986) immersed Filipinos in complex socio-cultural situations that left deep imprints of the West as superior and advantageous, with some scholars arguing that education too was used to train Filipinos to be good colonial subjects and to conform to American ideals (Kelly 2000: 29). Vincente Rafael reads the act of the balikbayan as mirroring the real tragedy that is shared by the majority of the Filipino population still caught up in the delusions of colonial hegemony. For Rafael, the real failures of nationalism lie in its inability to ‘retain and control the excess known as overseas Filipino’ (Rafael 1997: 272). In fact, the effects of US imperialism within the Philippines are so embedded to the point that Filipino/American Studies scholars have gone so far as to claim that the identity of ‘Filipino American’ is not just an apparent oxymoron, but an inherent redundancy. As Oscar Campomanes says: ‘To be Filipino is already, whether you move to the United States or remain where you are, to be American’ (Campomanes & Tiongson 2006: 42). Filipino journalist Conrado de Quiros makes similar assertions, stating that the physical fact of Filipinos migrating abroad is just the tip of the iceberg, for ‘[m]ost of us are expatriates right here in our own land. America is our heartland whether we get to go there or not’ (de Quiros 1990: 140, qtd in Rafael 1997: 272).

Since Philippine independence from the US in 1946, the Philippine government has also played an important role in seeking to construct a Filipino identity that is attuned to the needs of the globalised economy. The Philippine state’s legitimacy in
entering the global economic arena, both in terms of socioeconomic environment and
domestic political economy, is described as both ‘premature’ and ‘weak’ by some
scholars. Rommel Banlaoi argues that the characteristics of the Philippine state were in
opposition to those characteristics required of a mature and strong state when entering
the global market (2004: 203-4). Such mature and strong characteristics include:

i. The ends and purposes of government have become settled and founded on
   a significant ideological consensus;
ii. Most social groups (ethnic, religious, linguistic, and the like) have been
   successfully assimilated, or have achieved protection, equality, or self-
   determination through autonomy, federalism, or other special devices;
iii. Secessionism no longer constitutes a major goal of minorities. Territorial
   frontiers have become legitimised and sanctified through legal instruments;
iv. Leaders are selected on the basis of a regular procedure like elections. No
   group, family, clan or sector can hold power permanently;
v. Military and policy organizations remain under effective civilian control;
vi. The mores of governance preclude personal enrichment through various
   political activities.

The Philippines entered the global competitive market through the World Trade
Organization (WTO) in 1995, and is thus widely recognised as a nation determined to
face the challenges of globalization (Banlaoi 2004: 203). Yet the rather orientalist
notion of the ‘highly trainable’ disposition of the Philippine workforce continues to be
singled-out, as the US Embassy Bureau of International Labour Affairs report found

De-mystifying the ‘Musical Filipino’

[C]onflict between cultures – brought about largely by colonialism – has had a
ruinous impact on the music’s of the world, causing many traditions to
disappear altogether, especially in territories that were conquered by European
nations and incorporated into colonial empires. Musical practices played
important roles in this conflict, for in the early modern world there was
arguably no music that was not constitutive of societies’ ideological values
and a signifier of deep cultural symbolism. Every act of musical performance
was inextricably intertwined with religious or political cultural systems or
imbued with expressions of social or ethnic identities (Irving 2010: 2).
Colloquially, and academically, the Philippines is regularly cited as a nation filled with ‘inherently’ musical people, an archipelago filled with ‘natural’ singers. Filipino historian and playwright Horacio de la Costa romantically eulogised that music is regarded as one of the ‘jewels’ of the Filipino, providing a bond that binds across a nation of over one hundred languages and dialects (de la Costa 1946: 143-44). Contemporary travel literature and guidebooks mention, in passing, the Filipinos ‘innate musical talent’ (Bloom et al 2009: 46), while the Filipino American Symphony Orchestra affirm that Filipinos are ‘naturally gifted in music,’ and thus the Orchestra’s goal is to showcase this ‘innate Filipino artistic talent’ (FASO.org 2012). This propensity to homogenise Filipinos as an intrinsically musical people is by no means unique to the Philippines. Such descriptions of ‘positive racism’ are indeed familiar in much discourse surrounding an imagined African and African-American ‘natural’ musicality. Others too have experienced similar essentialising, ‘inherent musicality’ attests, with such tropes often used to describe the people of Iceland, Ireland, and Wales – places and people marked by centuries of colonialisation.

The following discussion attempts to redress this stereotype by investigating how and why such characterisations of Filipinos exist, and why they are so consistently perpetuated, both in the Philippines and abroad. In exploring the strategies behind these generalisations, I aim to uncover a deeper understanding as to

57 George G. Foster, a New York reporter wrote in 1849 that, ‘the coloured people are naturally strongly addicted to music and dancing’, meanwhile, as Ronald M. Radano explains, such tropes thus became embraced by the slaves themselves, as fiddler and writer Solomon Northrup stated, ‘the African race is a music-loving one, proverbially’ (Radano 2003: 147).

58 Musical stereotypes assigned to Icelandic and Irish peoples form part of both nations’ colonial (or in the case of Iceland, a crypto-colonial) discourse. (See Hall 2014). In addition in the case of both Iceland and Ireland – unlike the Philippines, such stereotypes are also contemporarily supported by a disproportionally large global musical presence in relation to both populations and economic situations. For accounts of the relationship between Iceland’s musical, sonic output and geographical, national identity see Dibben 2009: 136. A similar discourse exists regarding musicality as an inherent feature of ‘race,’ particularly surrounding the Irish and their ‘natural proclivity for music and song,’ and can be traced back to the Norman invasions of the twelfth century, but reached their height during the Victorian era, at the height of the British colonialisation of Ireland (McLaughlin and McLoone 2000: 181; see also Curtis 1971; Busteed 1998).
why CPDRC’s *Thriller* became an international ‘viral’ hit, celebrated by those inside and outside the Philippines.

History points to two potential reasons for this prevalent attitude. Firstly, pre-Hispanic Philippine music and dance traditions are maintained in some remote areas of northern Luzon, the central Visayas, southern Mindanao and the Sulu archipelago (Rodell 2002: 174-7), and has long been a cultural meeting place for Chinese, Malay, and Muslim people. By the sixteenth century, Spanish-governed Manila was, according to musicologist David Irving, an intercultural nexus, ‘the world’s first global city,’ and as such, it was ‘essentially, a microcosm of the world’ (2010: 19). Early accounts by Spanish colonisers describe the native Filipinos as competent and even good musicians, who quickly picked up church music. In such an ethnically diverse society as the Philippines, Manila represented a crucial conduit for the regional diffusion of multiple styles and genres of Western music, from the sacred to the profane (Rodell 2002; Irving 2010). Spanish colonization brought with it Filipinos’ expertise in complex polyphonic European music due to the Filipino ‘innate musicality,’ as Franciscan friar Juan de Jesús attested in 1703. He claimed that even ‘without teachers the Filipinos are decent enough musicians,’ who ‘make musical instruments and play them with skill’ (Jesús qtd in Irving 2010: 118). Indeed navigator John Meares’ account of his voyage from China to America would appear to reinforce Jesús’ utterances. Meares’ description of hearing local musicians performing in Mindanao in February 1788 seems to confirm how the Philippines served as a meeting point of people and cultures from East and West, as he describes a happenstance upon a local musical performance with a predictable dose of eighteenth-century colonial mentality:

*We were equally surprised at hearing a very tolerable band of music, which was composed of natives of the country. —It consisted of four violins, two*
bassoons, with several flutes and mandolins. This unexpected orchestra [was] acquainted with some of the select pieces of Handel; they knew many of our English country dances, and several of our popular and favourite tunes; but in performing the Fandango, they had attained a degree of excellence that the nicest ears of Spain would have heard with pleasure. The Malayans [sic] possess, in common with other savage nations, a sensibility to the charms of music, and are even capable no inconsiderate degree of perfection in that delightful science (Meares 1967: 44-5).

Leaving the romantic yet colonial primitivism of Meares’ report to one side, the above overview presents an account of pre-Hispanic and Spanish colonial Philippines as a musical place and people, who display multi-genre talent.

Secondly, in more recent history Filipinos have been supplying musicians to the world throughout the 20th century. As part of the US empire, the Philippines became purveyors of their own style of Western popular music, especially vaudeville, dancehall, jazz and later, rock’n’roll. During the 1920s and 30s, the harbour cities of Manila and Cebu in particular, became cultural crossroads, where citizens took part dual roles of consumers and performers of all facets of popular culture and the American jazz age, from music, art, and literature, to fashion (dress and hairstyles), theatre and cinema.

Many Filipinos became musicians on passenger ships, travelling to the US and beyond. In later decades and up until the present day, Filipino musicians have been playing in service industry sites all over Asia.59 This view about the skill of Filipino musicians may even be bolstered by the international success of choral groups (both children and adult) that tour the world. Like many other nations and nationalities, Filipinos think they are a musical people based on their own experience of music at home, but, in addition, there is validation from the outside world that they are valued as musicians. All of this is not to say that the myth is true, but rather to direct you at

59 It must be noted that any such discussion of a supposedly inherent Filipino ‘musicality’ may be read as ‘Western musicality’, for that is often what is being acknowledged in these situations. I am grateful to Christi-Anne Castro for conversations about the ‘musical Filipino’ myth (Personal correspondence, December 19, 2012).
possible explanations of the myth in order to drum up sources. (After all, the prevalence of Filipino musicians internationally is related to the general phenomenon of English-speaking, trained, migrant labor, the Philippines’ largest export.)

As we can see, tracing the history of this so-called musicality highlights the explicit role of colonisation in music training, from Spanish friars teaching Filipino natives Catholic hymns in four-part harmony, to American enculturation during World War II through the medium of radio and popular song. The central dimension of this musical stereotype that extends to a nation or peoples, is that there remains a degree of prevalent cognitive investment in such an association. This association, however minute, may or may not rise to the level of belief, but it becomes more than a mere recognition that such an association is widespread. Positive stereotypes, though often treated as flattering, harmless, and therefore innocuous, are especially potent because they may insidiously influence people’s general beliefs about the nature of social group differences, and ultimately ironically trigger negative and harmful stereotypical beliefs (see Kay, Day, Zanna & Nussbaum 2013).

**Setting the Scene: Music, Fiesta, and Cebuano Culture**

Located in the central Visayan region of the Philippines, Cebu’s place in history is famed for being the birthplace of Christianity in the Philippines (and by extension, Asia) in 1521. A long line of colonisers followed the Spanish, with the United States imperial forces in power until independence in 1946 (albeit a brief, but nonetheless disturbing period of Japanese occupation during the Second World War), only for Martial Law to be declared under the Marcos regime (1972-1981). This colonial history is often reduced to the précis of ‘three centuries in a Catholic convent and fifty

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60 The Visayan region is a group of islands occupying the central part of the Philippine Archipelago, and includes the islands of Panay, Samar, Negros, Leyte, Cebu, and Bohol. As a term, Visayan refers to the people, language, culture and so on of the Visayas.
years in Hollywood’ (Karnow 1989: 9). Cebu, or Lalawigan sa Sugbo in Cebuano, is an island at the centre of trade and commerce in the southern part of the Republic of the Philippines. Cebu province has a total population of 3.85 million and is located 365 miles south of Manila, the capital of Philippines (Cebu Government, 2014). Cebu is the oldest city in the country, the entry point for the first Spanish settlement in the Philippines and the location of Portuguese explorer Ferdinand Magellan’s death in the Battle of Mactan (1521), Cebu is rich in historical sites, shrines and stories, while facing similar socio-economic conditions as other Philippine cities. Cebu City is the capital of the province, centrally located and facing neighbouring Bohol island on the eastern harbour (Figure 2.4), which serves as an international port for domestic ships and inter-island vessels, as well as Cebu’s international airport connecting Cebu to domestic and international destinations on a daily basis.

While acknowledging the potential peril of stereotypes, one must also address the prevailing – if not lighthearted – cultural reputes among Filipino social identity. In Filipino culture, Ilocanos – native Filipinos who live along the Ilocos coast and agricultural valleys of northern Luzon, have a reputation for being very hard working and extremely frugal, undoubtedly due to notoriously harsh farming conditions (Rodell 2002: 6). Meanwhile Visayans are considered the archetypal opposite; for Filipinos, the abundant marine resources and rich volcanic soils of the Visayas has led to a culture that values music, art, and above all, fun (Rodell 2002: 7). The marriage of former president Ferdinand Marcos, an Ilocano, and his Visayan wife Imelda Romualdez, provides a well-known summary of the Filipino study of contrasts: Marcos, an Ilocano of simple tastes and alleged conservative spending, proved a contrast to Imelda’s flamboyant lifestyle, whose shopping sprees and impromptu singing at prolific parties ‘bespoke of her Leyte island origins’ (Rodell 2002: 7).
Thus, by fate and/or design, the Visayan Islands, and Cebu in particular, provides a particularly rich history of music traditions that extends beyond pre-Spanish acquisition.

Figure 2.6. Map of the Republic of the Philippines, with Cebu’s central location highlighted. Source: Open Street Map.
History paints a picture of the Visayans as noticeably musical. Visayans, legend tells us, ‘were said to be always singing except when they were sick or asleep’ (Scott 1994: 107). With the exception of funerals, historian William H. Scott explains that all Visayan feasts... were accompanied by dancing and gong playing – weddings, birth of children, planting and harvesting of crops, preparations for war, and victory celebrations afterwards (1994: 111).

In another example, Maria Colina Gutierrez’s historical account of antiphonal song in the Philippines demonstrates that such songs were introduced to the Philippines as early as the first migratory wave of Malays (Proto-Malays) who arrived in the Philippines between 12,000 to 8,000 B.C. (1961: 24). As Gutierrez notes,

Just to what definite part of the Philippines these alternating songs first took ground one can only guess, for their chronology is so widespread that studies made by different ethnologists reveal that practically all primitive and pagan mountain tribes have one kind of song or another sung alternatingly. Among the Christian Filipinos these alternating songs are especially popular in the Visayas, more so in places where the Cebuano language is spoken (1961: 25).

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Figure 2.7. Map of Cebu City surrounded by Cebu Province. Source: Open Street Map.
This type of antiphonal song, known by the ancient Visayan term *ayayi* and acquiring the term *balitao* in present Cebuano vocabulary, is said to have been in existence ‘since time immemorial’ (Gutierrez 1961: 25). In Gutierrez’s account, wherever early Cebuano’s gathered, whether it was during communal work or merrymaking, the *balitao* was ever at hand in the hearts and throats of the men and women. These early people especially the women were very proficient in the art of rhyming and verse making (1961: 26).

The early Cebuano *balitao* song and dance was initially performed to the accompaniment of the *subing*, a Filipino bamboo flute, and subsequently accompanied by a guitar made from a coconut shell (*buko*). One of the most significant Spanish influences on Philippine culture is reflected through the history of the *balitao* song and dance. Through the actions of Spanish friars and their followers, the *balitao* was transformed into a vehicle for the New Faith of Catholicism, incorporating narratives of the Nativity, Passion and Crucifixion of Christ, which mirrors the ubiquitous Christianization faced by Cebuanos and the general Filipino population in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (see Gutierrez 1961:26-7).

Music and dance’s omnipresence among everyday Cebuano socio-culture has continued in contemporary Cebuano life.

The Philippines and Filipinos, as indeed in many other cultures, continue to celebrate historical occasions and rituals through movement and dance. The Visayans, in particular, are above all noted among Filipinos as the most musical people in the country due to their bustling calendar of fiestas. In Cebu, the tradition of fiestas celebrated through music and dance is particularly ubiquitous among the 4.16 million people who call Cebu province home (National Statistics Office-Central Visayas 2010). Since all cities and municipalities in the Cebu province have their own respective annual fiestas, the Cebuano calendar boasts no less than 53 annual
festivals, all of which feature varying levels of dance, music, and colourful costumes.

Table 5 depicts a selection of these festivals that heavily feature dance and music in their programme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Location &amp; Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3rd Sunday of January</td>
<td>Sinulog Festival</td>
<td>Cebu City’s most popular and grandest fiesta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 19th</td>
<td>Tagbo Festival</td>
<td>Poro, Camotes Island</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January 20th</td>
<td>Silmugi Festival</td>
<td>Held in Borbon; in honour of its patron saint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 10th</td>
<td>Bodbod Festival</td>
<td>Cebu City; organised by the Cebu Equine Owners, Breeders and Sportsmen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 10th</td>
<td>Sarok Festival</td>
<td>Consolacion; mardi-gras parade and street dancing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 18th</td>
<td>Soli-Soli Festival</td>
<td>San Francisco, Camotes Island; Freestyle dance competition uses the soli-soli plant as its dominant material.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Sunday of April</td>
<td>Tostado Festival</td>
<td>Santander; Named after the town’s famous delicacy, the ‘tostado’. Street dancing is the highlight of the festivity, and dancers use the different movements of making a tostado in their choreography.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easter Sunday</td>
<td>Kabanhawan Festival</td>
<td>Minglanilla; Games and entertainment featuring street dancing celebrations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 22nd – 27th</td>
<td>Lapu-Lapu City Festival</td>
<td>Features musical productions commemorating the historical battle of Mactan between Magellan and Chief Lapu-Lapu.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 7th</td>
<td>Mantawi Festival</td>
<td>Mandaue City; Showcase for the city involving street dancing, dioramas, and floats.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Week June</td>
<td>Camotes Cassava</td>
<td>Tudela; Includes cultural nights and competitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 12th</td>
<td>Tartanilla Festival</td>
<td>Cebu City; Coinciding with the Philippine’s independence Day, this Cebuano fiesta preserves the tartanilla (horse-drawn carriage) heritage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June (Movable)</td>
<td>Kinsan Festival</td>
<td>Aloguinsan;Named after the town’s famous fish that visits the coastal area every June, features parades and dancing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June (Movable)</td>
<td>Kuyayang Mardi Gras</td>
<td>Bogo City; Kuyayang refers to the dance movements conveying courtship and love characterised by the Bogohanon’s cariñoso character.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Last Week of June</td>
<td>Palawod Festival</td>
<td>Bantayan; Palawod is the fishermen’s daily toil, their means of livelihood, life and pride. The street dancing captures and preserves the Bantayanons’ unique traditional fishing rituals inherent to the island through music and dance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 25/26th</td>
<td>Kaumahan Festival</td>
<td>Barili; A festival of revelry showcasing the town’s agricultural products through dancing on the streets to the pounding beats of the drum, chanting and singing thanking God for a bountiful harvest.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 25th</td>
<td>Caballo Festival</td>
<td>Compestella; Highlights include the Caballo dance ritual championship, which features several competition categories including Best Solo Performance and Best in Street Dancing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd Week of August</td>
<td>Dinagat Bakasi</td>
<td>Cordova; Celebrating an exotic eel locally known as ‘bakasi’, the dance replicates the gliding movement of the Bakasi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 9th</td>
<td>Bonga Festival</td>
<td>Sibonga; Thanksgiving fiesta for the abundant fruits found in their town, the festival includes street dancing competitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 30th</td>
<td>Haladaya Mardi</td>
<td>Daabantayan; Dance, parade and thanksgiving of Datu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Festival</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3rd Sunday of September</td>
<td>Kabuhian Festival</td>
<td>Ronda; Features dance movements based on the various livelihood programmes of the town.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd Sunday of September</td>
<td>Karansa Festival</td>
<td>Danao City; The Karansa dance, expressing one’s joy and happiness, is performed in four steps that jibes with the official Karansa beat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 4th</td>
<td>Sinanggityaw</td>
<td>Dumanjug; Through dance and field presentations, performers focus on three aspects: planting, harvesting and thanksgiving.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 14-15th</td>
<td>Inasal {Halad/Lechon) Festival</td>
<td>Talisay City; Showcasing the history and heritage through street dancing and food festival featuring the famous ‘Inasal’ or ‘lechon’ – the Philippine’s beloved roasted pork.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th Week of November</td>
<td>Kabkaban Festival</td>
<td>Carcar; Cultural catalogue of the town’s past with a parade and street dancing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 8th</td>
<td>Sadsad Festival</td>
<td>Oslob; Thanksgiving fiesta to the Immaculate Conception through dance displays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 8-9th</td>
<td>Tag-Anitohan</td>
<td>Tudela, Camotes; Street dancing and ritual contest participated by the community.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pride of place on the Cebuano calendar is the Sinulog festival. As is the case with many religious feasts, the Sinulog is understood to be traced to the pre-Spanish, pagan era of wooden idols and anitos, but today, it is an annual festival commemorating the Filipino conversion to Roman Catholicism, celebrated throughout Cebu and in more recent years, other parts of the Philippines too. The fiesta’s main feature is the collective performance of the Sinulog dance and street parade, to the sounds of the Sinulog dance-prayer expressing devotion to the Infant Child Jesus. To dance the Sinulog dance is to worship the Santo Niño, providing liminal spaces of celebration and bonding (Ness 1992). From early childhood, Cebuanos perform the Sinulog steps to the clear beat of the gongs and trumpets, which was formally solidified into the Sinulog Street Dance parade in 1980 (Sinulog Foundation 2013). Dance, particularly collective and collaborative dance in unison, appears regularly in the lives of many Cebuanos through the multitude of annual fiestas, and symbolises how music and dance are embedded in collective memory, national identity and power relationships.
Popular Music, Dance and Postcolonial Identity in the Philippines

I hope that in due time the enchantment of Western civilisation shall gradually wear off and in its place a truly integrated Filipino consciousness will develop even more richly as the spirit of a proud and sovereign people that it must be (Felipe Padilla de Leon, 1973: 274).

Relocating Philippine cultural identity post-Philippine independence was not without challenges. Nationalist critics denounce the continuous American cultural imperialism over the Philippines, noting the domination of all forms of popular culture including American films, music, comics and literature over Filipino popular culture for decades (Constantino 1970; Fernandez 1981). Such ‘an active, ongoing, multimedia, multi-sensory bombardment’ renders Filipinos powerless and complacent, according to Fernandez, and ‘before most Filipinos become aware of Filipino literature, song, dance, history […], education, language… the media have already made them alert to American life and culture and its desirability’ (Fernandez, qtd in Lockard 1998: 128-9). Certainly, Filipino scholars have been divided on the values and meanings of popular culture in today’s society, an argument that reflects the Frankfurt and Birmingham School divide, where critics view popular culture products as ‘purely escapist slop concocted by the hegemonic order and which the undereducated and the underprivileged lap up to the max’ (Lockard 1998: 129). Scholars have characterised the post-American-colonial Philippine popular music of the 1950s, 60s and 70s as largely derivative of American melody and rhythm. In Philippine educationist Eleanor T. Elequin’s analysis of the philosophies expressed in Filipino popular music, she surmises that a ‘seeming confusion or absence of direction in thought can be inferred,’ where it appears that ‘not knowing how to relate to what was reality, we ran away from it’ (Elequin 1986: 81-99). Furthermore, post and neocolonial identities were transferred not only through popular music compositions, but also through the embodied movements of dance.
While the Philippines operated as an American colony, schools were used as a site for Filipino dance preservation, including Spanish and American colonial dances. Indeed, ‘colonial identities can be interpreted through choreography,’ argues dance scholar J. Lorenzo Perillo (2011: 612). Basilio Esteban S. Villaruz, Professor of Dance at the University of the Philippines, theorises contemporary Philippine ‘dances of the people’ into six potential classifications, summarised as follows (Villaruz 2006: 29):

i. Those that propitiate the spirits – *diwatas* (spirits) and *anitos* (ancestors) – by the power of the *babaylan* (shamans)
ii. Those that are imitative of animal life or activities (i.e. hunting, fishing, planting, or mock-war dances)
iii. Those meant for socializing and celebrating, whether for courtship, communal harmony, ceremonies, or political hierarchy
iv. Those inherited from Spanish and American colonialism, most of which are for social purposes and are meant to preserve social amenities and protocols
v. Those mentioned above, religious and secular, which have been arrogated by tourism programmes for cultural and/or economic ends
vi. Theatrical dance, which was a product of evolving societal forces including ballet, modern dance, jazz and tap, and have now become staple in Philippine theatrical consumption.

As Villaruz’s classifications demonstrate, while the Spanish colonial era introduced Filipinos to a variety of European musical influences, the increased technological mediation of the 20th century brought with the American colonial period live dance bands, recorded dance music, and various dance crazes while popular songs inundated the Philippine market. In tandem with music, dance – those inherited from pre-Hispanic ancestors and *anitos*, as well as those imparted from Spanish and American imperialism – continues to play an important role in everyday contemporary Filipino culture. Dance shapes religious and secular celebrations, as well as providing economic prospects and tourism opportunities. Indeed dance remains an important facet of public school education in the Philippines today, however with more of a focus on calisthenics over creativity.
Today, music certainly continues to play an important role in everyday life for millions of Filipinos, and Cebuanos. Clearly Garcia built his music and dance rehabilitation programme based on an existing and prevalent musical-Philippine and musical-Cebuano stereotype, or what J. Lorenzo Perillo designates the Filipino musical-mimicry stereotype (2011). As Perillo fluently argues, the musical-mimicry stereotype normalises the dancing inmates as essentially Filipino, while simultaneously creating an ‘elated sense of collective identity for a multicultural archipelago that has survived centuries of psychologically fragmenting and violent colonialism’ (2011: 615). This stereotype, in combination with its presentation on YouTube, discourages critical engagement with Thriller and, as I will later argue, is in direct contrast to traditional conventions of Dance/Movement therapy, revealing instead underlying ideologies of punitive punishment, discipline, and control.
PART TWO

We’re the dancing inmates of CPDRC
We dance and entertain the world and make you all happy
A new approach to rehabilitation
Representing Cebu province and the rest of our nation
We’re the dancing inmates of CPDRC, fun and laughter, smiles in every corner
Got the world’s attention, coz we’ve got moves
And now all millions of you say you've watched us on YouTube
CPDRC, CPDRC, CPDRC Inmates, CPDRC Inmates…
(B. Garcia 2008)  

On December 27, 2004, CPDRC inmates staged protests and hunger strikes at the old, dilapidated, and severely overcrowded Cárcel de Cebú facility that was located in the centre of Cebu City. Refusing to transfer to the new, purpose-built facility in the outskirts of Cebu because of alleged misinformation, while demanding better treatment, over 1000 inmates were forcibly removed from the old facility by the Regional Mobile Group of the Philippine National Police, put in shackles and transferred to the hills of Cebu to the new CPDRC building (Figures 2.5 and 2.6).

Garcia was elected to as governor of Cebu in 2004 – a position she succeeded from her father, Pablo P. Garcia. Representative Pablo Garcia will forever be remembered for his role in reintroducing the death penalty into the Philippine constitution in 1993. Despite being the first country in Asia to abolish capital punishment for all crimes in 1987, and against the wishes of civil libertarian and human rights activists who maintained the death penalty functions as an ‘added nail’ to the coffin of the poor, Garcia – as Cebu Representative and Chair of the House of Representatives Committee on Justice – served as principal author of the bill, authorising the death

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penalty for 46 separate offences including non-violent crimes such as treason, car theft, and bribery.\textsuperscript{62}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure2_8.png}
\caption{To end the strike at the former CPDRC facility, located on MJ Cuenco, Cebu City, the Philippine army were enlisted to assist one of the largest inmate transfers in Cebuano history. December 2004. Source: Alex Badayos ©}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure2_9.png}
\caption{Shackled by the ankles and wrists, inmates are transferred from the old CPDRC building to the new CPDRC in Kalunasan. Source: Alex Badayos ©}
\end{figure}

Once the bane of the Cebu government with severe overcrowding, gang violence, and housed in a dilapidated building that dated back to the Spanish colonial era, the Cebu Provincial Detention and Rehabilitation Centre’s fortune’s changed when Gwendolyn In a press release statement on December 1 1993, Pablo Garcia explained that the death penalty bill – ‘Republic Act 7659’ – would be ‘signed into law by Christmas as a ‘Christmas gift’ to the Filipino people’ (UCA News 1993). Executions resumed, and by 2002 there were 52 offences carrying the death penalty, primarily affecting the poorest defendants who could not afford lawyers to defend them, including those who were tortured in custody, or sometimes unable to understand the language in which court proceedings were conducted (ICDP 2013: 20). Ongoing campaigns by NGOs, the Philippine Commission on Human Rights, and the Catholic Church led to President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo’s policy to commute death sentences to life imprisonment, announced at Easter 2006. The Philippine Congress voted overwhelmingly in favour of abolishing capital punishment, and on June 24, 2006 the new bill prohibiting the imposition of the death penalty in the Philippines (RA 9346) came into lawful effect.

The eldest daughter of the Congressman and his wife, Judge Esperanza (Inday) Fiel Garcia, Gwendolyn Garcia’s foray into politics surprised few since the Garcia family are among Cebu’s (and the Philippines) most renowned political dynasties. Upon entering office in 2004 Garcia was determined to eradicate the widespread gang violence, drug use and corruption among inmates and prison wardens alike. The governor appointed her younger brother Byron F. Garcia, a management graduate and novice to penology, to oversee CPDRC’s reinvention as chief security officer and prison warden. The facility officially moved to its’ present location in the hills of Barangay Lahug outside the city of Cebu (Figure 2.7) in
January 2005. Once warden Byron Garcia established the brand new, modern, purpose-built facility on the outskirts of the city, he fired dozens of corrupt prison officers, separated gangs, eradicated drug use, and implemented a strict routine of labour and exercise.

Continuing the Garcia family dynasty, Rep. Garcia’s son – the new warden Garcia, publicly declared that although he could have easily chosen a comfortable corporate career, he instead used his lineage as son of a ‘political scion transcended from his political and landlord roots to do “the very least for my brethren” – turn dregs into human beings’ (Garcia 2007). Equating his role as warden with that of a ‘mission,’ and highlighting the personal and familial difficulties his job brought with it, Garcia further explains how he ‘chose to be with the thugs of society, he chose to be with the dangerous men of society and he chose to be in a thankless and demeaning job where his relatives thought it was such a crazy thing to do’ (ibid). In the spirit of his unorthodox approach to penology, Garcia claims he was inspired to introduce music to the inmates exercise regime after watching the Hollywood film

Figures 2.10. CPDRC’s location. Left: Map of Cebu City and surrounds. Arrow points to location of CPDRC, in the Guadalupe district, Cebu city. Source: Open Street Map. The photograph on the right depicts the elevated position of the CPDRC complex among the lush hills on approach from Cebu city; Arrow points to the main building (green roof), and location of the prison yard, while the adjacent multi-storey building serves as additional inmate accommodation.
The Shawshank Redemption (1994) (McCarthy 2008). The scene in question is central to the film, where the sound of an LP playing Mozart’s ‘Canzonetta sull’aria’ duet from Le nozze di Figaro fills the prison yard. Garcia publicly attests to the communicative power of music, especially in communicating with prisoners, but rather than use a classical soundtrack as featured in the film, pop music was deemed a more suitable communicative medium for choreographing routines.

However Garcia presents an alternative account of the programme’s inception in other news reports. In an interview with National Public Radio (NPR), he describes the accidental yet aesthetic impetus behind the programme’s evolution from general inmate leisure time to choreographed routines. He explains:

I wanted a program where everyone would exercise an hour a day. One day, I saw these waves of orange people [in the exercise yard]. I thought it looked very nice (Garcia qtd in NPR 2007).

And in a similar report from Australian news agency SBS, Garcia explains how he saw inmates marching in the central quadrangle, which triggered the thought “‘Why don’t I convert that march into a dance number?’ I thought of dancing after that’ (Lazaredes 2007). In contrast to the Shawshank Redemption account, these narratives focuses instead on the gaze of the prison warden, who based the programme on the visual, surface appearance, with more than an underlying hint of objectification. Transforming his vision, whether based on Hollywood philosophy or aesthetic appearance, Garcia encouraged prisoners to undertake more physical exercise to ‘let off steam’ so that there might be fewer violent incidents inside the prison cells, and above all, to ensure previous disorderly conduct did not return. Thus the warden

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63 Garcia claims this scene inspired the dancing inmates programme in a Channel 4 documentary by Sarah McCarthy, Murderers on the Dancefloor, 2008, but subsequent research finds that Garcia has declared a variety of influences behind the novel ‘rehabilitation’ programme, as evidenced in interviews with other television and print reports (see Campbell 2007; Coonan 2007; BBC News 2007; Hunte 2007; NPR 2007).
initiated a mandatory exercise programme that developed into inmates marching in brisk, synchronised movements around the prison yard to the beat of a drum, often carrying the Philippine or Cebu province flag.\textsuperscript{64}

Marching in time and flag waving are historically rooted and deeply associated with military ideas of dance (McNeill 1995). The development from marching and flag waving to flag dancing and into other forms of dancing, in spite of biases against boys’ participation in dance, historically bears witness to predominantly all-male companies moving in unison displaying a union between governing bodies and participants.\textsuperscript{65} By October 2006 Garcia posted his first video of the inmates performing ‘The Algorithm March’, a Japanese song and dance-craze that penetrated popular culture across Asia that year, citing a desire to show other prison managers his innovative disciplinary technique in action. After the inmates had mastered the marches, in 2007 Garcia employed external choreographers to teach the prisoners, and to work alongside his creative designs. What began as a gentle one-hour work out soon developed into a rigorous programme that ordered all able-bodied inmates to dance outdoors for around four hours daily. Auditions were held for inmates who want to be part of the core ensemble of lead dancers, while all other inmates perform a reduction of the focal, more advanced, dance routine.

\textsuperscript{64} Indeed, this tradition continues to the present day, whereby the first routine inmates present in their \textit{hataw sayaw} is a synchronised, choreographed march (complete with military hand salutes) around the prison yard, yielding the Cebu and Philippine flags, all performed to the incongruous sounds of Van McCoy and the Soul City Symphony’s disco classic ‘The Hustle’ (1975). Halfway through the song, the marching is abandoned and the inmates perform the ‘hustle’ line dance. See Randy Kofahl’s video ‘NEW-Inmates at CPDRC dance to ‘Do the Hustle:. 08/30/08,’ Available from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lco-Z-t3s_4

\textsuperscript{65} A prevailing social stigma against male dancers continues to exist in the Philippines, along with many other countries, though with notable differences to the degrees of stigma associated within different dance genres. Yet with most genres, dance remains widely viewed as a feminine activity, and all males who dance face the possibility of being classified as effeminate and/or gay. While Wenjiel Resane, the lead dancer portraying Michael Jackson’s girlfriend in CPDRC’s \textit{Thriller}, is openly gay (in interviews and in \textit{bakla} appearance) a noticeable percentage of CPDRC’s YouTube audience verifiably categorise all the dancing inmates as effeminate and camp. (See exemplar YouTube comments, Appendix IV).
Although his upload of ‘The Algorithm March’ was virtually ignored by the YouTube community, it was Garcia’s seventh YouTube posting of the inmates rehearsing to Michael Jackson’s *Thriller* some nine months later that caused an Internet and media frenzy, and turned the CPDRC into one of Cebu’s leading tourist attractions. Warden Garcia revived the facility to the extent that Governor Garcia’s profile of achievements included a statement that under her term, the CPDRC prisoners – who were once considered the ‘dregs’ of society, they now ‘gained respect and worldwide fame’ (Governor’s Profile 2007). Here Governor Garcia appears to equate worldwide fame with respect, thus legitimising the programme as a successful venture.

Deciding to capitalise on the international attention from YouTube audiences and media conglomerates, warden Garcia opened the doors of the CPDRC to host live, public performances on a monthly basis. Such is the popularity of these shows that the CPDRC is now in demand as a tourist attraction among national and international visitors. A recent edition of the popular *Lonely Planet Philippines* guidebook lists CPDRC in its recommended tourist ‘Sights’ of Cebu, alongside butterfly sanctuaries and museums, tempting international backpackers and business travellers alike with the following enticing description of CPDRC’s free spectacle.

This is where you can catch the inmate dance performances that became an internet sensation on YouTube several years back… The performance was the brainchild of chief warden Byron Garcia, whose love of ‘80s pop inspired him to groove up the regular prison exercise drill. There are free performances on the last Saturday of each month; first register your name with the Capitol building… (Bloom et al 2012: 207).

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66 Copies of posters advertising the live, CPDRC performances can be found on the companion website: http://cargocollective.com/dangerousmediations
CPDRC continues to function as an alleged ‘maximum-security’ detention centre while simultaneously transforming into a tourist site once a month, in an exceptional, hybridised site of leisure and incarceration. New musical repertoire is added regularly, with requests coming from the new media community via public YouTube comments, and later, through Twitter and Instagram messages, as well as requests from Cebu Government officials. The ‘CPDRC Song’, quoted at the beginning of this section, is just one example of Garcia’s multidisciplinary role within CPDRC, as he straddles the line between official security consultant, video producer, press officer, and songwriter. Audiences bring forth a range of responses, from entertainment, to empathy – a ‘there but for the grace of God, go I’ attitude, to revulsion at their criminal status, posting comments to those effects underneath their YouTube videos.

The special ‘live’ monthly performances have become an integral part of the inmates’ daily lives, doubling up as a chance for family and friends to visit, though in reality a significant portion of the audience is comprised of foreign tourists. According to sources within the CPDRC, groups from South Korea and Germany appear among the most popular visitors to the facility, and regardless of nationality, photography and recording equipment is welcome, and even encouraged. Each performance ends with an invitation for audiences members to enter the prison yard and have photographs taken with the inmates, exiting through the gift shop. It is vital to note that photographs taken of the dancing inmates go on to enjoy a life

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67 It is repeatedly cited as a maximum-security facility in multiple media reports, though my experience of visiting CPDRC in January 2013 would contradict this.
68 I choose this saying purposely to draw on Dwight Conquergood’s essay ‘Lethal Theatre: Performance, Punishment, and the Death Penalty’, which uses this phrase in his discussion of the reactions of medieval spectators at the scaffolds (2002: 351). See Appendix IV for examples of YouTube comments of that nature.
69 According to a personal correspondence with CPDRC Warden at the facility on January 21, 2013.
70 Photographs of Garcia and the inmates with an array of visitors are presented in the photo-montage video ‘CPDRC Song’ (see 2.26 into the video: http://youtu.be/x-hinTjCD64?t=2m26s). Official CPDRC Inmate merchandise is on sale too, with proceeds (allegedly) helping to defray the cost of incarceration. Some merchandise has made its’ way onto online markets too (for example, CPDRC inmate t-shirts are available for sale on eBay from time to time).
beyond the ephemeral three-hour live palabas (spectacle) or hataw sayaw (dance show) as they are archived, disseminated and magnified by YouTube indefinitely. Such ritualistic, public spectacles of inmates clad in identical orange uniforms, serve as a constant reminder of their status as incarcerated people. As the live audiences take their seats behind the steel fencing in the panoptic towers high above the prison yard, the moralising framework is further construed.

Philippine Prisons: Human rights abuse allegations against CPDRC

As demonstrated in the Introduction and preceding chapter, CPDRC’s Thriller video elicited a range of responses, both positive and negative. Chapter One detailed how most YouTube comments left on CPDRC’s Thriller page addressed themes of homophobia, humour, approval, and/or racism. YouTube offers users the option to communicate with other members of the online community through its text-based comment board, which lends to the video-sharing platform’s ‘conversational character’ (Burgess and Green 2009: 54). It invites and indeed rewards – through lofty promises of social and cultural capital – those who engage with the video through the real-time comment board embedded underneath. The majority of the text-based comments that continue to be written alongside CPDRC’s Thriller respond directly to the viewer’s initial impression using a mix of colloquial, text message-based terminology, phrasing, and occasional emoticons, and are digitally fused with the video, archived and perpetually accessible to the public. Hundreds upon thousands of users write messages addressed to the YouTube community expressing their amusement – an uneasy mix of pleasure and irreverence – over the inmate’s captivating performance.

As mentioned previously, because the judicial system is notoriously slow and rife with corruption, all inmates at CPDRC are awaiting trial on an array of charges –
many waiting for up to six years. The CPDRC was built to comfortably accommodate 1,400 inmates, with a population of 1,288 in January 2013 (Interview 2013). In contrast, neighbouring Cebu City Jail and Mandaue City Jail have increasingly housed over twice their capacity in recent years. The CPDRC, under Garcia’s rule, strives to serve as a model of ‘leadership and good governance,’ which extends to their subsequent refusal to overcrowd their facility. In Garcia’s own words:

    While Jail authorities in this country continue to find ways to solve jail congestion or over-crowding, CPDRC has taken the very simple approach, which is by shutting its doors once it reaches full capacity (Garcia 2006).

This is, as Garcia states, in stark contrast to fellow Philippine prisons that struggle with severe overcrowding in old, sub-standard facilities. Indeed, conditions in prisons across the Philippines are notoriously harsh; former Philippine President Arroyo-Macapagal once said a life sentence in a Philippine prison was worse than death (Associated Press 2007). Recent human rights advocates report similar findings, observing widespread, consistent and credible reports of the use of torture against persons under detention and severe prison conditions characterised by overcrowding, lack of basic infrastructure, inadequate nutrition and medical attention (United Nations Commission Against Torture 2009). Philippine prison populations today show over-congestion by 300 per cent plus, as well as a significant rise in recidivism (International Centre for Prison Studies World Brief 2012). With the slow decline in poverty levels, despite enormous economic growth, the severely disproportionate distribution of wealth continues to impact crime, education, and social exclusion, and nationwide the increasing prison population bears the markers of such social inequalities.

As news reporters and documentary-makers visited the central Philippine island

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to learn more about Garcia’s ‘Dancing Inmates,’ the majority of media outlets gave light-hearted reports, littered with intertextual puns such as ‘Jailhouse Rockers,’ ‘Smooth Criminals’ and catchy attempts at rhymes, such as ‘Thriller in Manila.’ Fans of the video continue to write supportive comments on YouTube celebrating the programme as a novel use of music and dance therapy, a model of holistic and therapeutic prison practice. At the same time, national and international criticism of the dance programme surfaced. Other news reports indicated that forced dance rehearsals lasted for up to four hours daily; journalist Nick Lazaredes for the Australian Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) reports that the inmates dance twice daily, at 6am and 4pm (Lazaredes 2007). Allegations of inhumane treatment have been made against CPDRC by Philippine human rights group Karapatan, with primary blame resting on the inventor of the programme, Byron Garcia. In a BBC interview, Amnesty International Philippines stated that the dance videos appear to deny the individual inmates the basic right to respect (Galang 2010). Media reports from August 2007 and April 2010 indicate the implicit and explicit coercion that takes place in order for 1,500 inmates to participate in daily dance rehearsals; ‘Every able-bodied prisoner – about 1,500 of them – must dance,’ reports Hugh Riminton for CNN. ‘Sometimes the dancing occupies up to five hours a day’ (Riminton 2007). Indeed further reports note that certain privileges are withdrawn for those who will

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72 The title ‘Dancing Inmates’ was bestowed on them by Byron Garcia, and is reported in his video ‘CPDRC Song.’ Uploaded 9 October, 2008.
73 CPDRC’s Thriller are often bestowed the moniker ‘Thrilla in Manila’ (see GMA News 2007; PhilStar 2007; Washington Post 2008; Adobo Magazine 2014) which was the infamous third and final boxing match Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier that took place in President Ferdinand Marcos’ politically tumultuous Metro Manila in 1975. Yet aside from the title’s obvious reference to Thriller, CPDRC’s Thriller has nothing to do with the capital city Manila.
74 See user cesaryapril1’s comment: ‘If I’d ever be put in jail this is where I want them to send me lovin it.:):)’; Pinkelephantist’s comment: ‘DANCE IS POWERFUL and so is MUSIC...I’d rather see them do this then [sic] think about their next crime after they get out. Don’t hate.....Participate!!’; and dragonsorcerer’s comment: ‘I like the message you were trying to convey. Prisons are overall a mess, no matter what society you look at. They should be used to rehabilitate those that can be, and not as a way to cage those that can be saved with the fallen, thus promoting the breeding of evil.’ Retrieved 2 October, 2013 from: http://www.youtube.com/all_comments?v=hMnk7lh9M3o&page=2.
not dance, with some inmates claiming they were denied food and conjugal visits for non-participation (Galang 2007; Hunte 2007; Lazarades 2007; McCarthy 2008). Additional reports claim inmates who refused to dance were beaten (McCarthy 2008) and one prisoner, a lead dancer, claims that his scheduled transfer from the facility was put on hold because of his ‘integral part in the public performances’ (Israel 2010). The video and its subsequent reception raise several complex issues, from prisoner agency and welfare to the reality of implementing a penal rehabilitation program in a developing nation, in addition to questions regarding whether the mediation of recorded videos of the dance program and subsequent digital circulation constitutes a violation of prisoners’ humanity and inherent dignity as outlined in the two bodies of international law governing the treatment of prisoners.\(^{75}\) The tension between the positive benefits of this music and dance therapy program against allegations of mistreatment through enforced participation is examined in detail in the following chapter, taking into account the socio-cultural and economic landscape of the Philippines, as well as the power of dance as a medium for constructing what philosopher Michel Foucault called ‘docile bodies.’

**Together in Electric Dreams: Prison, Fantasy and Imagination**

Today, after more than a century of electric technology, we have extended our central nervous system in a global embrace, abolishing both space and time as far as our planet is concerned. […] As electrically contracted, the globe is no more than a village. Electric speed at bringing all social and political functions together in a sudden implosion has heightened human awareness of responsibility to an intense degree (McLuhan 1964: 3-5).

The imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order (Appadurai 1996: 31).

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Viewers are asking for more. We may be worlds apart, worlds may separate us, but we still can be connected through electric dreams (Garcia qtd in Associated Press 2007).

On the trails of Thriller’s international popularity in July 2007, and as a special request from Byron Garcia, the CPDRC performed a dual-function presentation of ‘Together in Electric Dreams.’ Firstly, in honour of Governor Gwen Garcia’s 52nd birthday in October 2007, secondly, the piece was chosen as a way for the inmates to acknowledge, with heartfelt thanks, their Internet audience (Riminton 2007). With an equally nostalgic musical choice, the inmates perform a rousing routine to Paul Oakley and Giorgio Morodor’s ‘Together in Electric Dreams’ (originally released in the UK in 1984), complete with audible handclaps (from 1.09), rhythmic shouts (from 2.30), and an acrobatic middle eight featuring inmates waving colourful hand-made flags of the world – each flag symbolising the nationalities of their new fans across the miles (Figures 2.8).76

![Figures 2.11. The flag-waving interlude from Randy Kofahl’s YouTube video of CPDRC’s ‘Together in Electric Dreams’ (2008). The close-up shows how the Philippine flag is twice the size and waved twice as high as the flags from other nations.](image)

Though the inmates are behind bars, warden Garcia firmly believes that Web 2.0 technology has united Filipino inmates with international audiences and fans, some of whom now travel off the beaten track to Cebu to see their performances for

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76 A video of this performance does not appear on Byron Garcia’s YouTube channel, although it is referenced in many news reports (see Associated Press 2007; Riminton 2007). For a complete performance of ‘Together in Electric Dreams’ is available through CPDRC visitor’s recordings, such as YouTuber RandyKofahl, ‘NEW-Inmates at CPDRC dance to “Electric Dreams” 08/30/08.’ Uploaded September 1, 2008. Retrieved May 17 2012 from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cDvI1M7hNa4
themselves. What makes this performance notable, like several other videos made by visitors to the facility’s monthly *hataw sayaw*, is the fact that we not only see the inmates dancing, but *hear* them too. While Oakley and Morodor’s song cloaks most of the video’s audio properties, there are moments throughout that we hear the inmates’ musicking – their handclaps and perfectly timed shouts that interlock with the song’s rhythm. Audibly, the audience is also present; at the beginning in their murmurings and excited chatter, later with enthusiastic whoops and wows, and ripplings of applause.

To capture Garcia’s appreciation, which he conveys on behalf of the inmates, he specifically chose the saccharine love song, composed by the Human League frontman, with Italian producer Morodor’s signature synthpop sound. The song emotionally narrates a futuristic tale of love across space and time:

I only knew you for a while
I never saw your smile
Till it was time to go
Time to go away (time to go away)
Sometimes it’s hard to recognise
Love comes as a surprise
And it’s too late
It’s just too late to stay
Too late to stay

[Chorus:]
We’ll always be together
However far it seems
(Love never ends)
We’ll always be together
Together in electric dreams

Because the friendship that you gave
Has taught me to be brave
No matter where I go, I’ll never find a better prize
(Find a better prize)
Though you’re miles and miles away
I see you every day
I don’t have to try
I just close my eyes
I close my eyes
At key points in the YouTube video, we hear the audience participating loudly, as those situated near the camera can be heard echoing Oakley’s line ‘time to go away,’ joining in singing with ‘too late to stay,’ and demonstrating that this song is well-known, and much-loved by the live audience by singing-along heartedly during the chorus. In an interview with CNN News, Garcia adapts Oakley and Morodor’s sentimental lyrics extolling the virtues of electric dreams, distant friendship and eternal optimism, and explains his reason for choosing this song for the inmates to perform. Although they may be worlds apart, he says, ‘with the Internet, we all can be together in electric dreams’ (Garcia qtd in Riminton 2007). Enchanted by Oakley and Moroder’s song, Garcia imagines each of CPDRC’s YouTube viewers as friends, reading their requests for encores as acts of love and a desire to ‘be together,’ transcending geographical boundaries through Internet imagination.

The ‘electric dreams’ of Oakley, Morodor and Garcia’s imaginations could be traced to Marshall McLuhan’s global village, which designates the advances in electric communication (through his primary example of television) to mean that all information was available to anyone, anywhere in the world, at the same moment in time. Despite subsequent queries regarding the accuracy of McLuhan’s media prophecy and critique as a technological determinist, his concepts remains an important forbearer in media studies. Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai argues that McLuhan overestimated the communitarian implications of the new media order: The world we live in now seems rhizomic (multiple, non-hierarchic), even schizophrenic, calling for theories of rootlessness, alienation, and psychological distance between individuals and groups on the one hand, and fantasies (or

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77 Appadurai explicitly references Deleuze and Guattari’s *Capitalism and Schizophrenia* project here.
nightmares) of electronic propinquity on the other (1996: 29). Such electric dreams navigate across today’s ‘communities of sentiment’ (Appadurai 1996: 31), where it seems that imagination is the key. Appadurai argues for imagination to be understood as a social practice – in forms of work and forms of negotiation between sites of agency and globally defined fields of possibility, imagination now assumes a different function in today’s sentimental community. For Appadurai (1996: 31) imagination is no longer mere fantasy (opium for the masses whose real work is somewhere else), no longer simple escape (from a world defined principally by more concrete proposes and structures), no longer elite pastime (thus not relevant to the lives of ordinary people), and no longer mere contemplation (irrelevant for new forms of desire and subjectivity).

Modernity is hinged on media, and electronic media have served to globally extol that there are possible lives and potential opportunities for their imagined selves and their imagined worlds. As a form of social practice and a constitutive feature of modern subjectivity, the imagination is thus offered new everyday resources through such new forms of media as YouTube videos, and as such, CPDRC’s Thriller demonstrates the extent of the truth to Appadurai’s findings. While the inmates rarely, if ever, get to experience watching themselves on YouTube – instead hearing about their public reception and rising view-count as it is relayed through Garcia’s updates and announcements – inmates thus imagine possible worlds from an impossible place.

Just as Benedict Anderson’s post-print capitalism created ‘imagined communities,’ CPDRC’s Thriller demonstrates how such post-digital networked forms exceed the potential of print media, extending transnationally and internationally, from mobile screens to large-scale projectors. The inmates may never get the opportunity to witness firsthand the fruits of their labour, but their participation in new media bears witness to monthly visitors who flock to the facility and serve to cement the fact that their performances count for something; that they indeed matter.
Appadurai continues, describing in detail the remarkable Philippine attraction to American popular music and culture. I quote Appadurai’s own words at length here, for he succinctly describes an emerging global system and the unique Filipino perspective, filled with ironies and resistances, often disguised as passivity and above all, a bottomless appetite in the Asian world for all things Western (1996:29). He states that:

the uncanny Philippine affinity for American popular music is rich testimony to the global culture of the hyperreal, for somehow Philippine renditions of American popular songs are both more widespread in the Philippines, and more disturbingly faithful to their originals, than they are in the United States today. An entire nation seems to have learned to mimic Kenny Rogers and the Lennon sisters, like a vast Asian Motown chorus. But Americanization is certainly a pallid term to apply to such a situation, for not only are there more Filipinos singing perfect renditions of some American songs (often from the American past) than there are Americans doing so… (1996: 29)

For Appadurai, compounding this Americanization is the fact that Philippine lives are otherwise out of sync with the referential world that gave birth to these American songs. Drawing from Frederic Jameson’s concept of ‘nostalgia for the present’ (1989), Appadurai locates the globalised Filipino as inherently paradoxical, a nostalgia without memory – looking back to a world they have never lost, which in the rhizomatic spread of culture, entertainment and leisure, is one of its’ central ironies. Of course Appadurai contends that such disjunction and ironies can be historically accounted for, as it lays bare

the story of the American missionization and political rape of the Philippines, one result of which has been the creation of a nation of make-believe Americans, [who tolerated for so long a leading lady who played the piano while the slums of Manila expanded and decayed.] Perhaps the most radical postmodernists would argue that this is hardly surprising because in the peculiar chronicities of late capitalism, pastiche and nostalgia are central modes of image production and reception (1996: 29-30).

The inmate-dancers in CPDRC’s Thriller serve as illustrations of Appadurai’s ‘make-believe Americans,’ enchanting the masses with their versions of American pop songs
while the majority of other Philippine prisons expand and decay. New media technologies gave rise to warden Garcia’s imagination in the first place, whether through watching a Hollywood movie or hearing an American pop song and deciding to use either (or both) as the basis for a novel approach to penology: it is his electric dream. By imagining visibly disciplined inmates, Garcia packaged his electric dreams as ideology – an ideology of rehabilitation mediated through the markers of global capitalism – American pop songs and celebrity culture. Garcia’s imagination – his electric dreams – when transferred to the inmates, becomes a fantasy that is collectively expressed, yet ultimately serves as collective escapism. The digital sharing of CPDRC’s pop performances highlight Tadiar’s claim for the Philippines as a third world space in ‘first world drag’ (2004: 2). The CDPRC dances, presented as an ironic and paradoxical example of embodied liberty within captivity, recall the American dream of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness – despite these prisoners never being promised such fantasies in the first place. While displaying a complex extension of the US colonial education experience, witnessed through 1500 inmates continuing to shake their hips in time to the disco beats of the Village People, and sing along to hits in a once colonial language – English, CPDRC’s Thriller demonstrates how the colonial culture is no longer the US alone, but the invasive imperialist ideology of late capitalism, which continues to be manifested through US cultural terms.

**Music, Performance, and Spectacle: Beyond St Louis Fair**

If concrete people envision historical agency to exist only outside of themselves, that is, if they imagine that real power exists in icons, they transfer their own power to these figures (Beller 2006: 215).
When examining history from present vantage points, it becomes easy to reflect upon CPDRC’s *Thriller* in light of the 1904 Philippine Exposition performances at St Louis. Both events have been ‘flattened’ as they become part of an ever-expanding digital archive, where history and the digital serve to level out, compress and decontextualise. Both the St Louis and Cebuano performances stress ideologies of ‘progress made visible’ – that is, ‘progress’ according to Western standards – and musical performance is central to advancing both ideals of progress. The Philippine ‘Exhibit’ at St Louis explicitly and implicitly served as an exercise in governmental propaganda, to justify the United States’ recent acquisition, purposely depicting the native tribes and villages in such a way as to reinforce the US as paternalistic missionaries, dutifully ‘taming’ the wayward Philippine peoples. The desire to display the Igorot tribes, clad only in loincloths, as ‘barbaric human beings’ was such that even as the Fair entered into the winter months, the Fair’s organisers refused to provide the native Filipinos with warm clothing or even trousers in the belief that visitors to the Fair would not pay to see them in Western dress. The Filipino band of battalion, part of the greater Philippine exhibit, comprised forty-five musicians who ‘materially assisted the battalion at parades and ceremonies… [and] played concerts for the entertainment of visitors at the request of the Philippine Exposition Board’ (Report of the Philippine Exposition Board to the Louisiana Purchase Exposition 1904: 29-30). Such tasks included furnishing music for opening ceremonies and other official functions at many of the state buildings, playing daily evening concerts and tri-weekly daytime concerts in the purpose-built bandstand in the Philippine reservation, and playing at venues and parades in Kentucky, Chicago, Milwaukee, and Wisconsin with the purpose of advertising the Philippine Exhibition

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78 Instead the Philippine Commission and Chairman of the Philippine Exhibition Board W. P. Wilson opted to heat and insulate the Filipino nipa huts. See Vostral 1993; Delmendo 2005.
at St Louis.\textsuperscript{79} We see then that these Western musical performances were closely linked to the Fair’s ideals of progress, and as such, the musicians and performers were crucial in conveying this ideology to the masses.

Themes of progress and a Westernised advancement are similarly palpable in CPDRC. An exercise in public relations to demonstrate the success of the Garcia clan in securing the previously unsecure, unstable prison population, un-convicted CPDRC inmates produce a similar vein of spectacular (audio-)visual entertainment for the masses. These performers and their appearances must be controlled. Despite wearing a mixture of civilian clothing and prison uniforms during their regular imprisonment, when the prison transforms into a monthly tourist site, all inmates must appear in full orange uniform, extending matching shoes. Levels of visual control extend to the casting of the lead characters for CPDRC’s *Thriller* in the first place. Both lead dancers explain in a documentary funded by USAID and The Asia Foundation, that Byron Garcia forced them to perform the roles based on their appearances (Diokno 2008).\textsuperscript{80} Crisanto Niere explains how he became *Thriller*’s lead dancer in an interview with filmmaker Pepe Diokno (Figure 2.12):

Sir Byron got me and made me dance. ‘My face looks like it’s for “Thriller,”’ he said. The zombie – the one from Michael Jackson. That’s how they see me. I look like a zombie (Niere qtd in Diokno 2008).

Missing a number of his front teeth, Niere pauses while he explains why he was singled out for the lead role in *Thriller* because he looks ‘like a zombie.’

\textsuperscript{79} It is worth highlighting that at the time of writing this report (1904), three members of the enlisted Filipino battalion died since their arrival to St Louis: one is listed as dying of pneumonia, one of suicide, and one from acute cardiac dilation, while five men from the force remained hospitalised for undisclosed reasons (1904: 30).

\textsuperscript{80} See Appendix VI for full transcript of *Dancing for Discipline* (Diokno 2008).
Bakla Wenjel Resane, who performs the role of Jackson’s girlfriend, also describes how Garcia forced him to dance yet despite Resane’s (initial) objections, Resane was powerless to refuse.

I don’t know with Sir Byron, what he saw in me. He had me called, and told me I’d carry the dance. I didn’t want to, but I couldn’t do anything. The planning [is all] by Sir Byron. He’s the one who programs us here (Resane qtd in Diokno 2008).

Power and control overwhelms both the CPDRC performance and the St Louis Philippine Exhibit. Both performances highlight the close Philippine-US relationship that remains equally intertwined and nonetheless complex today as it was one hundred years ago. By conflating two performances of the subaltern Filipino – the displaced slave forced into exhibition, and the hybrid, postcolonial dancing inmate also forced to dance – both performances can be seen as splitting subjectivity, existing in Homi Bhabha’s ‘third space.’ This subversive place is exemplified through the mimicry of hybridised cultures and identities whose agency can be read against the authority of the state – in this case, the US. As much as the St Louis World’s Fair enforced exhibition of indigenous Filipinos reflected the imperial, Orientalist values of the Fair’s organisers and the US government at the turn of the century, the Fair’s inherent racism has subsequently been widely critiqued by many both in and outside the academe. Yet we find ourselves, a century later, seduced and (however
temporarily) excited by portrayals of incarcerated, Filipino men, dancing to a host of Western soundtracks from Michael Jackson to Queen and the Village People. Audiences assume, because of the implied and thus assumed rehabilitative nature of the programme, the universal supposition that music could only equate with pleasure. Furthermore, because of its initial appearance on the participatory website YouTube, audiences are taking for granted that the inmates dancing must be an irrevocable force for good. The dancing inmates continue to dance for their lives, reinforcing essentialism with every step day in day out, while simultaneously attempting to assert agency through the very moves that bind them. In celebrating such spectacles uncritically we divert attention from the fact that imperialisms may just as easily be perpetuated from within.

“Music is the Language of the Soul”: The Ambassadors of Goodwill and Concluding Considerations

What became of the many Filipinos after the Fair ended? Some returned to the Philippines. Some, unaccustomed to the colder climate, caught pneumonia and died, while others, primarily Igorots, found themselves in Chicago, enslaved once again as live exhibits in other human zoos (Silva 2013; Vostral 1993; Delmendo 2005). Although neither the CPDRC facility nor the Philippine government have yet to release official CPDRC recidivism statistics, the authorities claim that recidivism has been reduced since the introduction of the dance performances. As for those CPDRC inmates who eventually were released or acquitted, a modest number of these former inmates formed the ‘Ambassadors of Goodwill’ troupe. This group have carved out a performance niche in the Philippine market: teaching dance to other inmates in facilities throughout the Philippines. The Ambassadors, backed by the Philippine
The government’s Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP), are described on Byron Garcia’s YouTube page as former Dancing Inmates who have bonded together to spread the message of peace, love, compassion and repentance to all jails in the Philippines in line with Mr. Byron Garcia’s crusade on spreading his ‘Music and Dance Therapy’ to all jails nationwide. BJMP chief Resendo M. Dial said the memorandum of agreement is a collaborative effort between BJMP and Garcia to institutionalise music therapy in jail facilities nationwide. Music therapy which includes therapeutic dancing and singing becomes the centerpiece component for BJMPs inmate development program (Garcia 2010).81

In effect, the memorandum legitimises the Dancing Inmates programme, as the Ambassadors of Goodwill bring song and dance to Filipino prisons across the nation. Comprised of twelve of the key dancers from the original Thriller video, namely Crisanto Niere (the lead ‘Michael Jackson’ role), and Wenjiel Resane (Jackson’s girlfriend), Garcia established the Ambassadors troupe after leaving the CPDRC. Media reports indicate that Garcia helped some of the ex-inmates get out of prison in order to perform in his troupe; in one interview Garcia explains that he negotiated their release for a variety of crimes, leading to assertions that the twelve Ambassadors were the most talented dancers and arguably his ‘favourites.’82 The Ambassadors have appeared on Filipino public broadcast television shows including the popular noontime show Eat Bulaga, where they danced for a live studio audience as well as the millions tuned in to the show on television, followed by participating in the show’s games for monetary prizes. Yet, upon closer inspection the fantasy of freedom in a life outside of the CPDRC is not quite as it seems. In 2010, most of the ex-
Dancing Inmates, now part of the Ambassadors of Goodwill, lived in Cebu in a small boarding house owned by Garcia, located three minute’s walk from their rehearsal space, thereby transferring his role as prison warden to that of paternal, benevolent landlord who allegedly allows them to live there rent-free (Colors 2010). The inmates must keep a log and rehearse six days a week in order to make 2,400 Philippine pesos a month – the equivalent of GB£1 a day.  

Music is certainly considered a communicative form, and often compared with language for its ability to communicate on multiple levels (Castro 2011: 6). On a fundamental level the CDPRC inmates, through their performative fusions of pop song and dance that are digitally circulated, communicate with us – the YouTube audience. The seemingly universal qualities of music are reiterated by Byron Garcia across a variety of media platforms, and most often take form in his repeated pronouncement that ‘Music is the language of the soul’ (Garcia 2006; 2007; 2009) and thus communicates with the inmates on a variety of implicit and explicit ways (See Figure 2.10). Their continuing performances since 2006, both live in the prison yard and on computer screens around the world, are parallel to and ‘bound up with the audience’s perception and expectations, which shape and are shaped by technological change,’ a change that echoes what performance theorist Philip Auslander terms the ‘technology of reproduction’ (1999: 158-9). As exceptional as the first viewing of Thriller seems for many audiences, and I count myself among them, the truth is that the endless repetition of the CPDRC’s pop dance videos on social networking sites like YouTube, Dailymotion, and Facebook, transforms the exceptional into the

83 To illustrate this point further, according to government statistics the average minimum wage in Central Visayas in 2012 was increased from P305 to P327 (approximately £4.14 to £4.48); therefore the Ambassador’s monthly wage of P2,400 is approximately a quarter of what the average monthly minimum wage worker in the area receives. (See: The National Wages and Productivity Commission, http://www.nwpc.dole.gov.ph/rtwpb.html)
mundane to the point that such videos become part and parcel of a perfectly ordinary, and ultimately banal online experience.

Figure 2.13. The view of the CPDRC’s music room, that overlooks the prison yard. Painted onto the walls is the text: ‘Music is the Language of the Soul!’ (Attributed to Sir Byron F. Garcia), and in smaller font, underneath: ‘Dancing is a Form of Positive Expression.’

Nonetheless, the symbiotic relationship between the live and the technologically transmitted remains inextricably linked. The legacies of colonialism and Althusser’s ‘Ideological State Apparatuses’ of subjection run deep. The inmates’ physical movements embody their remoulding as social subjects, and thus what is normally invisible in the outside world, this shaping of human subjects, is made visible within CPDRC and beyond through globally disseminated YouTube videos. However, it is crucial not to ignore the potential benefits that may be experienced through participation in a large-scale exercise activity, particularly in a culture where arguably, dance plays an imperative role, as a form of sacred devotion, personal

\[84\] Attempts to curtail the live performances and recordings of the dance performances in 2010 caused over half of the inmates to refuse to participate (See Israel 2010).
expression, and celebration. Through their choreographed reinventions and repertoire of iconic pop songs, the CPDRC inmates have demonstrated several facts. Their dance performances establish that although a person may be incarcerated, the permeable nature of pop music and dance enables them to remain a part of their community, playing an active role for the shaping of their island, and even their country by establishing and participating in a site for tourism and performance. The prisoners’ status as social waste has been confronted, albeit because of society’s voracious appetite for consumption, the cost is becoming ‘conspicuously consumed’ themselves (Adams 2001: 106).

The limited engagement that YouTube culture generally fosters underpins the stereotype that Philippine performers – and by extension Filipinos – are ‘chameleons,’ a mutable talent that unconsciously imitates the original (Diamond 1996: 141). The self-image of the Philippines, as a meeting point between East and West, as well as its multiple colonisations, differentiates the Philippines from other Asian countries (Castro 2011: 6). For these reasons, Catherine Diamond claims, the Philippines more than any other Asian nation ‘seems to have been plagued with doubts about its cultural identity from both Asian and Western perspectives’ (Diamond 1996, 141). This relates directly to the CPDRC performances, as the ‘technical aspects and the stereotypes about mimicry surrounding Thriller’s reception provide a window into how its choreography constitutes modernity, naturalises empire, and reinforces limited cultural engagement’ (Perillo 2011: 613). As Lockard observed in his study of popular music in the Philippines, popular culture has the power and ability to manipulate minds but it can just as easily be turned against authorities as a weapon (Lockard 1996: 170). The choice of primarily Western pop music soundtracks – in

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85 The positive benefits of moving together in time have been explored by many, including McNeill (1992) and Williams (2013), and are discussed in more detail in the following chapter.
particular American pop songs – for the dance programme is not surprising, given the vast, continued impact of the US imperialist project on the Philippines and Filipino people. What is significant in the production, uploading and digital sharing thereafter, of CPDRC’s *Thriller*, is how the Philippines is imagined – constructed, even – as a site for international intercultural encounters and exchange.

This chapter has outlined the unique conditions surrounding Filipino postcolonial cultural history, rife with seemingly ‘harmless’ stereotypes and ‘positive’ essentialism. Combined with pop songs, mass media technology and a prison warden with an overtly active imagination as they are in CPDRC’s *Thriller*, such stereotypes serve to present and perpetuate startling results. In troubling the pervasive academic marketability of the term ‘postcolonial,’ Anne McClintock asks,

> if ‘post-colonial’ theory has sought to challenge the grand march of western historicism with its entourage of binaries (self-other, metropolis-colony, center-periphery, etc.), [then] the term ‘post-colonialism’ nonetheless re-orient[s] the globe once more around a single, binary opposition: colonial/ post-colonial (85).

This case study demonstrates the extent to which the CPDRC inmates perform the postcolonial not as a single binary opposition, but rather as a continuing and lived process that remains a crucial and inseparable element of Filipino culture today. Implementing US dance styles to US popular musics could be interpreted as legitimising, and maintaining a form of imperialist, authoritarian rule over the inmates. Yet simultaneously both music and dance resist the ‘forces of oppression while articulating a vision of freedom on the other’ (Lockard 1996: 170). Their performances on the one hand can be considered ‘post’-colonial in that their existence, allegedly as a kind of rehabilitation for the inmates, makes attempts to go beyond the St Louis Fair. On the other hand, considering the postcolonial as a temporal dimension, by replaying and recirculating their performances on an
international stage, they fail in the impossible task of signifying the closure of the American colonial event. Their performance, or re-performance of postcoloniality, forces us to consider a more nuanced concept of colonialisms, both post- and neo--; to comprehend these concepts outside of such fixed axes of power.

As this chapter has demonstrated, performance of US popular music and dance performance continues to play a dual role in contemporary Philippine culture that is increasingly often projected online and traverses across various terrains and mediascapes. Dance shapes religious and secular celebrations in the Philippines and especially in Cebu, as well as providing real economic prospects and generating tourism opportunities through the manufacture of the Sinulog Street Dance Parade and its associated high-profile activities. Indeed dance remains an important facet of public school education in the Philippines today, albeit with more of a focus on mass exercise over individual expression. This is echoed in the CPDRC ethos as the inmates ‘demonstrate physical ability rather than develop an artistic concept’ (Perillo 2011: 614). Watching the neat and orderly rows of hundreds of inmates copying the choreographer’s every manoeuvre within the confines of an invisible square foot box, hardly ever coming into physical contact with their fellow dancers, by all appearances bears more resemblance to imperial drills than to a dance/movement therapy initiative. Considered in this light then, music serves an almost supplementary, albeit convenient function; the addition of pop music soundtracks prevents the exercise being deemed a purely militaristic – and therefore explicitly disciplining – endeavour. Though CPDRC’s Thriller aims at displaying rehabilitation in action and reducing violence among inmates, as Perillo argues, it does so by effectively extending racial and colonial inequalities and so it becomes crucial to understand the deep-seated colonial contexts of music and dance history in the Philippines in order to situate
Dangerous Mediations

*Thriller* accordingly (2011: 608-613). The explicit audiovisual objectification of the inmates in CPDRC’s *Thriller*, in conjunction with prevailing stereotypes of Cebuanos and Filipinos that function as ambivalent and/or benevolent racism, make possible insidiously dangerous mediations.
INTERLUDE III: FINALE

By CPDRC’s *Thriller*’s third minute, the recognisable synthesised groove returns, this time with additional, accentuated ghoulish groans\(^{86}\) as the central corps morph into a looser triangular formation enacting the hallmark zombie movements: arms outstretched and unsteadily dragging their feet. The girlfriend re-appears into the frame for the first time since the chorus started. Once again she enacts the damsel in distress tropes – arms daintily stretched to the side, hands framing her furrowed face – as she bounds across the yard. The camera closes in on her, monitoring her movement among the crowded yard, as the syncopated *Thriller* groove fades into Bernstein’s shrill orchestral soundtrack. The instrumental ‘scary music’ takes over, punctuated with the once diegetic sounds of monster growls, glass and wood smashing and Ola Ray’s high-pitched screaming.

Timing her actions to those on the soundtrack, CPDRC’s girlfriend character – Wenjiel Resane – pirouettes her way into the centre of the dance corps as the bedraggled zombies slowly encircle her. At 3.52 minutes she falls to the ground, knocking over one zombie-inmate in her midst, after which the central corps descends upon her as Bernstein’s soundtrack is punctuated by Ray’s piercing cry. The horde of zombies surrounds the girlfriend, captured by a range of long and full shots by Garcia’s camera – both public and social proxemics. She tries to crawl away but several outstretched zombie arms find her and grab at her hair, while one or two zombies tug at her baby-pink top. The fuzzy video-quality, frenzied soundtrack and increasing number of violators turn this into a disturbing audiovisual scene, with more than subtle connotations of ultra-violence.

\(^{86}\) Such ghoulish groans, heard here as they are in the original *Thriller* video, were made to be diegetic markers as the ghouls break into a wooden house to descend upon the girlfriend.
Figure 3.1. The girlfriend is surrounded and gradually succumbs to the zombie-inmates in the final scenes of CPDRC’s Thriller.

Without John Landis’s monster masks and tongue-in-cheek horror-movie set, the unmasked prisoners act the scripted parts of soulless corpses; yet in their prison garb they appear exactly as themselves. The inmate’s literal ‘show of face’ enacts new and decidedly more complex meanings to their Thriller performance, which obfuscates the boundaries between good and evil, between fact and fiction, and between truth and fantasy. CPDRC’s Thriller ending is markedly different to the original Thriller ending. In Landis’s short film, just as the zombies were about to close in on the girlfriend she suddenly wakes up, believing it was all a nightmare as she is comforted by her once again human boyfriend, Michael Jackson. As they exit the room arm in arm Michael Jackson breaks the fourth wall and Vincent Price’s laugh sounds as Jackson turns to face the camera (and the audience), revealing a pearly white wide grin against yellow, were-cat eyes (Figure 3.2). The camera moves in for a close-up of Jackson’s face, becoming an intimate proxemic of Jackson’s knowing smile and big yellow eyes.

87 I refer specifically to the short film’s narrative ending, at 12 minutes, to differentiate from the end credits that feature an extended repeated clip of Jackson and the zombies dancing the Thriller chorus, followed by an additional dance sequence of three body popping cemetery zombies who return to their tombs in style. In both of Thriller’s short-film endings, CPDRC’s ending proves to be a major contrast.
Price’s evil laughter – mediated through prison speakers to the inmates ears and remediated across the communicative distance through YouTube – interrupts the sustained orchestral cadence. But instead of revealing a visual metafictional break in narrative complete with knowing nod to the audience (as the original Thriller finale so aptly does), Price’s laugh in CPDRC’s Thriller soundtracks what is primarily read as the beginnings of a theatrical gang rape – or an act of zombie cannibalism upon the girlfriend – that unfolds under the camera’s steady, distant surveillance (Figure 3.2). However just as the horde of menacing inmates are about to completely descend upon the girlfriend, the screen suddenly cuts into a white, orange and black constellation that ultimately dissolves to a lingering blackness (Figure 3.3). There is no knowing nod in CPDRC’s version; the inmates never break the fourth wall; instead the YouTube video ends shrouded in mystery regarding the protagonists fate.
In visual culture and televisual semiotics, the dissonant finale wherein the image dissipates into a lingering blackness can have an effect on audience comprehension of the ending. In CPDRC’s *Thriller*, the video ends with the image of the orange-clad zombie horde about to descend upon the girlfriend that is suddenly edited, and the scene fades into a constellation of orange, white and black pixels. This surreptitious ending has shaped audience perception and understanding of how they see the performance ending, as the YouTube comments depict (see Appendix IV). To read the visual semiotics and production choices behind this text, two possible endings are signified: the camera angle, still perched high above the inmates, and the decision to cut and edit the final scene in such a way is remarkable (See Figure 5.3). In popular television and film, in addition to the fade to black’s clear marking of the end of a

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88 Garcia first introduced this type of edited, fade-to-black ending in his video of the inmates dancing to ‘I Will Follow Him’ from Hollywood film *Sister Act*, uploaded three months before *Thriller*. See: www.youtube.com/watch?v=2CPg9GWBoL0&list=UUUsuWpawGYKkdFsygL.fmxA&index=44
scene, it can also hold extra meaning: often it is used to signify declining to describe a sex scene in screen media (TV Tropes, 2014). Meanwhile in other contexts the fade to black commonly alludes to the death of the leading protagonist – usually on-screen at that moment (as in the famous final scene of *The Sopranos* which ends with a lingering blackness). With an air of narrative ambiguity – but nonetheless with the clear utilisation of digital editorial software to manipulate the final scene, CPDRC’s *Thriller* video fades to black, and abruptly ends. And along with it we can negate Garcia’s bogus claims at uploading the video purely as an educational exemplar for other prison guards to learn from. This video was conscientiously filmed, deliberately edited and globally disseminated by Garcia to be a form of entertainment; its subsequent circulation as mass entertainment has shown just how precarious such mediations can be.
CHAPTER THREE

BEHIND BARS:
MEDIATING MUSIC AND DANCE IN A PHILIPPINE DETENTION CENTRE

I
Handcuffed and weary, with sweat-soaked bloody bruises adorning his face and naked torso, a sallow-skinned, young man sits in a darkened interrogation room, eyes closing as he rests for a moment alone. Without warning, blinding floodlights fill his face and triggers the sounds of screaming vocals over distorted, hardcore guitars and pounding drumbeat are piped in through speakers. Startled and confused, the prisoner blinks into the bright light, unable to escape the relentless sonic attack, that ceases after five seconds, only to begin again after a five seconds of silence, and maniacally continues for hours and hours.89

II
The camera enters a make-shift interrogation dungeon to the diegetic soundtrack of a hardcore anthem being blasted at a detainee from a PA system perched in the corner. The lyrics are, as with many metal and punk lyrics, difficult to decipher, however on closer enquiry the track in question is ‘Pavlov’s Dogs’ (1990) by New Jersey hardcore band Rorschach, whose coarsely recited lyrics obliquely reference Ivan Pavlov’s experiments on respondent conditioning:

Open wounds/Never heal
Bleeding/I sense no pain
Festering/Over and over again
Drooling/The bell has rung
What have I said/What have I done
Unconscious/To the act
Not realizing until/After the fact
Everything evil/Becomes serene
Drilled in my head/What does it mean90

The first, bleak snapshot from the American TV series Homeland (dir. Johnson

89 Vignette I is from ‘Blind Spot,’ Homeland, Season One: Episode Five. (Dir. Clark Johnson. Showtime, originally aired October 30, 2011)
2011), detailed above, followed by an excerpt of a scene from the war thriller *Zero Dark Thirty* (dir. Bigelow, 2012), depict the level of widespread acceptance across mainstream media and general audiences of music’s connection with violence, either as an enhanced interrogation technique (EIT) or as a form of torture, particularly in US government-run operations post-September 11, 2001 (hereafter 9/11). Media reports increased after September 14, 2003, when US military commander in Iraq – Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, authorised the loud and sustained use of music on detainees, specifically to ‘create fear, disorient … and prolong capture shock’ (Associated Press 2008). Indeed Sergeant Mark Hadsell, of US Psychological Operations Company (Psy Ops) highlighted the US belief in the socio-cultural and violent power music has. In *Newsweek* magazine, Hadsell states his understanding of the process, rooted on the ideology of fear and alienation through being forced to listen to unfamiliar music:

> These people haven’t heard heavy metal. They can’t take it. If you play it for 24 hours, your brain and body functions start to slide, your train of thought slows down and your will is broken. That’s when we come in and talk to them (BBC News 2003).

Moustafa Bayoumi, writing in 2005, explains that the reported instances of ‘Western music’ being used as a weapon among US military were on the increase. In his essay ‘Disco Inferno,’ he describes the experiences Afghani and Iraqi men faced at the hands of American forces:

> Near Fallujah, three Iraqi journalists working for Reuters were seized by the 82nd Airborne. They charged that ‘deafening music’ was played directly into their ears while soldiers ordered them to dance. And back in Mosul, Haitham

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91 An edited version of the scene in question from ‘Blind Spot’ (Episode 5, Season 1) is available on YouTube at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NG7zWjx2uRI>

al-Mallah described being hooded, handcuffed and delivered to a location where soldiers boomed ‘extremely loud (and dirty) music’ at him. Mallah said the site was ‘an unknown place which they call ‘the disco’ (Bayoumi 2005).

In the above accounts we see how music, and specifically in Bayoumi’s article – the popular music of Metallica and Britney Spears – is used at extremely high volumes, in addition to the humiliation tactics of forced dance, and other stress positions such as being hooded and handcuffed. ‘Disco isn’t dead,’ Bayoumi remarks. Rather, ‘it has gone to war’ (2005).

The second vignette, from the film Zero Dark Thirty, conveys the unintentionally deft choice and use of music as a form of torture by the Hollywood writers’ interpretation of EIT that although fictionalised, are widely understood as practised forms of alleged ‘no touch torture.’ Although mostly unintelligible due to sheer volume combined with stylistic expression, Rorschach’s lyrics to ‘Pavlov’s Dogs’ precisely echo the assumed sentiments of the captive inmate, as the sounds of lead singer Charles Maggio screaming ‘Everything evil/Becomes serene/Drilled in my head’ – magnifying the visual violence. All the while, this fictional depiction of a commonly-practiced form of interrogation, is what is widely considered ‘white-collar’ or ‘no touch torture.’ The implication of such ‘white-collar torture(rs)’ is, for Melissa Kagen, based on the idea of progress: that torture has been civilised, professionalised, in some way stripped of its teeth (Kagen 2013). Ultimately, both vignettes depict accounts, however fictionalised, based on the fact that constant exposure to excessive and intense sound can lead to ‘diminished intellectual capacity, accelerated respiration and heartbeat, hypertension, slowed digestion, neurosis, [and] altered diction’ (Attali

93 Psychological torture, or ‘no touch torture’, includes such categories as isolation (solitary confinement), sensory assault (loud music, bright lights, shouting), sensory deprivation (hoods, goggles, gloves), desperation (indefinite detention, sense of futility), debilitation (food, water, sleep deprivation), spatiotemporal disorientation (confined in small places, natural light denied), and degradation (verbal, religious, sexual, nudity, overcrowding). See Amnesty International Report on Torture, 1975 and United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, 1987.
1985: 27), effects that fall in line with even the most conservative understandings of the term torture.

Despite the United Nations prohibition of torture since 1984, and the multitude of international protests held at US embassies around the world against their state-sanctioned use of torture, for the most part such uses of music in warfare and in detention are routinely accepted as the US push the boundaries of interrogation, in practice and by definition, to enable such methods to circumvent legal definitions of torture. At the turn of the 21st century, the ensuing rise of digital media networks enabled the play and replay of leaked photographs of the cruel and inhuman punishments served to detainees at US-run Guantánamo Bay and Abu Ghraib. Under the Freedom of Information Act, the American Civil Liberties Union released copies of the FBI internal memos concerning the alleged abuse and torture at Guantánamo, in Afghanistan and in Iraq. One particular memo dated May 22, 2004 described in detail specific methods of ‘interrogation’ that were sanctioned by US military personnel and by extension, mandated by the President of the United States, which included playing loud music, hooding detainees, the use of dogs, and removing all prisoners’ clothes. The International Committee of the Red Cross reported that the abuse of Iraqi detainees was widespread, not limited to Abu Ghraib prison but other facilities as well, including al-Baghdadi air base, Hubbania camp, Tikrit holding area, and the ministry of defence, and ultimately, some cases were ‘tantamount to torture’ (Cloud et al 2004). Consequently, the multitude of images of cuffed and hooded inmates being physically and sexually abused by US military that circulated print and digital media, in addition to the proliferation of hundreds upon thousands of news reports on music’s increased use as a weapon cemented in international consciousness.

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94 The ICRC has a strict policy of never publicly releasing its reports into prison conditions, but this was leaked to the Wall Street Journal, who posted the report on their website (2004).
the fact that music has and continues to be used on detainees as a form of (or as part of) ‘harsh interrogation’ within the so-called US war on terror (BBC News 2003; Cusick 2006; Johnson and Cloonan 2009).

Drawing from the rich legacy of penal spectacle in the tradition of imprisonment, this chapter traces the historical relationship of music and penal practice in order to read the CPDRC prison performances, utilising fundamental concepts such as discipline, control, punishment and surveillance. This chapter particularly focuses on the role of music in the history of crime and punishment, taking as a starting point the public and participatory use of punishment in medieval Europe. I will move, chronologically but quickly, towards the implementation of the prison system, and highlight ideologies of enlightenment that brought about seemingly more humane forms of punishment against felons. I examine contemporary versions of music, torture and imprisonment to reveal understandings of the confluence of music, sound and violence through a close reading of the CPDRC’s music in detention practice.

‘Gentle’ Punishment: The Evolution of the Prison

Man was born free, but everywhere he is in chains. This man believes that he is the master of others, and still he is more of a slave than they are (Rousseau, 1763).

What is punishment? And why do most nations use prisons instead of other types of punishment? Punishment, from the Old French punissement and derived from the verb punir, is universally understood as a painful or unpleasant experience that is inflicted upon an individual in response to an offense, carried out by persons who have the authority to do so. Since punishment through its very definition involves inflicting pain upon a person, and fundamentally such an action is reprehensible,
philosophies of punishment are divided on the issue. Two differing philosophies to punishment arise – the retributive: those who believe that inflicting pain as punishment is fundamentally different to inflicting pain on innocents and therefore is not inherently wrong (Pollock 2006), and the utilitarian approach: those who justify punishment only if it results in a ‘greater good’ through the secondary rationales of deterrence, incapacitation, or rehabilitation (Durham 1994; Murphy 1995). Revenge is considered personal and often disproportionate, whereas in theory and in practice retribution should be limited, impersonal and balanced (see Pollock 2006).

The concept of the social contract or political contract theory has been argued since ancient Greek philosopher Plato (see Crito) but gained particular resonance during the Age of Enlightenment in the 17th and 18th centuries. Based on Rousseau’s assertion that ‘man was born free, but everywhere is in chains’ (1763), the central hypothesis behind a social contract is the voluntary agreement in which humans can remain free whilst living together in society, as society provides a set of legal, political and social arrangements to mutually benefit individuals and groups. Thus, men surrender a portion of their individual freedom (Hobbes State of Nature) in exchange for the benefit of security and protection (State of Society). In social contract theory, if one infringes upon the rights of others, one has broken the social contract and therefore society has the right to punish, as Rousseau explains: ‘Once this multitude is united this way into a body, an offense against one of its members is an offense against the body politic’ (Rosseau 1763). To assume that disenfranchised groups breach ‘a “contract” they had no part in creating (nor benefit from) weakens the legitimacy of this theory,’ as many scholars including Pollock argue (2006: 4; also

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95 The social contract and the Enlightenment are particularly associated with such writers as Thomas Hobbes (Leviathan 1651), John Locke (Two Treatises on Government 1689), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Du contrat social ou Principes du droit politique 1762) and Immanuel Kant (Metaphysics of Morals 1797).
Schall 2006; Levine 2009; Muldoon 2009). As a result, such scholars argue that an important problematic element of the social contract theory of punishment is that it conveys a simplistic picture of society, based upon a fiction that every member of society is equal and participated in the agreement to abide by the social contract.

The second element of the retributive rationale designates that the offender must be punished, and indeed deserves to be punished. Using a rhetoric steeped in natural, moral rights and duties, Herbert Morris asserts that we have a right to punishment, and that

this right derives from a fundamental human right to be treated as a person; [...] this fundamental right is a natural, inalienable, and absolute right; [...] the denial of this right implies the denial of all moral rights and duties (Morris quoted in Pollock 2006: 5).

Morris’s quote speaks incessantly of a sense of agency, of the concept of ‘fundamental right,’ something that is ‘natural, inalienable, and absolute’; however we do not need to be reminded that the concept of enunciating universal, fundamental rights for all citizens is deeply fraught with complexities. Furthermore, any attempt to rehabilitate or undertake correctional treatments on offenders is inherently more intrusive than mere punishment alone, as it does not respect the individual’s agency (ibid). As a ‘pain or other unpleasant consequence that results from an offense against a rule and that is administered by others, who represent legal authority, to the offender who broke the rule’ (Newman 1978: 6-7), punishment is conceptualised of as a primitive, almost instinctual response of humankind to punish transgressors (Pollock 2005: 5). Yet for Émile Durkheim, certain acts of punishment under certain conditions serve as social rituals, bringing together communities and providing a forum for reaffirming and intensifying their commitment to such shared values (Miethe and Lu 2005: 6). As an advocate for retributive rationale, Immanuel Kant believed that punishment by a court can be inflicted upon a transgressor, but never
merely as a means to promote some other good for the criminal himself or for civil society. It must always be inflicted on him only because he has committed a crime. He must previously have been found punishable before any thought can be given to drawing from his punishment something of use for himself or his fellow citizens, for the law of punishment is a categorical imperative (Kant 1797: 105). Kant continues, stating that ‘accordingly, whatever undeserved evil you inflict upon another within the people, that you inflict on yourself’ (1797: 105).

Dating back to the gladiator combats of Ancient Rome, public death and executions served as socio-cultural forums, frequently tasked with uniting communities, and providing social rituals whereby community members could reflect on social and moral values. Music played an often vital role in such social gatherings; gladiator spectacles often opened with processions led by musicians playing trumpets, cymbals and the remarkable hydraulis (water organ), and continued to accompany during and in between the fights (Wisdom 2001: 42-61). Medieval punishment practices were similarly grounded on community ritual, with music playing a seemingly innocuous yet fundamental role.

The stocks and the pillory were two of the most widely-used forms of physical punishment that occurred across Europe and the United States. Both devices were used from the medieval period through to the nineteenth century as a form of public spectacle primarily to punish the petty crimes of ordinary men and women. Humiliation and physical pain were the key features of these devices, as both the stocks and pillory consisted of specially crafted wooden or metal boards containing holes for head and hands, and usually located outdoors in such public places as crossroads, marketplaces and elevated platforms in town squares. Crowds of common people would flock to these spectacles and were openly invited to jeer and shout.
insults, spit, and pelt victims with dead animals, offal, rotten food, and excrement. Such acts of violence were undertaken through the agents of the state, and grounded in religious rhetoric surrounding the concept of hell; carrying out such publicly painful acts was justified in the belief that by doing so, one was in essence saved from the burning fires of eternal hell (Bending 2000). Physical punishment and retribution were permitted to be inflicted upon offenders as they merely mirror the relationship between God and mankind, and pain and suffering formed a crucial part of medieval Christian teaching, further serving as a way to purge oneself of evil sins in order to enter the next life.  

Based on artistic and legal historical accounts, Herzfeld-Schild examined the medieval practices of punishment that utilised music. In her study on musical instruments for punishment in the Middle Ages, she describes one painting in particular detail – Pieter Bruegel the Elder’s 1559 work entitled the Netherlandish Proverbs. This large-scale oil-on-panel painting by the Flemish artist depicts over 100 different visualisations of folk metaphors, idioms and proverbs commonly in use during the sixteenth century, and can be deemed a legal iconographic source. Among these various illustrations is a man imprisoned on a pillory, playing an instrument that bears resemblance to a violin, thus alluding to the Medieval proverb ‘he plays on the pillory’ (Herzfeld-Schild 2013: 14). This old adage relates to a specific kind of punishment used in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Era, where felons had to wear symbolic musical instruments, usually wooden or iron ‘neck violins’ or ‘neck flutes.’

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It is important to note at this point that although there is not space in this overview to examine the present reality that many practices of public humiliation, discipline, and public executions continue to exist in many parts of the world. Lashing, whipping, and caning are enforced in some former British territories, and in many Islamic countries under Sharia law, and self-flagellation is publically practiced among some Roman Catholic extremists in the Philippines and Mexico. Despite the more widespread move towards ‘humane’ executions, beheading, firing squad, hanging, stoning, the gas chamber and (botched) lethal injections, remain in use in various countries, and in tandem with the rise in social media activists and citizen journalists, images from capital punishment frequently, and freely, circulate through the mediasphere.
while being pilloried through the streets in order to be humiliated in public. Such illustrations and historical documents suggest that ‘these punishment practices originally date back to a more ancient use of real instruments in a penal system that was applied and understood as a “healing punishment” (\textit{poena medicinalis}) to banish the ill and re-establish the good in the delinquent, the community and the world as a whole due to musical sounds’ (Herzfeld-Schild 2013: 14). Tellingly, this research points towards an historical ideology where specific punishments were meted out for specific crimes using music as a form of mockery on perpetrators, and where societal order is restored through a kind of symbolic re-enactment performance, and where sounds, symbolic or real, emanated not from the punisher but from the punished themselves (Herzfeld-Schild 2013: 14-22). Thus cultural and historical ideas of music – by means of real or symbolic instruments – and the performance of the \textit{punished} rather than the punisher, have been apparent for quite some time, and serve to solidify music’s crucial role in the spectacle of punishment – as a form of humiliation, and as violence itself.

Michel Foucault argues that the public spectacle of torture and punishment served several intended and unintended purposes for society, which can be summarised as follows:

\textbf{Intended purposes:}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Reflecting the violence of the original crime onto the convict’s body for all to see
\item Enacting the revenge upon the convict’s body, which the sovereign seeks for having been injured by the crime
\end{enumerate}

\textbf{Unintended consequences:}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Providing a forum for the convict’s body to become a locus of sympathy and admiration
\item Creating a site of conflict between the masses and the sovereign at the convict’s body
\end{enumerate}
The ritualised nature of public punishments (from the tortuous to the executions) often exceeded the sovereign’s intended purpose by inciting empathy and respect from spectators. Other times sites of public punishment led to riots in support of the convict. Dwight Conquergood’s attentive writing on performance and punishment in penal institutions also traces the medieval approach to public punishment of convicted criminals. He argues that through the theatricality and spectacle of the scaffolds, audiences were encouraged to identify deeply with the convicts as fellow human beings and sinners. Conquergood describes the expected reactions of spectators at the scaffold as follows:

They [the audience] did not shrink in moral revulsion from even the most despised and heinous criminals. The typical response was ‘there but for the grace of God, go I.’ […] This way of seeing encouraged a deeply sympathetic, theatrical identification in which the spectators could imaginatively exchange places with the condemned, instead of holding themselves aloof in distanced judgment. The ideal spectator at executions became a deeply engaged, co-performative witness (Conquergood 2002: 351).

The format and formality of public execution rituals served to create a kind of ‘ideal spectator,’ a way of seeing that encouraged audiences to be deeply sympathetic and identify as the criminals themselves. As sovereigns across Europe began to lose their power to more impersonal forms of government, power was ‘exercised in the name of society as a whole and was legitimised as being in defence of society’ (Burkitt 2008: 89). By the nineteenth century, such acts of public violence decreased as the state’s next form of punishment was born – the prison.

As the above account details, penal systems, as we know them today, followed a long tradition of violence and public torture towards convicts. Michel Foucault presents a detailed account of the contrasts between modern and premodern approaches to punishment starting with the politically ritualistic, ceremonious nature of public torture and executions, where the body was the locus of punishment, to the
shift to a ‘gentler’ and more ‘civilised’ way of punishment through imprisonment. By
the nineteenth century public hangings, pillories and stocks were no longer necessary,
as prison systems slowly became an omnipresent force for policing the population.
The beating and whipping of offenders moved indoors so that on the surface,
punishment appeared to ‘progress,’ and become more ‘gentle,’ though not for
humanitarian reasons. Reformists were unhappy with the unpredictable, unevenly
distributed nature of the violence that the sovereign would focus on the body of the
convict, Foucault argues. Because the sovereign’s right to punish was so
disproportionate, it was ultimately ineffective and uncontrolled. Thus, such changes in
penal history served ‘not to punish less, but to punish better’ (Foucault 1977: 80).
Punishments were no longer expected to be acts of revenge against the criminal’s
body, but instead now measured against the weight of the crime. The theatre of public
torture gave way to public chain gangs, and out of this movement towards widespread
punishment, a thousand ‘mini-theatres’ of punishment were created wherein the
convicts’ bodies were put on display in a more ubiquitous, controlled, and effective
spectacle (Foucault 1977: 29-31). Foucault categorises the changes in penal history
into four key transitions, which are summarised as follows:

1. Punishment is no longer a public display, a spectacular demonstration to
   all of the sovereign’s irresistible *force majeure*, but instead a discrete,
   almost embarrassed application of constraints needed to preserve public
   order
2. What is punished is no longer the crime but the criminal, the concern of
   the law being not so much what criminals have done as what
   (environment, heredity, parental actions) has led them to do it
3. Those who determine the precise nature of and duration of the
   punishment are no longer the judges who impose penalties in conformity
   with the law, but the ‘experts’ who decide how to implement
   indeterminate judicial sentences
4. The avowed purpose of punishment is no longer retribution (either to
   deter others or for the sake of pure justice) but the reform and
   rehabilitation of the criminal (Gutting 2005: 80).
The transformation from judges to ‘experts,’ who include psychiatrists, social
workers, and parole boards, to hand down sentences, in conjunction with the new,
self-declared purpose of punishment as an act of self-amelioration marked a drastic
change in the history of discipline and punishment. As a result, prisoners were forced
to do work that reflected their crime, thereby balancing the books by repaying society
for their infractions. This allowed the public to witness the convicts’ bodies enacting
their punishment, enabling both convict and audience to reflect upon the crime. For
Foucault, ‘the body becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a
subjected body’ (1977: 26), and as such the ‘useful force’ of the body is wholly
dependent on the productivity of said body. The capitalist economy turned bodies into
objects that can be easily ruled by those in power, from princes to prison guards.

Questions regarding the scale of microscopic discipline over the active body
became imperative as the state gave birth to a new ‘mechanics of power.’ ‘The body
was entering a machinery of power,’ wrote Foucault, describing power’s subjection of
the body as a machine that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it. This ‘political
anatomy’ established

how one may have a hold over others’ bodies, not only so that they may do
what one wishes, but also that they may operate as one wishes, with the
techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines. Thus discipline

The shift from brutal physical punishment to less painful, more intrusive
psychological control over the inmate signalled the beginning of the modern age for
prisons, where control of the soul is the ultimate goal. This change in psychological
attitudes controls bodily behaviour. The ubiquitous influence of the Christian
ideology saw the public perception of God shift from the forceful, vengeful God to
the loving, nurturing father figure, which led to legislative changes in private corporal
punishments during the nineteenth century.
The origins of punishment on criminals being used as a forum for public spectacle has been written about extensively (Foucault 1977; Brown 2009; Roth 2010), and such theories have proved especially enlightening in viewing how CPDRC’s *Thriller* might represent a return to theatrical forms of punishment that focus on the prisoners’ bodies. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975) provides a cogent argument to help understand how the ‘dancing inmates’ of CPDRC operate in terms of penal control, displays of discipline and public punishment. Foucault’s ‘docile bodies’, it would seem, have become the key feature of the CPDRC performances, as I elaborate in more detail in the following section.

**Discipline and Control in the CPDRC performances**

Extraordinary levels of control are involved in creating a YouTube video like this – and prisons are first and foremost spaces of control. Many early CPDRC videos uploaded onto YouTube feature extended introductions preceding the dance routines, wherein Garcia seizes the opportunity to introduce audiences, live and imagined, to the most prominent inmates – usually those charged with the most severe crimes such as multiple murder,97 or the lead dancers performing the role of Michael Jackson and his on-screen girlfriend, Ola Ray. Using a microphone amplified by the prison speakers, inmates must say their name and the offence they have been charged of. In news reports and interviews as well as during live and mediated performances themselves, Byron Garcia introduces prominent inmates to the audience by their name, and also by their offence and duration of the sentence that they will serve at

97 See, for example, the 2009 CPDRC performance of ‘Grease Lightening’, held on the third anniversary of a shooting between feuding gangs. The video opens with a lengthy monologue by Byron Garcia, where he explains his rehabilitation philosophy and impetus behind initiating the CPDRC programme, including the Shawshank Redemption inspiration anecdote: ““Grease Lightening” (The Dance starts at 6.40 view description)”, uploaded by byronfgarcia. Available at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KACFo5V73ro>
CPDRC. Prisoners are presented as people, but are permanently associated with their (alleged) crime. It seems to make no difference that they are awaiting trial and technically innocent until proven guilty of a criminal act: their (possible) crimes are inscribed and affixed to their names, and especially, their faces. Thus it is perhaps no surprise that Garcia imparts an ideology that reflects aspects of Foucault’s theories on modern penology, such as the desire to impart to the viewer a visual lesson in morality.

_Murderers on the Dancefloor_, a 2008 twenty-three minute documentary based on the CPDRC, reveals the extent of the surveillance and control enacted in CPDRC. The documentary opens by connecting CPDRC inmates with the most violent crimes, as the voiceover announces, ‘Cebu Detention Centre is a maximum security prison, meaning 70 per cent of the inmates are here on murder or rape charges’ (McCarthy 2008). Garcia, interviewed by director Sarah McCarthy, steadily articulates his achievements: ‘What I did is something that you only see in the movies,’ he affirms in all seriousness. ‘I have put a true meaning, in the real sense of the word, of jailhouse rock’ (McCarthy 2008). Interviews with the inmates highlight their lack of consent in Garcia’s YouTube broadcasts, most pointedly displayed in an interview with lead dancer Wienjiel Resane who states that ‘We didn’t know that Mr. Byron put it on the internet and that it became so popular’ until reporters began arriving at the facility requesting interviews with the star dancers (Journeyman Pictures 2007).

Discussing his reasons for choosing the song ‘Thriller’ for the inmates to perform, Garcia draws from a history of retributive rhetoric, fused with contemporary prison culture. He asserts his intended purposes as follows:

I saw in the lyrics and video of Thriller much of what jail culture is like…
The Dancing Inmates come as themselves. People perceived to be evil…

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98 For a discvisual representation of discipline and punishment see Chapter Two, part two, interview with Crisanto Niere in Pepe Diokno’s documentary _Dancing for Discipline_ (2008).
What I wanted inmates to do in dancing to the Thriller was for them to be convicted to sin. When I uploaded this on the YouTube, what I wanted viewers to see is how evil dances in our lives without knowing its deathly consequences (Garcia 2007).

Garcia ascribes the alleged violence of the inmates crimes onto their bodies, conflating unconvicted men as men perceived to be ‘evil’ and therefore ‘convicted to sin,’ acting as judge, jury and executioner within the most ubiquitous and public platform available in the 21st century – YouTube. Inmates perform Thriller perhaps as rehabilitation, as Garcia attests, but in dancing the Thriller as a metaphor for their perceived wrongdoings, thus repaying the state for their purported transgressions.99

The idea of public spectacle on a global scale is difficult to ignore in this case. It would seem that to the majority of YouTube users watching Thriller (and certainly to the live audience watching from behind the bars of the CPDRC viewing towers) that these performances are explicitly coerced, if not forced upon all fifteen hundred prisoners, regardless of age or (alleged) conviction.100 Flouting the detainees alleged crimes and inscribing them ‘in sin’ in such a public manner certainly invites what Foucault designates ‘unintended consequences.’ A number of user comments elicit sympathy in favour of the inmates, as Foucault warned us, yet in contrast a greater number of comments are greeted with public derision. YouTube’s open access offers international audiences to leave comments of admiration and concern, as the inmate’s body becomes a locus of transferred emotion. And still, presented as it is on YouTube, alongside Vevo’s official music videos of Michael Jackson’s back catalogue, and millions of user-generated cat videos, the CPDRC’s performance of

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99 See Chapter Four for a more detailed discussion of Thriller’s musical and cultural impact.
100 There are many questions regarding how CPDRC operates the dance programme; as Filipino politician and activist Mong Palatino asks: ‘Do prisoners have the right to refuse if they are chosen to be part of the dancing group? Do they receive compensation? If they stopped dancing, will prison reforms also stop? [Michael] Jackson fans are impressed with the disciplined dance moves of the prisoners but we should ask if prisoners are punished if they commit mistakes during the practice sessions.’ Palatino. (2010). ‘The Dancing Prisoners of Cebu’, Relativity OnLine: Revealing the Multiplicity of Perspective. <http://www.relativityonline.com/home/the-dancing-prisoners-of-cebu/>
Thriller video is widely perceived as a quick click, and few minutes respite from an otherwise banal day in the office. Therefore, as I will argue in more depth in the following chapters, CPDRC’s Thriller’s pop-music-video appearance means it is not generally viewed as a site of conflict between the masses and the state, but rather as a form of mass entertainment.

Despite CPDRC’s Thriller pop exterior, in a manner akin to the medieval ‘playing on the pillory,’ Garcia has constructed a 21st century mini-theatre of punishment wherein the inmates’ bodies are first and foremost put on display in the most controlled and effective spectacle. This contemporary mini-theatre of punishment is then projected online, through YouTube, and as such the CPDRC ‘replaces bodily pain with performance rehearsals, and redistributes public responsibility online to discursively reinscribe and bring criminals to justice’ (Perillo 2011: 610). In the CPDRC performances, dance performance is pitched in opposition to punishing the inmates’ physical body, and discipline is shown physically through controlling corporeality. The type of discipline we witness in CPDRC’s Thriller was born at the precise moment when the inmates’ bodies became obedient in responding to the choreographer’s instructions in the prison yard. The dance routines, but more importantly their mediation, represent a shift from disciplinary societies, as Deleuze contends, but the result is a ‘move towards control societies that no longer operate by confining people but through continuous control and instant communication’ (1992: 3-7). This is crucial in relation to CPDRC, as the benefits of exposing prisoners to pop music and dance, as well as widespread fame and (mis-)fortune through their commercial spectacle, must be considered as part of a wider inclination towards new, open forms of punishment that are being introduced ‘without a critical understanding (of) what is happening’ (Murphy, Peters & Margison 2010: 355). As a result, the
inmates become useful to the prison warden’s requirements and thus enacted the quintessential modernist approach to discipline, producing what Foucault designates ‘docile bodies’: bodies that not only do what we want but do it precisely in the way that we want (1977: 138). The individual bodily behavior of each inmate, their posture, demeanour, clothing, footwear – every movement they make – is governed by Garcia’s (and by extension, the Philippine state) rules and regulations. Accordingly, through their embodied performance, the inmates have become ‘subjected and practiced bodies’ (138), that embody the very essence of docility. The act of surveillance over inmates creates a power-relation, with the ‘gaoler made the watcher, the holder of knowledge, and the prisoner induced to enact the corresponding role of the watched’ (Counsell & Wolf 2001: 127). This power-relation impacts directly on the behaviour of the inmate, ‘for in “disciplining” their activity in accordance with knowledge’s conception of them, individuals inscribe power on their own bodies, in effect performing hegemonic models of the human subject’ (Counsell & Wolf 2011: 127). There is no power relation without the ‘correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations’ (Foucault 1977: 27), and thus the body, power, knowledge, and performance are inextricably linked.

Measured in YouTube hits, tourist’s photographs and international news reports, Garcia’s programme is deemed by many to be successful. After the ‘Algorithm March’ evolved into intricately choreographed, mandatory routines, Garcia reports that prison violence subsided, the inmates’ health improved and recidivism rates dramatically decreased (Seno 2008). However neither the CPDRC nor the Cebu government have validated such statements with quantifiable evidence to verify these claims. Press interviews with Byron Garcia, (former) Governor
Gwendolyn Garcia, and one or two sanctioned, lead-dancing inmates that defend to
the media Garcia’s belief that mandatory dance is in opposition to forceful forms of
incarceration. Indeed, Garcia consistently denies any claims of abuse towards the
inmates in forcing them all to participate in the routines, stating in a 2007 interview
that ‘Nobody forces them [the inmates]. They dance because they want to dance’
(Campbell 2007). Garcia implies that dancing to pop anthems is accepted as a natural
form of expression for incarcerated men and women in the Philippines.

Dance, Discipline, and Docility at CPDRC

If you ask a military man what is there sign of courtesy, their sign of courtesy is
a salute, right? So now, we made it such a point that this physical fitness
program will be the sign of their discipline – through dance (Garcia qtd in
Diokno 2008).

As detailed in part two of Chapter Two, after a series of violent incidents unsettled the
wardens at the previously overcrowded CPDRC, Cebu Governor Gwen Garcia
appointed her brother Byron as Security Consultant to the facility in 2006. The
newcomer to prison employment was given free reign to restore discipline and control
to the prison. Byron Garcia initiated a mandatory calisthenics regime that was only
met with success when music was added – initially a compilation of his favourite
1980s and 90s pop songs. Played over six loudspeakers across the prison yard, the
sounds of Queen, the Village People, Soulja Boy and Flo Rida enticed inmates to clap
and move together in time to the beat (See Figure 3.4). Delighted with the results,
Garcia recorded the rehearsing waves of orange dancers with a view to share his
experiments and his idea with other prison officials. Using his personal channel and

101 At the time of writing (May 2013), Gwendolyn Garcia is suspended from office since December
2012; therefore permission to visit the CPDRC facility in December 2012-January 2013 was granted by
then Acting Governor Agnes Magpale.
102 The ‘inherently musical Filipino/a’ stereotype is explored further in part one of Chapter Two.
103 See Appendix II for complete list of CPDRC ‘Dancing Inmates’ videos that Byron Garcia has made
public through YouTube, from the first posting in 2006 until his departure from the CPDRC mid-2010.

![Figure 3.4](image)

*Figure 3.4. A photograph of the extra reinforcement brought in to bolster CPDRC’s musical amplification (including a live drum kit) during a live performance in honour of Filipino boxer (and politician) Manny Pacquiao’s visit to the facility in January 2014. (Source: CPDRC Inmates Facebook page)*

Official choreographers from outside the prison were hired thereafter, and several homemade videos followed including routines to songs from the musical-film *Sister Act* and Pink Floyd, so that by the time ‘Thriller’ was uploaded, Garcia had a firm understanding of the communicative potential that this new media platform, YouTube, held. More than the exercise or the physical movement of dance, Garcia attributes the power of music as the platform to reach the inmates’ ‘inner-psyches’.
Using his YouTube channel as a platform to explain his philosophy, Garcia describes his belief that ‘therapeutic music and dance is meant to help prisoners cope with their depression and anxiety, improve their wellbeing as they go through a transition phase and reintegrate to society’. Garcia’s manifesto continues:

Music is a protocol to heal them of emotional and psychological disorders and trauma as a result of the offense or incarceration. Because penology practices make living hell in jails, the tendency is we breed next generation demons when they are discharged. If prisoners are healed while in prison, then we make them better persons when they are released and stay away from crime (Garcia 2006).

Here Garcia affirms his belief that first and foremost, all inmates are convicted in sin, and secondly, that his programme ‘heals’ inmates and absolves them of their sins through the familiar trope of the therapeutic power of pop music – a statement he reaffirms in countless media interviews. Yet, as previously stated, to date no official reports confirm exactly how the programme has healed inmates, nor how and if it actually reduces recidivism rates. Instead, through the calculated dance routines Garcia attempts to rid the inmates of their criminal ways through disciplinary training and instil in them an air of an enlightened member of society instead. He moulds the inmates, training them in acts of discipline and control of following strict and detailed orders, so they can be released back to society as noticeably changed, ‘better persons,’ that somehow through disciplined dancing they have become ‘reformed,’ ‘honest beings.’ Garcia is clear in his connection between using music and dance to shape the prisoners, physically and mentally, into upright citizens who will uphold Philippine law. Such description of the inmates echoes the eighteenth-century militaristic creation of a soldier. According to the Ordinance of 20 March 1764, a soldier was seen as something that can be made,

out of a formless clay, an inept body, the machine required can be constructed; posture is gradually corrected; a calculated constraint runs slowly through each part of the body, mastering it, making it pliable, ready at all times,
turning silently into the automatism of habit; in short, one has ‘got rid of the peasant’ and given him ‘the air of a soldier’ (Ordinance of 20 March 1764; qtd in Foucault 1977: 135).

Through compelling dance performances to familiar, popular songs, inmates are believed to be reconstructed individuals. Through the action of repeated, daily dance, bodies undergo tangible, corporeal changes. Accordingly at CPDRC, physical posture has been corrected, and a calculated constraint now run through each part of their bodies so that it is pliable and ready at all times to obey the choreographers command. In short, through dance one has got rid of their criminal, peasant, social waste status, and replaced it with the air of authority akin to a soldier. At CPDRC, dance is clearly utilised to separate inmates from their allegedly criminal pasts and thus recondition them into absolute, functioning citizens.

Many scholars have connected the relationship between exercise and positive behavior in penal institutions. International medical and therapeutic publications provide much evidence that exercise can improve people’s physiological and psychological health, particularly that of older people or those currently inactive (Callaghan 2004: 476-83). One study on the relationship between physical exercise, acute and chronic illnesses, and mental well-being specifically in a penal institution was conducted on 914 prisoners in New South Wales, Australia. This study revealed that there is a great need to include exercise as a factor in inmate health plans, due to the unquestionable benefits of exercise (Cashin, Potter & Butler 2008: 66-71). There appears to be an explicit correlation between emotion and mass. The mood improvement of certain inmates who participate in exercise is clearly stated, and when that mood in more than one person is changed, it can have more drastic effects. As performance scholar Richard Schechner notes, when moods are practiced in large groups or mass spectacles, the physical enactments of emotion, or what he designates ‘mood displays’ (anger, enthusiasm, joy, etc.), are transformative when the mood
changes in more than one individual. For Schechner, these mood displays change character,

when they are ritualised into mass actions such as spectator sports, political rallies, or militarised parades; then individual expression rigidifies, is channeled into exaggerated, rhythmically co-ordinated, repetitive actions, while emphasis shifts from the free expression of feeling to an evocation and channeling of aggression for the benefit of the sponsor: the team, corporation, politician, religion, party, or state (Schechner 1988: 249).

At its most fundamental level, dance is an expressive form of exercise that releases endorphins, activating the body’s opiate receptors to act as an analgesic, which can cause a sense of euphoria in participants.

The addition of music to forms of exercise, is also proven to greatly enhance the positive attributes felt by exercise alone, and as expected, embodied movement without music is not sufficient to restore ‘inept' bodies. Music is added to the physical movements of CPDRC’s inmates, and serves to ‘penetrate their psyche’ (Garcia qtd in Ortigas 2007). Music further assuages inmates as a tool of distraction, taking their minds off their impending trials, as Garcia confirms: ‘Inmates say to me: “You have put my mind off revenge, foolishness, or thinking how to escape”’ (BBC News 2007). Garcia also credits music as part of a wider holistic, therapeutic, process, as a form of music therapy to help the inmates reintegrate into society after the trauma of their detention and/or their criminal activities. These features are not necessarily mutually exclusive, of course, as the act of dance is widely understood as a pleasurable pastime that increases fitness levels and general wellbeing. The benefits of moving together in time with others, what William McNeill designates ‘muscular bonding’ (1995: 2), is also proven to produce euphoric feelings of belonging, including among prison populations (Cashin, Potter & Butler 2008: 66-71).

In describing the positive, euphoric effects that marching in unison can have on a soldier during times of trial, McNeill draws from his personal experience of
service after being drafted into the army of the United States in 1941. In his book *Keeping Together in Time: Dance and Drill in Human History*, war historian McNeill argues that the act of physically moving in time with others was an intrinsic source of good in the life of a soldier. He explains,

> Words are inadequate to describe the emotion aroused by the prolonged movement in unison that drilling involved. A sense of pervasive well-being is what I recall; more specifically, a strange sense of personal enlargement; a sort of swelling out, becoming bigger than life, thanks to participation in collective ritual. [...] Moving briskly and keeping in time was enough to make us feel good about ourselves, satisfied to be moving together and vaguely pleased with the world at large (1995: 2).

He continues, describing how the rhythmic input from muscles and voice after ‘gradually suffusing through the entire nervous system, may provoke echoes of the fetal condition when a major and perhaps principal external stimulus to the developing brain was the mother’s heartbeat’ (1995: 7). Thus, for McNeill, he imagines that the action of dancing in time to music, both a rhythmic beat of a drum and/or the sound of the human voice, might arouse in adults something like the ‘state of consciousness they left behind in infancy, when psychologists seem to agree that no distinction is made between self and surroundings’ (1995: 7). Yet the connection between marching together in time and embodied discipline in action remains foregrounded, and does not escape the attention of CPDRC audiences. Initial feedback from audiences of the CPDRC dance performances equated their choreographed dance with intrinsic discipline, as YouTube viewers remarked on the performances as acts of discipline (See Appendix IV). One viewer in particular observed that the dances were ‘a marvelous show of discipline.’ Philippine Roman Catholic Cardinal Archbishop Vidal continues, ‘If only they had practiced that (discipline) in their lives, they wouldn’t be here’ (Sun Star 2007). The Archbishop, along with a significant number of CPDRC’s YouTube audiences, clearly associate
choreographed movements to pop songs with an essential, positive character reformation.

The transfer from an individual expression of emotion to the channelling of an idea for the benefit of an institutional ideology is explicitly evident in the CPDRC performances. Louis Althusser asserts that ideology is reproduced in familiar, apparently benign institutions that are part of everyday social life. He argues that the primary purpose behind ideology is the formation of individuals as ‘social subjects’ (Althusser in Counsell & Wolf 2001: 33). He continues by describing the different institutions that form what he designates ‘Ideological State Apparatuses’ (ISAs), which he contrasts with the repressive state apparatuses that include the government, the police, the courts, and noticeably, the prisons. These state apparatuses are repressive, Althusser suggests, because they function ‘by violence’ in both physical or non-physical forms, and therefore they are different to the Ideological State Apparatus, which ‘function “by ideology”’ (Counsell & Wolf 2001: 36). The ordered dance performances and shows of discipline at CPDRC inherently support the ethos of the detention centre, and by extension, the ethos of a correctional facility (despite the inmates’ status of presumed innocence), and thus the CPDRC creates ‘social subjects’ out of the incarcerated individuals. They voice the shared values of Garcia and his administration, ranging from decided political statements (e.g. the ‘innocent,’ finale Sinulog performance of ‘Mabuhi ang Sugbuanon’ featuring a cameo.

104 It is worth reproducing here Byron Garcia’s elucidation from his YouTube page explaining the impetus behind this particular performance of ‘Mabuhi ang Sugbuanon’ (Cebuano, Long Live Cebu!) in a YouTube video titled: ‘Mabuhi ka GWEN.’ Garcia writes: ‘My innocent plan for my sister to dance with the inmates on her birthday would somehow set another world record. It was a unique way of celebrating her birthday. The dynamic Governor Gwendolyn Garcia celebrated her birthday in dance – not with a dance instructor – but with prison inmates. It was like a scenario of a swan dancing with lions, a peacock prancing with wolves or a princess romancing with a beast. This is yet a phenomenon that no official of the land has ever done worldwide, ever since. For where in the world has there ever been a government official danced [sic] with 1,500 hardened criminals? A criminal by any name is still a criminal, a prisoner by any name is still a prisoner and a governor by any name is still a governor. For a governor to be seen in the company of prisoners, dancing and enjoying herself is no movie. It is no
appearance from Cebu governmental head Governor Gwen Garcia dancing the leading role, to the inmates performance of Bonnie Tyler’s Eighties hit ‘I Need a Hero’ that was prefaced by Garcia’s spoken dedication to all ‘peace heroes,’\textsuperscript{105} to explicit religious statements (e.g. ‘Gregorian Chant’ featuring a Roman Catholic mass service conducted by Philippine Cardinal Vidal, with the inmates bodies choreographed to form a large, crucifix formation).\textsuperscript{106} Since Garcia took control of CPDRC as Chief Security Official in 2006, I assert that the prison has undergone a transformation from an overtly (repressive) state apparatus, that is, one based on corrupt guards, violent and drug addicted inmates, to something more akin to Althusser’s Ideological State Apparatus, one where Garcia’s carefully constructed new rehabilitation programme functions by means of a benign, almost invisible authoritarian outlook. Indeed CPDRC remains a detention centre, and therefore according to Althusser’s theory, it continues to be a repressive state apparatus. But the dance programme, which is generally regarded as positive and rehabilitative in Filipino and international media, retains an underlying ideological element that is often overlooked or simply disregarded. Even so, perhaps this shift from an institution based on violence to what it is today marks the real revolutionary change that is noticed by audiences in CPDRC. The inmates’ physical movements embodies their remoulding as social subjects, and thus what is normally invisible in the outside world, this shaping of human subjects, is made visible within CPDRC and beyond through YouTube videos.

\textsuperscript{105} Their performance to ‘I Need a Hero’ was decorated with home-made banners adorned with pictures of Mahatma Gandhi, Albert Einstein, Pope John Paul II, Mother Teresa, Nelson Mandela, Dalai Lama, Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, Aung San Suu Kyi, and Anne Frank. See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fDdPuCsOLaQ

\textsuperscript{106} See YouTube video ‘Gregorian chant 2’: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YYnzL5IuK3M
‘Born Digital’: Therapy, Thanatourism and the Digital Panopticon

The degree of civilisation in a society can be judged by entering its prisons (Dostoyovsky 1862).

As I detail in Chapter Two, on the one hand the choreographed dance programme may be understood as extensions of existing Filipino and Cebuano music and dance traditions. On the other hand, the programme is frequently cited as a music and/or dance therapeutic programme, or as Garcia designates a ‘clinical breakthrough’ (Garcia 2009) that unites the arts with science and criminology in a developing economy. In the strictest sense, to call such a programme ‘music therapy’ and a ‘clinical breakthrough’ is disingenuous, not least because of a lack of empirical evidence to support Garcia’s claims of rehabilitative success and reduced recidivism rates. The original programme bears little resemblance to conventions of Western somatic, expressive, and rehabilitative Music Therapy or Dance/Movement therapy, undertaken under the rigorous guidelines of a trained therapist, and always voluntary. In essence, Music and Dance/Movement therapy programmes in prisons may appear, by definition, contradictory – forcing another form of control over inmates within the confines of a strictly controlled detention centre. However, the very concept of agency remains a vital component to any therapeutic activity.

It remains unclear exactly how long participation in the programme has been optional rather than forced. Discussions with prison officials in January 2013 explain that at that point, inmate participation in the dance programme was optional. However it was initially mandatory, and appears to have continued to be mandatory until Garcia’s dismissal from CPDRC in 2010. Moreover it is unclear the extent to which participation in the dance programme is without any form of inherent coercion. On the one hand Garcia proudly reported how inmates wanted to dance, how it was ‘natural’ for them. Yet on the other hand, as mentioned in Chapter Two, several
former inmates have claimed they were subject to withdrawal of food, refused prisoner rights such as conjugal visits, and even physical abuse for non-participation in the dance programme (Galang 2007; Hunte 2007; McCarthy 2008; Israel 2010).

In some reports, Garcia is seen openly mocking the inmates for dancing – half-jokingly, half-seriously, but all the while disconcerting. ‘The faggots – look at them,’ he says in one interview, pointing to the prison yard where inmate Wenjiel Resane is dancing. ‘Hey, look at the faggots everyone!’ he bellows into the microphone in Cebuano, laughing away to himself (Garcia qtd in Diokno 2008; See Appendix VI).

Sharing videos of the Dancing Inmates with a global audience without permission denies the inmates’ right to privacy, and is in direct opposition to even the most fundamental therapeutic regulations. The Web 2.0 technology that enables communicative, social networking features such as YouTube comments enables the inmates’ objectification by Garcia as well as an infinite number of anonymous viewers. Accordingly we must be mindful of encroaching into exploitative territory. Through YouTube and various other new media platforms (such as blogs, social-networking sites, and photo-sharing galleries), the inmates’ identities as incarcerated men and women have been globally disseminated without their permission. User-generated videos and holiday photographs of the inmates’ live performances continue to be distributed electronically. Furthermore such images of the inmates enjoy an afterlife that extends far beyond their time served in detention, adding to popular culture’s ever increasing fascination with prison culture and criminology.

The allure of prison culture is only too evident today, across various media (and genre) platforms. The start of this chapter made reference to the recent American television series *Homeland* and Academy Award winning film *Zero Dark Thirty*,

...
which are just two of the more recent examples of the internationally popular media
set behind bars – that, simultaneously, make subtle and overt reference to the role of
music and sound in imprisonment. Soon after CPDRC’s *Thriller* achieved viral
success, Garcia capitalised on the requests for live performances that the dancing
inmates received (as detailed in Chapter Two). In Pepe Diokno’s 2008 documentary
on the CPDRC inmates, financed by USAID and the Asia Foundation, Garcia reveals
the extent of the response to *Thriller*. One unnamed Philippine company, Garcia says,
made a ‘donation’ of PHP ₱160,000 (over GBP £2,000) to let their employees visit
the facility and view the ‘dancing prisoners’ (Diokno 2008). Later in the same
documentary, Garcia announces the news of the forthcoming live performance to the
inmates, proclaiming that

Many companies want to come here and watch you. This is going to become a
tourist destination! Beware if you stop dancing… If you stop dancing, we won’t
get any money (Garcia qtd in Diokno 2008).

Garcia shares with the inmates their national popularity, and transfers to them a sense
of pride in commanding the interests of a prosperous company. Yet what happened to
the PHP ₱160,000 – whether it went on improving prison amenities, was divided
among the inmates, or pocketed by the prison staff, remains a mystery yet to be
solved. What is clear, however, is how lucrative prison tourism and penal
performance can be.

CPDRC’s growing reputation as a tourist attraction for the island of Cebu
follows several other prisons that have opened their doors to allow the public access
to this ‘Other’ world. Sites of ‘dark tourism’ or thanatourism\(^\text{107}\) include historic
prisons such as Alcatraz, and even former sites of torture such as Auschwitz-
Birkenau, Robben Island and Tuol Sleng, which receive millions of visitors each year.

\(^{107}\) ‘Dark tourism’ or ‘thanatourism’ is defined by Philip R. Stone as ‘the act of travel and visitation to
sites, attractions and exhibitions which have real or recreated death, suffering or the seemingly macabre
as a main theme’ (Stone 2006).
As a form of thanatourism (or kitsch pop music entertainment), CPDRC functions as an addition to the multiple contemporary mediations of prison culture, and in doing so, exemplifying the growing trend in popular cultures’ obsession with prisons. Even the most cursory glance at mainstream media reveals the extent to which the number of films, television series, documentaries, websites, videogames, toys, fashion and tourist destinations that celebrate themes of punishment and retribution is increasing in frequency (Novek 2009: 376-84). Prison rodeo shows, for example, involving select inmates competing against each other and some 2000-pound bulls for a nominal cash prize, have a rich legacy in various (southern) states in the United States. The Angola Prison Rodeo at Louisiana’s State Penitentiary was established fifty years ago as a ‘fun’ event by a handful of rodeo-loving inmates and employees, and has now become a highly lucrative business. Year-on-year increases in public curiosity lead to an expansion of their specially built arena in 2000, to now accommodate 10,000 spectators.

Former prisons too now operate as accommodation for business and pleasure from the luxuriously refurbished Charles Street Jail in Boston, Massachusetts to the ‘unfriendly, unheated, uncomfortable’ former KGB prison in Latvia. Yet, however puerile paying to stay in jail may seem, the decision to visit a fully functioning jail, with real, living, convicted and non-convicted inmates inside, marks a completely different undertaking than any of the other historical tourist experiences. Recent

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108 Several sources describe the ‘part Wild West show and part coliseum-esque spectacle’ of American prison rodeo: from the all-female Oklahoma State Penitentiary Annual Rodeo show Sweethearts of the Prison Rodeo, to the homage to rodeo history available on the Texas Prison Rodeo official website.

109 Even with the increase in capacity, tickets to the six annual Angola Rodeo are frequently sold out, and patrons complain about the long queues of traffic on the highway leading to the facility. 2009 figures show that the rodeo produced $2,463,822 in revenue, with proceeds purportedly covering rodeo expenses and supplement the Louisiana State Penitentiary Inmate Welfare Fund (Segura 2011).

110 For a nominal fee, one can be treated like an actual prisoner while staying overnight from 9pm to 9am – being subjected to at Karosta Prison in Liepāja, Latvia. See www.karostascietums.lv.

111 Though operating on humanitarian grounds, I point to the actions of charitable groups such as Prisoners Abroad, a UK group who care for incarcerated Britons in foreign prisons. Part of their remit
scholarship on dark-tourism, or ‘thanatourism’ as well as criminology and penology literature reveal the extent of the public’s fascination with criminality through the spectacle of ‘live’ inmates being put on display in contemporary societies. Watching over live, criminal bodies, the real and the fictional, is as lucrative a business as ever.

Surveillance, and the screen, it seems, are the key. At CPDRC, Garcia aligns his success in restoring order to the facility first and foremost through increased surveillance over the inmates. Surveillance cameras were installed in every area of the new CPDRC facility, and these cameras were connected to the Internet. As a result the camera’s footage was accessible through screens in Garcia’s office, home computer monitors or wherever he chooses to log in and to inspect the inmates in any section of the prison (Figure 3.5). The dance programme’s origins, in another reported version of Garcia’s account, came about through closely watching the inmates on these very surveillance screens (Journeyman Pictures 2007). In this report, Garcia claims to have seen the inmates marching in the prison yard through the surveillance camera’s computer screen, and then decided the inmates should be dancing. Therefore, in this version of events at least, the screen plays a most crucial role from the programme’s inception – the entire dance programme was ‘born digital.’

I contend that viewing the inmates through the frame of the computer monitor made possible for Garcia smooth transition into filming and uploading video footage of their dancing, for they were born on screen. From the beginning, the inmates were viewed by Garcia as bodies on a mediated screen – bodies that could be transformed, ordered, and controlled through distinctively hierarchical means.

assists British tourists holidaying in foreign countries to visit a British inmate. Being a ‘prison tourist’ – unsolicitly visiting a stranger in prison – is especially well received by the British embassy in Thailand that oversees visits to Britons in Thai prisons. (See James Hopkirk’s 2005 article ‘Checking into the Bangkok Hilton,’ originally published in the Observer Escape – the newspaper’s weekend supplement: www.theguardian.com/travel/2005/oct/23/thailand.darktourism.observerescapesection

112 Born digital, as the term suggests, refers to material or industries that originate in digital form, e.g. websites – which are inherently digital, to newspapers and sound recordings, which are increasingly digitally presented.
The Foucauldian notion of ‘docile bodies’ once again becomes useful. As discussed earlier, docile bodies are those that are produced through uniquely modern methods, including hierarchical observation, which is based on controlling subjects merely through surveillance. This mode was magnified through Jeremy Bentham’s mid-eighteenth century panoptic prison design that enabled maximum control of inmates by a minimum of staff (Figure 3.6). Panopticon prisons were not put into practice until the 20th century but since then its concept has permeated contemporary society in a variety of situs; from military barracks, lecture halls and hospital rooms, to shopping malls and factory floors. This enables the objects of control to be highly visible with the highest level of visibility reserved for criminals and asylum inmates, while those who exercise power remain somewhat obscured.
Panopticism is based not on the fact of observation but on the constant possibility of being seen. Inmates do not know precisely when the monitor will direct their attention at them, but rather then, they are consciously aware of their permanent visibility, and as such, this ‘assures the automatic functioning of power’ (1977: 201). With primary focus on the visual, the principal of panopticonism gradually spread throughout the world, ‘by the gradual adaptation and diversified application of this single principle, you should see a new scene of things spread itself over the face of civilized society’ (Foucault 1977: 201). Prisons evolved into sites of reform for the body, and more crucially, the soul. Thus while surveillance as a disciplinary technique was not newly invented, instead it became ubiquitous through the small and subtle mechanisms that
‘obeyed economies too shameful to be acknowledged [...] – it was nevertheless they that brought about the mutation of the punitive system, at the threshold of the contemporary period’ (1977: 139). The effects of surveillance transitioned into society at large, resulting in what Giles Deleuze considers to be a move towards societies that ‘no longer operate by confining people but through continuous control and instant communication’ (Deleuze 1992: 3-7). Discipline is without question, as Foucault states, a political act of detail.

In CPDRC, inmates are not only observed in their cells, mealtimes, labour, and family visits, but particularly during their exercise or ‘leisure’ time in the prison yard – the four to six hour daily dance routines. Within the dance rehearsals, a further four-tier security surveillance structure is in place. Firstly, the prison choreographer strictly surveys the dance rehearsals and tutors the inmates from the front of the prison yard, teaching the inmates to count each step while they grow accustomed to the music – music that is often new to some inmates. On the occasion when the routines are more polished, and in the run up to the live performances, the choreographer sits high above the inmates in the panoptic balcony.

Secondly, each section of dancers has an appointed ‘leader’ selected by Garcia – usually a more senior (or bigger) inmate, such as former police officer Leo Suico – who oversees his section and ensures each dancer is in time and in line. Thirdly, an

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113 The first prison choreographer Gwen Lador explained her view that teaching the inmates to dance was easier than getting the routines accurately timed. ‘They know how to dance but they have trouble coordinating with that music, especially if the music is new to them,’ says Lador. ‘You have to practice. You have to count for them.’ (Journeyman Pictures 2007).

114 Two choreographers – Gwen Lador and Vince Rosales – have been employed by the prison since the programme was established, sometimes working together, other times taking rehearsals in shifts. I am grateful to Vince Rosales for detailing the practicalities of establishing the dance programme in a discussion on January 18, 2013.

115 Inmate Leo Suico features prominently in several interviews and video documentaries on the prison; before Garcia took over CPDRC, Suico was addicted to drugs that were smuggled into the facility. As a former member of law enforcement, he was chosen by Garcia to ‘keep everyone in check’ and help Garcia introduce a ‘new system of discipline (…) based on Christian principles’ (Journeyman Pictures 2007).
array of prison guards who align the perimeter of the yard on the ground, and
fourthly, prison warden Garcia and his team watch and supervise each step they take
from high upon the prison watchtowers, occasionally shouting down instructions to
the choreographer or inmates over a microphone connected to the speaker system. In
eyear CPDRC rehearsal videos Garcia can be seen on videos calling out for
choreographic changes, stopping rehearsals to suggest certain prisoners move to the
front of the corps, and appearing smiling whilst singing along to whichever of his
favourite songs is blasting from the prison loudspeakers. It becomes increasingly
apparent that it is not the prisoners experience that is captured on camera and then
globally disseminated, rather we, the YouTube audience, are privy to Garcia’s
panoptic production – Garcia has chosen the soundtrack to their toil; Garcia watches
from above; Garcia records and shares his viewpoint with the world through YouTube
– a unique and elaborate performance of punishment, discipline and control.

What is further apparent from this panoptic experience is the inherent
hierarchy given to a gaze that assumes visibility over audibility. In prioritizing the
panoptic gaze and, as such, overlooking the auditory aspects of the subjects of the
gaze – by cloaking their noise and hiding their individual sounds under Thriller’s high
volume – no such knowledge can be realised. The uni-directionality of the panoptic
gaze is further construed when we consider its aural properties; how the musical
soundtrack, crucially, masks their utterances and silences their voice. The sound-
transmission-system experienced by YouTube audiences forms an additional layer of
observation. Just as the very concept Bentham and Foucault’s panopticon – the
constant, all-seeing eye – is fundamentally fantasy, perhaps a concept of the
panacoustic (Szendy 2007: 32-39) or panauditory (Siisiäinen 2005; 2010) – a
constant, all-hearing ear – can exist only in our collective imagination.
Concluding Considerations: ‘Ambassadors of Goodwill’ and the CPDRC’s lasting legacy

I wanted something to thrill the world. I just found it so hilarious, so melodious. What an irony. They’re right here in this jail, considered the rejects of society, and yet these rejects are now making our province and our country proud (Garcia qtd in Hunte 2007).

Due to the international popularity of the videos, by the end of 2007, eight Filipino prisons had begun adapting Garcia’s dance as rehabilitation. In March 2010, the Philippine government passed legislation to implement the dance programme in all prisons across the Philippines, placing Byron Garcia at the helm of the new ‘Ambassadors of Goodwill’ programme. This new programme featured twelve former dancing inmates, now released from CPDRC and touring the Philippine islands with Garcia, who sometimes appearing alongside in the dual role of programme creator and a kind of troupe ‘manager,’ promoting the CPDRC rehabilitation programme in other Philippine prisons and on daytime television shows.116 The dancing inmates has received numerous accolades, from placing number 5 on Time Magazine’s Top 10 Viral Videos of 2007, to making the shortlist in the ‘Best Caper’ category of the top 100 media moments from 2000-2010 (Geir et al 2009). Garcia’s actions have been singularly recognised and rewarded by international, external sources simultaneously; in April 2011 Garcia won the Second Annual Disruptive Innovator Award at the 10th Tribeca Film Festival in New York.117

As an early Internet viral video, CPDRC’s Thriller’s novelty is relatively easy to decipher. The audiovisual incongruity of watching scores of allegedly hardened

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criminals dancing to pop and disco soundtracks yields potentially comic results. Yet some critics argue that the novelty of the programme simply misses the point. In one media report, criminal justice professor Edward Latessa attests that more appropriate programmes including ‘substance abuse or family reunification programmes should be implemented with such coordination and vigor’ (Ferran 2007) as the dance programme has been initiated. While conditions in the majority of Philippine prisons remain severely overcrowded, and dilapidated, one of the Philippine’s oldest penal facility on the island of Palawan, have implemented a ‘humane’ reeducation, retraining and rehabilitation programme (Agence France-Presse 2014). Iwahig prison is one of the world’s largest open prison’s, whose approach is made possible because of the prison’s vast 64,000 acre plot encompassing coconut groves, fish ponds, corn plantations, vegetable plots, forests and mangroves. These facilities teach inmates life skills they can use once they return to society, as they tend to rice paddies (wielding machetes), learn to farm and be self-sufficient from the land.

At CPDRC, one of the critical issues lies in providing leisure opportunities in the guise of rehabilitation, which ultimately may do more harm than good. Dance, though it helps pass the time and can bring ensuing Internet fame, does not train the majority of inmates in the transferable skills needed to help them restart their lives after release. Thus a boundary between the glorification and humiliation of (suspected) criminals is in danger of being crossed through the CPDRC dance and tourism programme. The commercialisation and Internet mediation of the Dancing Inmates, as well as the live monthly performances in Cebu, becomes dangerous as they run the risk of alienating local Cebuano residents who see alleged perpetrators of crime being celebrated internationally. Families who reside in the area express distaste at the tourist attraction on behalf of the victims of crime. ‘Busing in tourists to
Dangerous Mediations

see [the Dancing Inmates]’, local Mariana Reyes declares, ‘rewards them for the actions that led to their incarceration’ (Alesevich 2013). Although CPDRC inmates are presumed innocent by law, in practice their continued incarceration, often up to six years for a large population of inmates, amounts to guilt for many locals. At the end of the day, the inmates continued incarceration in a detention centre speaks only to grave economic poverty facing most CPDRC inmates.

Most crucially, the distinct viral power and subsequent prison economy generated by *Thriller* clearly serves the interests of the Philippine state. The inmates’ dance is endlessly repeated on YouTube, distracting viewers from the overall reality of Philippine prison life where many prisoners live in cruel, inhuman and degrading conditions with acute overcrowding and insufficient food. Furthermore, it reduces the CPDRC inmates to a single, entertaining image that obscures the wider, more complex and ultimately unjust picture – that CPDRC inmates have been detained for up to six years awaiting trial, amid political and socioeconomic power struggles, in a penal system that is abysmally slow. The inmates’ captivating video performances as seemingly happy, cheerful and content Filipino prisoners is their double-edged sword. As we become increasingly conditioned to live in a ‘Broadcast Yourself’ society, where fame itself is enough reward, the resulting benign projection and banal mediation of the inmates through YouTube clearly undermines the integrity of this ‘rehabilitation’ programme.
INTERLUDE IV: ‘IT’S MORE FUN IN THE PHILIPPINES’

![Flight attendants in Cebu Pacific](image)

Figure 4.1. Flight attendants are all smiles and jazz hands during the YouTube video of ‘Cebu Pacific Christmas Safety Demo Dance!’ Uploaded by Cebupacificair, official Cebu Pacific Air YouTube account, December 19, 2012. \(^{118}\)

We are in the air a matter of minutes before the games begin.

I should have expected as much. Before booking my flight from Manila to Cebu, I ran a quick, obligatory search through Google for any possible alerts on Cebu Pacific airlines. Instead of news of their fleet, air safety, or punctuation record, I found countless YouTube videos of the famous Cebu Pacific singing and dancing cabin crew (see Figure 2.1). \(^{119}\) Thus I am a little disappointed that the flight attendants did not bop their way through the safety procedures before departure. I need not have worried; it’s no less than ten minutes into the stratosphere when the hum of the plane’s engine is almost drowned out by the amplified announcements and peals of laughter as the flight attendants ask for a show of hands from the guests on board,

\(^{118}\) Video available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aXY27Rwg6UQ

\(^{119}\) For example, see YouTube video ‘Cebu Pacific FAs dancing’, uploaded by wingco1129; September 30 2010. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lqh8e2KYIrU/>
designating those eager to participate in their famous ‘Fun Flights’ parlour games. Billed as a ‘fun in the skies’ pop quiz, it involves the skills of speed, general knowledge and particularly good hearing. Passengers are asked a question over the PA system, and the first to raise their hand with the correct answer wins a prize. Being half-deaf rules me out of this competition, and I say goodbye to the prize-winning yellow pen emblazoned with Cebu Pacific’s bright logo. An arm two rows ahead of me shoots up, fervently waving until the flight attendant makes her way down the aisle to verify his answer. With an atmosphere more akin to that of a children’s birthday than a traditional flight, the attendant gives an emphatic thumbs-up, signalling the contestants’ correct answer, upon which the passengers onboard break into a modest round of applause. Tellingly, it appears that none of the passengers around me – even those clearly not participating in the game – seem to mind this mid-flight interruption, with those who’ve won clearly enjoying the experience the most.

The business of ‘fun’ is a lucrative one, it seems. Such a novel modus operandi appears to reap rewards for the airline company, who’s website is now the most visited travel site in the Philippines. As chief executive of Cebu Air, Lance Gokongwei explains the reason for the airline’s popularity is their ‘lighthearted approach,’ for which Filipinos are uniquely known. He elaborates, stating that ‘[t]here is a different sense of fun in the Filipino personality – singing, dancing – and the airline reflects this’ (de Leon 2011). This ‘light-hearted’ approach chimes in nicely with the recently launched Philippine Department of Tourism international campaign

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120 Cebu Pacific (CEB), the primary low fare air carrier serving the Visayas region as well as domestic and international destinations, pride themselves on their innovative and creative approach to airfare, stating that aside from the price and service, the brand promise of a ‘Fun Flight’ experience serves to differentiate CEB from its competitors and thus attract more customers. ‘Guests have also learned to anticipate a uniquely upbeat flying experience with CEB, as this is the only domestic carrier that offers fun in the skies with its games on board popularly known as Fun Flights.’ See ‘About Cebu Pacific: Why every Juan flies!’ Available at: https://www.cebupacificair.com/Pages/company-info.aspx [Accessed March 3rd 2013].
that was unveiled via Twitter on January 4, 2012. Released from the official
Department of Tourism Twitter account behalf of Tourism Secretary Ramon Jimenez,
the tweet read:

Starting tmrw all Filipinos will hav a simple truthful ans 2 d question why
should I go to the Philippines. ‘It’s more fun in my country.’

Less than an hour after the campaign was launched by virtue of, the hashtag
#ItsMoreFunInThePhilippines became the top online trending topic in the Philippines
and across the world.\textsuperscript{121}

‘Maligayang Pagdating sa Pilipinas!’ (Welcome to the Philippines!)

\textsuperscript{121} As mentioned in the introduction, Filipinos – those in situ and the Philippine diaspora – represent an
energetic and sizeable percentage of social networking activity. See Dimacali, T. J. (2012, January 6).
#ItsMoreFunInThePhilippines tops Twitter trends worldwide. GMA News Online. Retrieved August 9,
tops-twitter-trends-worldwide
CHAPTER FOUR

THRILLING: THRILLER AS TRANSMEDIA TEXT

Night creatures call and the dead start to walk in their masquerade
There’s no escapin’ the jaws of the alien this time (they’re open wide)
This is the end of your life. They’re out to get you, there’s demons closing in
on every side. They will possess you (Temperton 1982).

Clad in a gold jacket, white T-shirt, maroon trousers with a diamante-encrusted gold
belt, Michael Jackson sang and moonwalked across the MGM Grand Arena stage
with grace and ease, promoting his latest single, ‘Slave to the Rhythm’ at the 2014
Billboard Music Awards show in Las Vegas. Supported by a five-piece band and 16
live dancers who moved across the stage and down through the aisles, the four-minute
masterful yet posthumous performance of an already five-year-deceased Jackson
reduced some audience members to tears. Costing ‘multiple millions’ to produce and
half a year to plan, choreograph and film, the King of Pop’s likeness was reproduced,
using Pulse Evolution and Tricycle Logic programming, to create a ‘digital or
synthetic human’ (Kravets 2014). To meet the public’s apparent substantial demand
for a Jackson hologram, a performance was created that was allegedly ‘classic
Michael,’ but without any input from the Jackson himself, instead created by a team
that included the Estate of Michael Jackson, his lawyer and advisor John Branca, and
various choreographers and associates (see Gallo 2014; Kravets 2014).

Death no longer curbs certain live musical performance, it seems. Rather, the
growing trend of incorporating hologram technology into large-scale concerts leads to
a certain re-conceptualisation of ‘liveness’ (Auslander 1999), as well as raising new
concerns for artists whose likeness may be harvested and utilised posthumously.
This subject is frequently debated within the media. In academia, an emergent number of scholars have addressed what this growing trend might mean for recording artists.

In late capitalism, ‘the dead are highly productive’ (Stanyek and Piekut 2010: 14, italics mine). For Stanyek and Piekut, what is truly “late” about late capitalism could be the new arrangements of interpenetration between worlds of living and dead,’ which they term ‘technologies of the intermundane’ (2010: 14). Such technologies lie between bio- and necroworlds, and are centered on social, economic, cultural, and affective worlds where the living participate with the dead in an inter-handling, mutually effective co-labouring, of which music in particular has witnessed a growing market for the ‘dead talent’ (2010:14-15).

In a broad sense, CPDRC’s Thriller video hinges on the blurred boundaries between life and death, between living life to the fullest and a diminishing, social death. On the one hand, then, we could view CPDRC’s Thriller performance as a kind-of cyber-marriage, or a posthumous-duet post-June 2009. But death springs forth
new life, in strange and sometimes estranged ways, and Michael Jackson’s death in 2009 is a fitting reminder for much of the life and legacy that remains imbued within his music. After Jackson’s sudden passing, music scholars were somewhat ‘taken aback to find that they had neglected Jackson almost entirely; despite his massive appeal, historical significance, celebrity status and artistic accomplishments, there was no substantial scholarly examination of Michael Jackson’s music.’ (Warwick 2012: 241). Rather, much of the media attention Jackson received came in aggressive, hostile, waves that upon reflection have more to do with societies deep-seated cultural anxieties about race, gender and sexuality, and especially towards those who (appear to) transgress such deeply entrenched categories.

As the single most influential pop singer of the late 20th century, and arguably the most influential artist and entertainer of the 20th century, Jackson’s music and artistry was widely overlooked, in part due to the rock-centric focus within popular music studies. Within popular musicology, Jackson’s output was often dismissed under a so-called ‘rockist aesthetics’ that often took for granted global chart success and instead served to valorise concepts of authenticity, ascribing more value to singer-songwriters than interpretive artists, and to instrumentalists over singers and dancers (Warwick 2012: 241). Despite receiving a multitude of accolades and winning numerous ‘Best Vocals’ awards throughout his career, journalists and critics seldom focused on the sound that generated such plaudits – his unique and wide-ranging timbre that encompassed spinto, countertenor and baritone vocalities. However once critics and scholars started to write about Jackson’s music, they noticed what was perhaps already obvious for his many fans – his unequaled voice. Frank Kogan, writing in 2001, commented that although Jackson possessed a spectacular voice,
what is unusual is that Jackson doesn’t feel the need to amaze us with it. Instead, Kogan (2001) maintains, Jackson’s art lies in his understatedness:

hispavourite technique for conveying passion is to choke off his words. On dance songs he makes his voice as hard and compact as the percussion, reducing himself to icy shards and chilly wails. And when he lets loose with dazzling gospel-like displays, he undermixes these displays, letting them play in the background while drumbeats or simpler vocals take the spotlight.

For Susan Fast, writing in early 2010, Jackson sang with technical precision – ‘pitch-perfect, vibrato-infused, clear, [and] impossibly high’ (260). However, the vast range of qualities that Jackson could elicit from his embodied instrument was equally as impressive as his technical perfection, as Fast writes, his

increasingly deep use of distortion, the exploration of a lower range, and of course, his incredible command of rhythm, demonstrated not only in his staccato melodies and punctuations thereof, but in his grooves, which he often created or contributed to through beat-boxing. The different vocal qualities he could summon were irreconcilable; he could sound dirtier than James Brown on one track and smooth as silk, like Smokey Robinson, or Barbara Streisand, on the next (Fast 2010: 260).

Jackson’s vocal range is also exceptional, covering three octaves and a minor sixth (Riggs 2010). While Jackson’s changing physical appearance received endless media scrutiny, discussions of his voice are, once again, comparably few. Kobena Mercer importantly recognised Jackson’s voice as the heart of his mass appeal (1986: 93). For Mercer, Jackson’s voice is rooted in the Afro-American soul tradition and marked by ‘breathy gasps, squeaks, sensual sighs and other wordless sounds which have become his stylistic signature’ (1986: 93). The emotional and erotic expressive Barthesian ‘grain’ of Jackson’s voice then, is complimented by his graceful and dynamic dancing style (Mercer 1986: 94). Christopher Wiley, extending Mercer’s argument, hears Jackson’s vocally high tessitura and quasi-falsetto whooping as the perfect aural exemplification of Jackson’s embodied gendered contradiction (Wiley 2012: 107).
Pre-2009 a small but nonetheless significant number of scholars broached the subject of Jackson’s musicality, generally through wider discussions of this audiovisual artistry. Yet scholars are quick to realise that any just reading of Jackson’s artistic output requires an understanding and interpretation of the key elements that constitute such an artist’s persona: a meta-narrative that includes artistic identity, generic affiliation and aesthetic intent. ☞ Kobena Mercer’s significant study ‘Monster Metaphors: Notes on Michael Jackson’s Thriller’ (1986) contextualises and situates ‘Thriller’ within a wider African-American cultural tradition, while simultaneously investigating the audiovisual parody and interplay between Jackson, the music, gender and sexuality. Mercer’s essay has since been reprinted in a number of collections, and has successfully demonstrated the need for contextualised readings of Jackson’s works. In many ways, this chapter takes up a discussion of Thriller from where Mercer left off, that is, extending Mercer’s analysis of Jackson’s musicality, and addressing his oversight in discussing the vast structural changes within the song’s video adaptation, as well as the crucial choreographed sequence, which I later argue has been almost completely ignored by critics and scholars alike. ☞

Other pre-2009 musicologically-oriented scholarship that refers to Jackson, however briefly, includes articles by Alf Björnberg (1994), Burnett and Deivert (1995) and Brackett (2002). Thus, it is primarily in the years following Michael Jackson’s death that music scholars have begun to really study the ‘sound’ of his oeuvre. Recent works of note include Christopher Wiley’s chapter on ‘Putting the

122 See Andrew Goodwin’s notion of a contextualised discourse, the idea of a ‘star-text’ that encapsulates a repertoire of images and discourses that together constitute a musician’s (or band’s) persona (and in Goodwin’s argument, are crucial to understanding the meaning of music videos (1992).
123 Of course such musicological undertakings are likely to fall beyond the remit of Mercer’s essay, and additionally, writing in 1986, perhaps the vast and international impact of Thriller’s choreographed sequence might not yet have been apparent. It is important to note that Mercer’s essay came before Jackson’s physical appearances began to notably change in terms of skin colour and plastic surgery, although Mercer does (almost prophetically) point out how Jackson’s appearance in ‘Thriller’s’ promotional photography appears increasingly non-black.
Music Back into Michael Jackson Studies’ (2012), Anne Danielson’s examinations of micro-rhythm and ‘sonic pleasure’ in ‘Don’t Stop ‘Til You Get Enough’ (2012), Jeremy Samuel Faust’s focus on musical orientalism in ‘Liberian Girl’ (2012), Brian Rossiter’s contextualised reading of the ‘industrial’ heavy percussive groove in ‘They Don’t Care About Us’ (2012), and Susan Fast’s much anticipated addition to Bloomsbury’s ‘33 1/3’ series, with a detailed study of Jackson’s 1991 album Dangerous, an album widely considered post-peak (forthcoming 2014).

‘Thriller’, the single, the album, and the short film, have enjoyed lasting influence across music and popular culture around the world. This chapter provides a close analysis of Michael Jackson’s ‘Thriller’ to illuminate the ancestral line of the very concept of viral video. I posit that CPDRC’s 2007 ‘Thriller’ viral video marks a milestone in popular cultural history, similar in effect, to the impact Jackson’s original 1983 ‘Thriller’ had on shaping popular music and global culture. The impact of Jackson’s Thriller included breaking down colour barriers on radio and television, imbuing popular music with the visual, perfecting the art of music video and shaping MTV practice. Therefore, ‘Thriller’ and its many remediations unite important issues surrounding the decline of the recording industry, shifting spans of attention, the ubiquitous fusion of sound and vision, the increase in user-generated and/or DIY musical events, postcolonial theory and globalisation.

This chapter begins by contextualizing ‘Thriller,’ first through introducing Michael Jackson’s unprecedented global impact. Widely overlooked in terms of academic discourse, with most writing focusing on his sensationalised ‘crazy’ lifestyle, multiple legal scandals, and somewhat fluid gender, sexual and ‘racial identity’ (Nelson 2010: 12), I highlight the lack of serious writing about his artistry.

\[124\] While I assert that ‘Thriller’ marks a milestone in visual reproduction and representation of music, it remains part of a long history of music’s fusion with the visual, not least dating back to the first sound film – The Jazz Singer (1927), for example.
his music, his pioneering short films that only started to appear after his death on June 25, 2009. As a singer, songwriter, dancer, actor, businessman and philanthropist, the ‘King of Pop’ is widely acknowledged for his vast contributions to music, dance, and fashion. Yet, a crucial part of Jackson’s legacy that deserves attention lies in his ‘pioneering role as an African-American artist working in an industry still plagued by segregation, stereotypical representations, or little representation at all’ (Vogel 2012). Following this is a detailed examination of the musical and non-musical mechanics behind Michael Jackson’s ‘Thriller’, first as an album, secondly as a single and lastly, as a short film. (Jackson preferred to differentiate his work from conventional music videos by referring to them as ‘short films’.) I then highlight the many ways ‘Thriller’ has been adopted and adapted by millions of people around the world since the release of the music video Thriller in 1983. The practice of ‘Thriller’ adaptations or cover versions appears to be increasing steadily due to advancing personal video technology, in combination with an increasing number of Internet ‘Thriller’ remediations.

The ‘King of Pop’

The Michael Jackson cacophony is fascinating in that it is not about Jackson at all. I hope he has the good sense to know it and the good fortune to snatch his life out of the jaws of a carnivorous success. He will not swiftly be forgiven for having turned so many tables, for he damn sure grabbed the brass ring, and the man who broke the bank at Monte Carlo has nothing on Michael. All that noise is about America, as the dishonest custodian of black life and wealth; the blacks, especially males, in America; and the burning, buried American guilt; and sex and sexual roles and sexual panic; money, success and despair – to all of which may now be added the bitter need to find a head on which to place the crown of Miss America (Baldwin 2001: 217-218, orig. 1985).

James Baldwin, American novelist, playwright, poet and critic, described the American hatred of the androgynous as an uncharted territory of ‘freaks,’ in his 1985
article ‘Here Be Dragons.’ Connecting mythological references from the ‘ancient maps of the world – when the world was flat’, Baldwin informs us that within that ‘void where America was waiting to be discovered, HERE BE DRAGONS’ (2001: 209). ‘Dragons may not have been here then, but they are certainly here now, breathing fire, belching smoke; or (...) attempting to intimidate the mores, morals, and morality of this particular and peculiar time and place’ (Baldwin 2001: 209). At the end of his essay, Baldwin transforms the beasts of the past, transferring the dragon into the modern day feared and hated category of androgynous ‘freaks.’ For Baldwin, freaks are called so and treated so ‘because they are human beings who cause to echo, deep within us, our most profound terrors and desires’ (218). Baldwin encapsulates the hypocrisy, sexism and racism prevalent in American culture, and tellingly, foresees that Michael Jackson will ‘not swiftly be forgiven for having turned so many tables’ (217). Indeed, even in 1985 it was clear, at least for astute social critics like Baldwin, that a then twenty-five year old Jackson would face lasting ridicule concerning his sexuality, race, appearance, and behaviour.

Writing near the end of the 20th century and building from Baldwin’s work a decade earlier, David D. Yuan takes up the torch and claims that ‘[t]he freak show is virtually extinct in the West’ (1996: 368). He continues, describing the continuing American fixation on freaks and freakishness, where tabloid press, Internet and television programmes feature habitual stories of Siamese twins and three-hundred pound babies. Yet for Yuan, it is the category of ‘celebrity freakishness’ that occupies the main stage today, and Michael Jackson, ‘the self-designated King of Pop, is willingly or unwillingly the definitive celebrity freak of our times’ (1996: 368). He goes on to propose two categories, ‘static enfreakment’ and ‘plastic freakishness,’ to

125 ‘Here Be Dragons’ was originally published as ‘Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood’ in *Playboy* January 1985.
distinguish firstly, how the audience perceive Michael Jackson, and secondly, the enfreakment that Jackson fears the audience is attempting to impose on him (371).

The static enfreakment refers to a type of human zoo curiosity, while the plastic freak seeks to ‘elude fixity and definition; his ‘true’ identity remains hidden as he weaves images and stories around himself to arouse curiosity’ (371). Throughout Jackson’s exceptionally popular global career and record-breaking successes, stories of Michael Jackson as celebrity freak – the ‘Wacko Jacko’ media circus – were continuously circulated. Apart from a handful of articles that focused on Jackson’s artistry, it was only after his death that more serious studies of Jackson began.126

Greg Tate wrote in his tribute article ‘Michael Jackson: The Man in Our Mirror,’ in The Village Voice (July 1st 2009), that Black America’s recent eulogies for the King of Pop serve to enable Americans to resurrect Jackson’s ‘best self’ (Tate 2009). Asking the rhetorical question, ‘How many other Black American men born in Gary in 1958 lived to see their 24th birthday in 1982, the year Thriller broke the world open louder than a cobalt bomb and remade Black American success in Michael’s before-and-after image?’ He continues, and I quote at length to preserve the impact of Tate’s composition:

126 Speaking just before Yuan’s article and a decade after Baldwin’s writing, the controversial Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan adopts a similar, forthright discussion of Michael Jackson’s treatment in the and by the media, in an interview with Arsenio Hall (1994) at the height of Jackson’s child abuse allegations. In his zealous style, Farrakhan declares (and I quote an abridged version of his talk at length): ‘Michael Jackson is the greatest pop artist that the world has ever seen, and he is the most popular human being in the world. But Michael was treated like a slave on a plantation, because of a charge that has yet to lead to a criminal charge. But here’s a human being that had to be made to strip—forced in a judge’s search order that, if he didn’t strip, they had the right to be violent with him and force him to reveal his nakedness, that they may take pictures of him in that manner. That, to me, says that no matter how big Michael is, to those who look at us with our money, with our Mercedes-Benz, with our fine homes and our fine cars and our prominent positions in life—you’re nothing but a nigger, and if you get out of your place, I will have to put you back in your place. […] I can’t argue whether he’s guilty or not—I don’t know that—but I know that the man is being mistreated, and I ask myself why. […] I believe that Michael is becoming politically mature, and Michael wants to use his political maturity along with his wealth to aid his people. And because there are those in high places that may fear the direction that Michael is going, let’s strip him of his wealth, strip him of his fame, make him an outcast, then throw him in the laps of his people again.’ (For a video of this interview segment, see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gGs_rWbHUDY).
Where Black modernity is concerned, Michael is the real missing link: the ‘bridge of sighs’ between the Way We Were and What We've Become in what Nelson George has astutely dubbed the ‘Post-Soul Era’—the only race-coded ‘post’ neologism grounded in actual history and not puffery. Michael's post-Motown life and career are a testament to all the cultural greatness that Motown and the chitlin circuit wrought, but also all the acute identity crises those entities helped set in motion in the same funky breath. From Compton to Harlem, we’ve witnessed grown men broke-down crying in the 'hood over Michael; some of my most hard-bitten, 24/7 militant Black friends, male and female alike, cupped to bawling their eyes out for days after they got the news. It's not hard to understand why: For just about anybody born in Black America after 1958—and this includes kids I'm hearing about who are as young as nine years old right now—Michael came to own a good chunk of our best childhood and adolescent memories (Tate 2009).

The absolute irony of all the jokes and speculation about Jackson trying to pass as white or transform into a white woman lies in the fact that for Tate, Jackson’s music, as well as his dancing, represent the epitome of what he designates ‘Black Music,’ and no matter how much Jackson’s physical, surface appearance changed, his voice, his sense of rhythm, flexibility, and fluid physicality remained forever intact.

As Tate and many others have observed, it was Jackson’s embodied vocal talents that above all enabled him to become one of the greatest storytellers of the last century. While Jackson’s role in the history of American musical entertainment is at once clear, it is simultaneously complex, for throughout his career (which began at eight years of age), Jackson blurred the boundaries between black and white, masculinity and femininity, adulthood and childhood, between pop, rock, soul, R&B and disco. A hybrid of gender, racial ethnicity, sexual orientation, and musical styles, it was Jackson image and appearance that fueled the majority of media reports up until his death. Jackson’s identity as an African-American male was not without

127 Race, gender identity, and sexuality all intertwine in Cynthia Fuch’s discussion of the phenomenon of Michael Jackson. Fuch’s deliberately uses the term ‘transsexual’ to diagnose Jackson’s interstitiality, marked by phallic presence and absence (e.g. continually referenced in his choreographed crotch-grabbing). See Fuchs article ‘Michael Jackson’s Penis’ (1995). The complexities of race politics in the US and Afro-American history has been marked by a dissociation between phenotype and race as a social construct (See Martin (2002), The White African American Body: A Cultural and Literary Exploration), and although Jackson remained verbally impartial to discussion on race, many interpret the famous panther morphing scene in the music video for ‘Black or White’ (1991) as a reference to the Black Panther Party, and perhaps, the larger Black Power movement.
complications. In his autobiography *Moonwalk*, Jackson describes himself as a painfully self-conscious teenager. Much of his childhood consisted of performances with his Jackson 5 siblings, under the strict tutelage of his father Joseph Jackson, and much of Jackson 5’s early performance successes hinged on a young Michael’s adept choreographed hi-jinks. Describing an early Jackson 5 nightclub-cum-vaudeville performance, in Michael Jackson’s own words,

> We’d start the song and somewhere in the middle I’d go out into the audience, crawl under the tables, and pull up the ladies’ skirts to look under. People would throw money as I scurried by, and when I began to dance, I’d scoop up all the dollars and coins that had hit the floor earlier and push them into the pockets of my jacket (Jackson 1988: 37).

As this direct quotation demonstrates, a clear performance pressure – a nuanced image of boyhood yet simultaneously that of androgyny and sexual inexperience (Warwick 2012: 247) – as well as potential financial gain rested on Jackson’s shoulders, arguably more so than his older siblings since he was, from an early age, the much beloved lead singer and ‘front man’ for the Jackson 5. Michael Jackson’s early performances were that of a child prodigy, as Jacqueline Warwick astutely observed, which connected him to mainstream audiences through clichéd tropes of Hollywood child stars and stereotypes of black masculinity that derived from blackface minstrelsy (2012: 241). Yet as an adult, Jackson emphasised his belief that African-American music ‘should not be relegated to ‘sideshow’ status in American cultural history’ (Yuan 1996: 372). To understand his subsequent adult career it is crucial to consider the anxiety Jackson faced during his adolescence, Warwick argues, and thus goes some way to explain the heavily constructed image of Jackson as a Peter Pan-like figure.\(^{128}\) As Mercer argues, writing in 1986, ‘we are told that behind

\(^{128}\) Indeed this Peter Pan image was constructed not only by the media, but by Jackson himself too, as his ‘Neverland’ ranch suggests. (The 3,000-acre Neverland Valley Ranch in Santa Barbara County, California, was Jackson’s home residence, as well as private amusement park and petting zoo, from 1988-2005).
the star's image is a lonely ‘lost boy,’ whose life is shadowed by morbid obsessions and anxieties. He lives like a recluse and is said to ‘come alive’ only when he is on stage in front of his fans’ (34-35). It is clear that this mediated image of Jackson originated in his Jackson 5 days, continually perpetuated during his early solo career and exaggerated beyond control alongside his rising popularity.

**Thriller: The Making of a Record-Breaking Album**

Michael Jackson’s extremely successful album *Off the Wall* (1979) was somewhat overlooked in the 1980 Grammy Awards; Jackson was nominated for, and won, one Grammy Award for Best Male R&B Vocal Performance with the song ‘Don’t Stop ‘Til You Get Enough.’ Yet he felt slighted by the experience, stating that it was grossly unfair that *Off the Wall* didn’t get ‘Record of the Year,’ and that such an oversight of his work ‘can never happen again’ (Tamborelli 2009: 191). The rebuff served only to fuel his desire to create something bigger, something better, something that could not be ignored by the cultural gatekeepers. His next solo album was *Thriller*; at the 1984 Grammy Awards it went on to win a record-breaking eight Grammys, including the Grammy for Album of the Year, and it became the best-selling album by any artist in the history of the music industry.

Four of *Thriller*’s nine tracks were composed by Jackson himself, and the remaining five were written by an array of songwriters including Rod Temperton and Quincy Jones, as well as American singer-songwriter and producer James Ingram, lyricist John Bettis and Toto keyboardist Steve Porcaro (See Table 6).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Track Title</th>
<th>Songwriter(s)</th>
<th>Producer(s)</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Single Release Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>‘Wanna Be Startin’ Somethin’</td>
<td>Michael Jackson</td>
<td>Quincy Jones, Michael Jackson</td>
<td>6.03</td>
<td>May 8, 1983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>‘Baby Be Mine’</td>
<td>Rod Temperton</td>
<td>Quincy Jones</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The 42 minutes and 19 second album also featured three high profile ‘featured’ guest artists from the music and movie industries – a duet with Paul McCartney, an electrifying guitar solo from Eddie Van Halen, and Vincent Price’s sprechgesang narrative in the album’s title song. Recorded from April 14, to November 8, 1982, *Thriller* was released by Epic Records on November 30, 1982. *Thriller* generated an additional seven single LPs, all of which reached the top 10 of the US *Billboard Hot 100* charts, and three award-winning music videos. The videos for ‘Billie Jean,’ ‘Beat It,’ and ‘Thriller’ extended previous practices of music video into the realm of short films. After the music videos for ‘Billie Jean’ and ‘Beat It’ were released and rotated on MTV, *Thriller* experienced unprecedented increases in sales, moving *Thriller* up the charts once again.

It would be futile to give an account of *Thriller’s* historical impact without noting the racial and racist undertones that surrounded *Thriller’s* first music video release. Michael Jackson and Colombia Broadcasting System (CBS) faced immense difficulties in getting ‘Billie Jean’ added onto MTV’s rotation, despite the single’s
immediate chart success. Although the song was released on January 2, 1983, the video was not added to MTV’s rotation until two months later, on March 2 – for a host of complex (and contradictory) reasons. For CBS (and Jackson), this move represented inherently racist motives – a ‘no black artists policy’ – within MTV operations. Meanwhile MTV denied such accusations, responding that their mandate was designed to be a rock music channel, and as such, it was difficult to find African American artists whose music fit the channel’s rock prerequisites. Allegedly CBS’s Walter Yetnikoff threatened to pull all CBS artists (which included among others, Journey, Pink Floyd, Billy Joel) from MTV unless MTV finally agreed to air ‘Billie Jean’ (Denisoff 1988, 103). As many before me have noted, ‘Billie Jean’ is thus today heralded as the video that ‘broke’ MTV’s self-constructed colour barrier, despite the fact that other black artists were, in fact, aired before this video (Denisoff 1988; Mercer 1986; Goodwin 1992; Marks and Tannenbaum 2011). Yet despite this, ‘Billie Jean’s’ eventual MTV success secured a long-standing partnership with MTV. Thus Jackson’s subsequent Thriller video releases were supported by MTV from the outset, which ultimately helped pave the way for other non-rock, non-white artists to gain mainstream, televisual recognition.

Decades later, Thriller continues to be officially recognised as a culturally, historically and aesthetically significant record by industry gatekeepers; in 2008, 25 years after its original release, it was inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame\(^\text{129}\) and the National Recording Registry (May 14, 2008). On April 10\(^{th}\) 2014, the Estate of Michael Jackson and Sony Music announced that Michael Jackson’s Thriller album has sold in excess of 100 million records worldwide; meanwhile other sources, such the Guinness World Records, amount Thriller’s global sales to an estimated 51 to 65

\(^{129}\) Two of Jackson’s albums were inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame in 2008 – Thriller and Off the Wall. (In 1999 the Jackson 5 song ‘I want You Back’ was also inducted.)
million. While music industry sales figures are a complex subject, as Bill Wyman concedes, it remains clear that Thriller’s legacy remains vast.

‘Thriller’: The Infamous Dance and Short Film

On January 4th 2010, Michael Jackson’s Thriller became the first and, at the time of writing, only music video officially inducted into the National Film Registry (NFR) by the United States Library of Congress. As part of the National Film Preservation Act of 1988 that enabled the identification, acquisition, storage and dissemination of films deemed ‘culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant,’ the NFR announces up to 25 significant films annually to join a list of titles that includes 2001: A Space Odyssey, Casablanca, The Great Dictator, and West Side Story. Jackson’s influence extends far beyond the realm of pop records and chart performances, and his induction into the NFR demonstrates his establishment as a serious video artist, arguably blurring the then-normative boundaries between singer, dancer, audiovisual artist and actor. What is it, specifically then, that qualifies this music video, the only music video in the history of the United States, such a special place in American popular consciousness?

Thriller, the music video, is widely understood as playing a crucial role in Jackson’s global dissemination and record-breaking chart success, a fact that seems to be taken for granted by many writers, as today, focused academic studies of Thriller: the music video, are noticeably sparse. Indeed, Mercer’s article on the music video’s ‘monster metaphors’ of race and the audiovisual remains the first and only

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130 I contend that, as many before me have pointed out, ‘Thriller’ upped the ante for pop singers. In order to be able to promote and sell records in a post-‘Thriller’ environment, ideal pop singers must become fluent in a range of artistic skills in addition to singing, as demonstrated by Jackson – songwriter, dancer, actor, and fashion model.

131 Thriller is also credited as fundamental in MTV’s development as a mainstream, household media technology. See Chapter One for more details on MTV and the audiovisualisation of popular music.
close reading of *Thriller* as music video. In what follows, I will closely read the music video for *Thriller*, followed by a detailed discussion that contextualises and highlights what I consider to be the primary tropes that enable *Thriller* to be easily and fluidly transformed and remediated by vast populations, as an auditory but for the most part, as an embodied visual text.

In 1979 Rodney L. Temperton, a British songwriter and producer, was approached by Quincy Jones to write some tracks for Michael Jackson’s then forthcoming album *Off the Wall*. After being successfully recruited by Jones, Temperton continued the collaboration and wrote the title track of *Thriller*, purportedly under Jones’s strict specifications (George 2010: 107). ‘Thriller,’ which appeared the fourth of nine tracks on *Thriller*, was the seventh and final single from Jackson’s *Thriller* album.\(^{132}\) It proved a stark contrast following the September release of *Thriller*’s sixth single, the lighthearted ‘P.Y.T (Pretty Young Thing).’ Jackson approached Hollywood director John Landis, and together their vision of *Thriller* extended the already longer-than-average pop song (5 minutes and 59 seconds) to a substantially longer 13 minutes and 42 seconds. Thus two audio versions of *Thriller* exist, which is in contrast to standard music video practice of that era.\(^{133}\) This deviation from conventional pop music practice is just the beginning of understanding how *Thriller*’s audiovisual extension might validate Jackson’s assertion for it to be called a short film rather than a traditional music video.

Indeed most aspects of *Thriller*’s inception, production, and dissemination mark it as exceptional in terms of previous music video and pop music practice. Since the single was released over a year after the album *Thriller*, the single was released

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\(^{132}\) The single ‘Thriller’ went on sale on November 12, 1983 in most countries, and on January 23, 1984 in the US.

\(^{133}\) Although two audio versions of *Thriller* exist, the album/single version is more likely to receive radio/airplay, while the audio from the short film is generally reserved specifically for dancing (see the Hollywood film *13 Going on 30* (dir. Winick, 2004)).
Dangerous Mediations

after *Thriller’s* success had been formally recognised and financially validated, thus serving a vastly difference purpose to *Thriller’s* first single ‘The Girl is Mine.’ In the summer of 1983 Walter Yetnikoff, then President of CBS recalls being woken by phonecalls from a distressed Jackson in the middle of the night saying, ‘Walter, the record [*Thriller*] is not Number 1 [anymore]. What are we going to do?’ (Lyle 2007). As *Thriller’s* exceptional chart success gradually began to decline, based on the proven success of the previous two music videos, Jackson set his sights on creating a third music video from the album to reignite public interest in *Thriller*. Up to this point, the album had been in the Top 10 charts for almost a year, produced a string of Number 1 singles as well as two very successful videos, ‘Billie Jean’ and ‘Beat It.’ The album was already deemed a colossal success in the eyes of the record company, who consequently refused to finance what was widely considered to be a vanity video/project. Therefore, in order to finance the production, Landis’s associate George Folsey Jr. conceived of the idea of filming the filmmaking process, that could be pre-sold to cable television as an hour-long documentary called *The Making of Thriller*, thus raising the capital to make *Thriller* itself. The plan was executed and a bidding war between cable companies ensued, which resulted in MTV and Showtime paying $250,000 each to the rights to air *The Making of Thriller*.

Jackson approached film director John Landis after watching Landis’s horror comedy film *An American Werewolf in London* (1981). Initially reluctant to take on a project that he deemed as a glorified advertisement, eventually Landis took the job because he saw it as a chance to resurrect a genre that had once been a Hollywood staple, viewing the experience as a great opportunity to ‘bring back the theatrical short’ (Celizic 2008). The average cost of producing a music video in the early Eighties was about $50,000. Landis and Jackson’s projected budget cost ten times the
average, as it included financing professional dancers and choreography rehearsals, and specialist make-up effects adopted from Hollywood. *Thriller* set new standards in terms of production costs, yet Landis is quick to point out how *Thriller*’s budget has been grossly exaggerated over the years, as it is often misquoted as costing $1 million to produce. In Landis’s own words, the video ‘ended up costing $500,000 — still enormous money at that time for that kind of thing’ (Celizic 2008).

As previously highlighted, Landis and Jackson’s visualization of *Thriller* included a significant audio remix, extending the 5.59 minute single to last 13 minutes and 42 seconds. The two differing versions of ‘Thriller’ are often taken for granted; yet the effect of extending the song to over twice its original duration has, in itself, interesting audio repercussions. The original song is composed in a somewhat conventional, if elongated, pop song tradition: verse, chorus, verse, chorus, bridge, verse, chorus, and a spoken section before the end. Tables 7 and 8 demonstrate the key sections in both versions of ‘Thriller.’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Counter</th>
<th>Section</th>
<th>First line of lyrics</th>
<th>Extra-sonic features</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td>Introduction</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Creaking door, strong winds blow, footsteps across floorboards, and a lone wolf howls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>Melodic groove starts</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Drumbeat enters, followed by and synthesizer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>(Instrumental ‘Thriller’ motif)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>Groove</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>Verse 1</td>
<td>It’s close to midnight</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>Chorus 1</td>
<td>‘Cause this is thriller</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>Verse 2</td>
<td>You hear the door slam</td>
<td>A door slams in the mix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.26</td>
<td>Chorus 2</td>
<td>‘Cause this is thriller</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

134 A noteworthy exception to this general ‘two-Thriller’ oversight is Christopher Wiley’s 2012 chapter ‘Putting the Music Back into Michael Jackson Studies,’ whose ‘Thriller’ tables I draw from here.
Table 7. Structure ‘Thriller,’ album version, 1982 (adapted from Wiley 2012)\textsuperscript{135}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Track Duration 5.59 minutes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although the main sections are present in both, the shift in order of appearance and inclusion of additional incidental music in the second version demonstrate how the musical and sonic structure of Thriller’s short film is at odds with conventional music video practice that serves to advertise the song as originally recorded. Indeed, a closer examination of the restructuring of the song and inclusion of extra-musical sounds, as well as the additional incidental score, composed by renowned Hollywood film composer Elmer Bernstein, reveal how Thriller’s short film soundtrack functions in a variety of ways to additionally frame Thriller’s film-within-a-film meta-narrative. For example the inclusion of the distinctive sound of the Pacific Tree Frog’s ‘ribbit ribbit’ at 0.22 minutes into the short film, serves to sonically ‘place’ or situate the listener within a Hollywood setting, before the on-screen narrative plays out this sub-plot.\textsuperscript{136}

As a consequence, Thriller’s film-within-a-film is both visually and audibly discernible, therefore consciously or subconsciously signalling to audiences the fact that Thriller’s opening scene is that of a Hollywood motion picture.

\textsuperscript{135} Table 8 is adapted from Christopher Wiley (2012: 111).

\textsuperscript{136} The use of the Pacific Tree Frog’s (\textit{Hyla regilla}) distinctive croak, often described as ‘ribbit ribbit’ or ‘shirk-it shirk-it’ sound (Nussbaum 1983), has a long history in Hollywood soundtracks dating back to the early talkies. Despite the frog’s existence only in the US, the Pacific Tree Frog has become the quintessential sound signifier of frogs in screen media, regardless of the film’s geographical setting.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Counter</th>
<th>Section (Sonic/Narrative)</th>
<th>First line of lyrics, dialogue or onscreen text</th>
<th>Visual features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>[Text: Due to my strong personal convictions, I wish to stress that this film in no way endorses a belief in the occult. Michael Jackson]</td>
<td>Black background screen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>Introduction, with the subtle sounds of howling winds</td>
<td>[Opening Credit: Michael Jackson’s THRILLER]</td>
<td>Text fades in, in blood-like, red font</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>Film opens to the sound of Pacific tree frogs</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Red convertible car (possibly a Chevrolet Bel Air classic), Jackson’s varsity jacket, Ray’s pink sweater, poodle skirt &amp; high ponytail hairstyle clearly frame this scene as 1950s suburban Americana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>[Dialogue, Jackson: ‘Honestly, we’re outa gas.’]</td>
<td>Car stops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>Bernstein’s background soundtrack fade-in</td>
<td>[Dialogue, Jackson: ‘I have something I want to tell you’]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>Dramatic orchestral begins</td>
<td>[Dialogue, Ray: ‘What are you talk’ about.’]</td>
<td>Camera pans to dark clouds passing a full moon in the sky;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.23</td>
<td>Bernstein’s ‘scary music’ climax</td>
<td>[Dialogue, Jackson: ‘Go away!’]</td>
<td>50s Jackson’s werewolf metamorphosis;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.05</td>
<td>Bernstein’s pulsating incidental music, building suspense</td>
<td>Werewolf roars and howls</td>
<td>Werewolf chases Ray</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>Bernstein’s soundtrack shifts to the background</td>
<td>Screams from audience</td>
<td>Transition to the present; crowded movie theatre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>Groove commences under dialogue</td>
<td>[Instrumental; segue in dialogue, Jackson: ‘It’s only a movie’]</td>
<td>Scene shifts to outside the Palace Theatre (downtown LA), with Vincent Price Thriller on the bill.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>Verse 1</td>
<td>It’s close to midnight</td>
<td>Ray walks &amp; Jackson playfully dances around her as he sings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.16</td>
<td>Verse 2</td>
<td>You hear the door slam</td>
<td>Jackson teases turn to charm, Ray relaxes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.47</td>
<td>Verse 3</td>
<td>They’re out to get you</td>
<td>Jackson physically enacts the lyrics ‘Cuddle close together,’ &amp; ‘screen’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.21</td>
<td>Groove returns</td>
<td>[Werewolf howl &amp; Extended Instrumental]</td>
<td>Couple skip together hand in hand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.31</td>
<td>Vincent Price sprechgesang</td>
<td>Darkness falls across the land</td>
<td>Graveyard scene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.03</td>
<td>Extended groove (with additional diegetic sounds of creaking coffins &amp; the scraping opening of a metal manhole)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Ghouls advance from tombs &amp; sewers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.32</td>
<td>Vincent Price</td>
<td>The foulest stench is in the</td>
<td>Procession of ghouls</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td>Event Description</td>
<td>Action/Reaction</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.02</td>
<td>sprechgesang returns over Jackson’s vocal improvisations</td>
<td>air</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Song stops; Bernstein’s chromatic ‘scary music’ takes over in addition to guttural groans from the ghouls</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ghouls continue to advance &amp; encircle the couple</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.21</td>
<td>‘Scary music’ climax builds</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ray surrounded; Jackson’s zombie metamorphosis revealed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.28</td>
<td>‘Thriller’ song restarts</td>
<td>[Extended instrumental groove]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peters choreographic sequence with zombie Jackson leading the troupe of ghouls</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.40</td>
<td>Chorus 1</td>
<td>‘Cause this is thriller, thriller night</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jackson returns to human form; dance cont.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.57</td>
<td>Chorus 2 (extended modulation end)</td>
<td>Thriller, thriller night</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Main dance sequence cont. with pan to four other zombies shuffle-dance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.17</td>
<td>Chorus 3</td>
<td>‘Cause this is thriller, thriller night</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Main dance sequence cont.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.34</td>
<td>Groove returns</td>
<td>[Instrumental, with ghoulish groans]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zombie Michael returns, leading the ghoul parade as they chase Ray</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.51</td>
<td>Groove fades into Bernstein’s orchestral score</td>
<td>[Bernstein’s instrumental ‘scary music again takes over, with accompanying sounds of Ola Ray’s screaming &amp; glass &amp; wood smashing]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>House scene, broken doors &amp; windows</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.25</td>
<td>Bernstein’s sustained orchestral climax</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zombies surround Ray inside house</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jackson suddenly appears as human, smiling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.58</td>
<td>Vincent Price evil laugh</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jackson turns, looks over his shoulder as camera zooms in on his smiling face revealing his yellow, werewolf eyes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.01</td>
<td>Groove returns, fades in under Price’s ongoing laugh</td>
<td>[End Credits Roll]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.22</td>
<td>Chorus 4 (repeat of earlier choruses)</td>
<td>‘Cause this is thriller, thriller night</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peters choreographed scene returns with Jackson (human) flanked by ghouls</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.39</td>
<td>Chorus 5 (extended modulation end)</td>
<td>This is thriller, thriller night</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dance continues (as before)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.59</td>
<td>Chorus 6</td>
<td>‘Cause this is thriller, thriller night</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(As before)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.17</td>
<td>Groove returns</td>
<td>[All characters and events in this film are fictitious. Any similarity to actual events or persons living, dead (or undead) is purely coincidental. (…)]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Three zombies dance a choreographed routine amid gravestones</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.42</td>
<td>End</td>
<td>--</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Screen fades to black</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The significant structural alteration of the original song to accommodate the short film is certainly worthy of closer analysis, not least because this marked such a deviation from previous music video practice. The short film opens with Bernstein’s incidental music (or ‘scary music’ as it is credited at the end of the film), which includes excerpts most likely to be leftovers from his soundtrack to *An American Werewolf in London* (1981) – compositions that were not featured in the final film. In particular, this so-called scary music clearly draws from the introductory motif from Bernstein’s track ‘Metamorphosis.’ Following the scary music and dialogue, the ‘song’ begins with verse one, with verses two and three following consecutively. The verses are then followed by Vincent Price’s two verses of sprechgesang, before stopping suddenly with Bernstein’s incidental music returning at 8.02 until the signature ‘Thriller’ groove returns almost thirty seconds later. Almost ten minutes into the short film we finally hear the first iteration of the ‘Thriller’ chorus, which is then repeated twice more consecutively, before another interplay between Bernstein’s score, ‘Thriller’s’ groove, and Vincent Price’s extended evil laugh. In the following final credits the chorus is reprised thrice more. Accordingly, as Wiley argues, one of the key reasons why ‘Thriller’ is considered extraordinary, lies in its dualism. ‘While the original song adopted the verse-chorus structure paradigmatic of pop, the music video rejects this normative sequence in its coherent pursuit of a fresh narrative’ (2012: 112). Thus, this reinforces Mercer’s (1986) argument that the short film commemorated *Thriller’s* success rather than serving as a faithful advertisement for the single, as was standard practice at that time.

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137 Short film version here is from YouTube, Uploaded by VEVO, (2009, October 2). ‘Michael Jackson – Thriller.’ Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sOnzkJTMaA

138 In particular, the opening 0-0.50 seconds of Bernstein’s track ‘Metamorphosis’ is clearly referenced in *Thriller* from 2.10-3.07 of the ‘scary music.’
**Parody and Play: Reading ‘Thriller’**

The two metamorphosis sequences are of crucial importance to this narrative structure; the first disrupts the equilibrium of the opening sequence, and the second repeats but differs from the first in order to bring the flow of images to an end and thus reestablish equilibrium. (…) In the opening sequence equilibrium is established and then disrupted. The dialogue and exchange of glances between Michael and ‘the girl’ (as the male and female protagonists of the story) establish ‘romance’ as the narrative pretext. (…) At another level, their clothes—a pastiche fifties retro style—connote youthful innocence, the couple as archetypical teen lovers. But this innocent representation is unsettled by Michael’s statement: ‘I’m not like other guys.’ The statement implies a question posed on the terrain of gender, and masculinity in particular: why is he different from ‘other guys’ (Mercer 1986: 42-3).

Embedded deep within popular culture’s psyche, ‘Thriller’ represents the ‘most important communal dance of the last three decades’ (George 2010: 107). Tony Award-winning choreographer Michael Peters (1948-1994), who had previously choreographed Donna Summer’s ‘Love to Love You Baby’ (1975) and worked with Jackson in choreographing Bob Giraldi’s visualization of ‘Beat It,’ was invited to collaborate with Jackson on the subsequent short film. Central to the film’s success is the now infamous zombie dance sequence, created in collaboration between Peters and Jackson. In an interview originally broadcast in July 2009 on VH1, Jackson revealed the delicate approach required to create a dance for zombies and monsters that maintained an air of sincerity that did not descend into complete hilarity. Jackson explains how he collaborated with choreographer Michael Peters, and together they imagined how zombies might move ‘by making faces in the mirror.’ He continues,

> I used to come to rehearsal sometimes with monster makeup on, and I loved doing that. So he and I collaborated and we both choreographed the piece and I thought it should start like that kind of thing and go into this jazzy kind of step, you know. Kind of gruesome things like that, not too much ballet or whatever (Jackson qtd in Reid 2009).

The resulting original choreographic routine, in which Peters also featured as one of the zombie dancers, is notable for its unusual rhythm, and complex combination of
sequences. Ten years after its release it was recognised as a ‘sophisticated blend of musical theatre and pop values’ (Dunning 1994), and to date, the Thriller dance sequence is arguably the ‘most performed choreography – by choreographers, professional dancers, and the general public alike – of all time’ (Mkrdichian 2009: 2). As Quincy Jones describes his experience of making Thriller, the short film, and its impact over a year after the album’s release:

In my perspective, Michael and MTV rode it [the short film] to glory. At last, 14 months after Thriller came out, the video for ‘Thriller’ [the song] came out — it had 10 cameras, nobody had seen anything like this. We were fearless! You have to know you’re just a terminal being used by a higher power. It’s not about us (Jones qtd in Reid 2009).

Indeed as Jones points out, ‘Thriller’ was not about ‘us.’ Jackson’s insistence on producing a third, and initially considered excessive, video was then, perhaps, about something more, about conveying a ‘higher’ message that went beyond that of a vanity project. The original album version of ‘Thriller,’ written entirely by Temperton, conveyed lyrics centered around a literary pun on ‘thrill’ (Mercer 1986), while the sound and structure of the song reified somewhat standard verse-chorus conventions. To convey a sense of authenticity and meaning through ‘Thriller’, Jackson was forced to use what Campbell refers to as ‘non-verbal vocalizations’ – the hiccup, the beat-boxing, the pitched screams, the ‘Hee-hees,’ etc. (Campbell qtd in Johansson 2012: 271). Thus Jackson’s intertextual borrowings from African-American and soul music heritage enable an in-depth interpretation of Temperton’s lyrics – his use of soul and Motown inflections, such as the frequent improvised vocalisations in between verses, and as an underlying countermelody to Price’s sprechgesang. As others have argued, the non-verbal vocalizations pay homage to African-American vocal styling’s but as a ‘stylised form of blackness that doesn’t

The film’s transformation scenes – the fantastical and realist metamorphosis from boyfriend to werewolf – serve to retrospectively imply that the film’s ‘entire opening sequence was a film within a film (or rather, a film within the video)’ (Mercer 1986: 44). As we ‘listen’ to the production of meanings in the music track, the various ‘voices’ involved in the process (Jackson, Temperton, Price, Quincy Jones) are audibly combined into parodic play, as Mercer suggests. One way of approaching this transition from music to video, in addition to Landis’s obvious directorial ‘voice,’ is through discovering the meaning that Peters and Jackson’s dance brings to Thriller. Consequently, it would appear that creating a short, musical film for Thriller was crucial in that it allowed Jackson to represent the song physically, as a form of embodied black tradition and culture, through carefully devised choreographic sequences that blend as many styles and genres as the music itself.

Parody is rooted on an explicit self-consciousness, as Kobena Mercer points out: in Thriller, the short film, the parody lies in dialogue, dress, and acting style, but also in its acknowledgement that there is no narrative as such, rather a ‘simulacrum of a story in its stylistic send-up of genre conventions’ (Mercer 1986: 44). Yet while film continues to play on the meaning of the word ‘thriller,’ further meaning is construed if we consider the Fifties era that is being parodied in the film’s opening. As the Civil Rights Movement gained momentum, the 1950s remained a period of extreme violence against black Americans, including the continued lynching of (young) black men.139 Thriller’s opening sequence homage to the 1950s therefore operates on two

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139 The brutal murder of 14-year-old African-American Emmett Till in 1955, and acquittal of his murderers, speaks to the injustices black Americans faced during the Civil Rights Movement.
levels: as an audiovisual pun on Hollywood thrillers, but more crucially, connects to a lived history whereby large populations of the US experienced the everyday anxiety of oppression, routine terror, and quotidian horror. On many levels, *Thriller* itself operates as a mode of meaning-making, that is clearly read as a transcendental text by the ever-increasing volume of *Thriller* adaptations that continue to appear on public streets and private functions alike.

**Remediating Thriller: Zombies dancing at weddings, protests, proms, flash mobs, memorials**

Why do we dance? To celebrate, to mourn, to heal, to give thanks, to preserve cultural heritage, to assert individuality, to provoke, or to entertain? For some, dance is a potentially humiliating activity and dancing to club hits like no one is watching is a ‘high-risk guilty pleasure’ (Miller 2014). For others, to dance is to show off one’s physical fitness, co-ordination, a form of display for attracting and selecting a mate – ‘a vertical expression of a horizontal desire,’ as the old adage goes. As a solo act or performance with friends, dance embodies ‘an ideological way of listening; it draws in our attention… to dance to music is not just to move to it but to say something about it’ (Frith 1996: 224). This section investigates precisely what it is that online remediated videos of *Thriller* ‘say’ – and as such, demonstrate the various multifaceted ways in which *Thriller* has permeated and continues to circulate the mediascape. My approach here is to examine a series of subgenres of user-generated video treating each remediation as a brief case study. I pay particular attention to those *Thriller* remediations that have received minor attention from mainstream media, such as the subgenre of public ‘flash mob dances,’ and ‘home dance videos’ that frequently act to capture the everyday activities of the domestic sphere.
Providing a brief survey of one of YouTube’s dance video’s many subgenres, that of the remediated *Thriller* performance, I will then offer some considerations as to how these videos construct social and cultural value, as well as displaying shifting forms of attention across social media practice and participatory culture. New media practices often recall old media, and *Thriller* dance videos are no exception. On the surface, their roots lie in the fundamental act of combining music and dancing in public and domestic settings, whether solo, paired or in groups. The videos also call to mind basic forms of broadcast presentation such as television, or even MTV forms of music videos, but on closer inspection and in contrast to traditional forms of broadcast media, YouTube enables viewers to respond directly to the videos both with their own videos and more commonly with text comments. Burgess and Green describe this textual communication as the ‘conversational character’ of YouTube (2009).

**May I have this Dance?: Thriller in Public, as Celebration, Marathon, and/or Protest**

Social media, mobile communicative and technological affordances today enable large groups to coordinate, and is a powerful tool in connecting significant numbers of people for various means and to varying ends. One trend that emerged from the mid-2000s is that of the so-called ‘flash mob’: a term defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as: ‘A large public gathering at which people perform an unusual or seemingly random act and then disperse, typically organised by means of the Internet or social media’ (first appeared in OED in 2004). The inventor of the flash mob’s early prototype, the ‘inexplicable mob,’ Bill Wasik, wrote that we face an inherent paradox at the turn of the 21st century, whereby our personal technology (laptops, smartphones, browsers, apps) does ‘everything it can to keep us out of crowds’ (Wasik 2011). Wasik’s 2003 social experiments, combined with Larry Niven’s
science fiction imaginings of a ‘flash crowd,’ led to the term ‘flash mob’ being coined by Sean Savage, a UC Berkeley grad student who blogged about Wasik’s experiments as they took place (Wasik 2011; Nicholson 2005; Nold 2003). Wasik stressed the physical transformative power rendered through the act of flash mobbing, which is intrinsically bound up with political expression:

People intuitively understand that it is a powerful thing to very quickly and surprisingly transform a physical space, and one reason they keep coming back to the mobs is there is this feeling that something is being created that can’t be ignored (Harmon 2003).

Flash-mob dances became increasingly popular through a symbiotic relationship with advancing video sharing technology. YouTube’s arrival firmly launched a more widespread to we see more and more online videos featuring mass ensembles of individuals dancing the hallmark Thriller choreography. Some of the larger mass dances are organised to be flash mobs in the strict sense, that is surprise events, taking place in public, both in outdoor locations such as parks, playgrounds, and town squares as well as indoor malls, supermarkets, and sports arenas, much to the bemusement and/or annoyance of passers-by (See Figures 2-4).

Other large-scale Thriller performances are strictly coordinated with mainstream media in tow, and as such, are performed to an expectant audience, such as the Los Angeles ‘Thrill the World’ Thriller performance (2009), the successful Mexican attempt to break the world-record for the most people dancing to Thriller (2009, with 13,957 officially registered dancers according to the Guinness Book of Worlds Records), and the large-scale Chilean flash-mob protest against governmental education cutbacks (2011) (See Figures 4.3 – 4.6. 140 Many smaller-scale Thriller

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140 See video ‘13,957 people dancing thriller in Mexico 1 of 2 HQ’ (2009, August 30). pscr1971. Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P7yBxSZv0U0. See also YouTube user Diego Diaz’s upload of the Chilean large-scale Thriller protest against education cuts (June 24 2011). ‘Thriller Masive Por la Educación en Chile’, Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WgLy4gwir3Q
dances appear in organised and publicised *Thrillers* occur in public and private
locations such as hospitals, underground trains, cruise ships, hotel lobbies, at wedding
receptions and high school proms (Figures 4.7—4.9).\(^{141}\) The collective *Thriller*
dances continue to draw large crowds, and with rise of citizen journalists, such events
are frequently recorded, edited and deposited in digital archives like YouTube. From
Baku to Baguio to Bristol, and from San Francisco to Stockholm, these videos serve
to illustrate how *Thriller* has become the most performed choreographed dance in the
world.

![Thriller performed at an American Home Coming Rally (2009), in YouTuber Panha Phin’s video.](image)

\(^{141}\) Hospital *Thriller* (2012): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PXcklCda-k; Cruise ship *Thriller*
(2013): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ocltxlOr33k ;
Figure 4.4. Large-scale, public Thriller demonstrations. Bottom left: 13,957 people dancing to Thriller in Mexico (2009); from YouTuber pscr1971’s video. Top: YouTuber mahdroo’s video of the October 26, 2009 Los Angeles mass Thriller dance – four months after Michael Jackson’s death, in ‘Thrill the World at L.A. Live.’ Bottom right: Diego Diaz’s video of the 2011 Chilean protesters dancing to Thriller, in ‘Thriller Masivo Por la Educación en Chile.’

Figure 4.5. The groom shines as lead dancer in this ‘Wedding Thriller Dance,’ by YouTuber rockwoodcomic (2006).
‘Thriller’ in the Mirror: Remediating Dances of Domesticity

Far from being an exclusively public, large-scale phenomenon, solo and paired domestic performances of *Thriller* appear just as frequently in YouTubes online archive. This pervasive genre of intimate videos highlight the lived reality of the camera as prophesised (and glorified) in Vertov’s *A Man with the Movie Camera* – the camera can be anywhere, with superhuman vision, and provide close-ups of any object. Adapting Richard Chalfen’s (1982) term ‘home mode’ that refers to the amateur film-maker’s representation of the private world of the domicile, home mode
footage comprises material made, if not necessarily within the home, then dealing primarily with ‘the home’ – the domestic and the familial (Pini 2009: 71). The category I designate ‘home dance videos’ then are those recorded performances that are uploaded online, primarily to the user-generated site YouTube (and more recent relatives such as Vimeo and Vine), where individuals play back pop songs in private, often domestic space and dance to them. These homemade videos construct a kind of ‘ordinariness’, as the home is displayed as a domestic yet theatre-like space. These awkward shots in front of kitchen cupboards, in dimly lit bedrooms or framed by chintzy curtains serve to construct a sense of liveness or co-presence, inviting interaction from the viewer’s home to the dancers, even though of course, none of these videos are actually ‘live.’ Set against YouTube’s self-conscious self-referentiality, these videos – like many of their flash mob counterparts – appear to us dark and grainy, habitually captured on camera-phones and low-resolution webcams. But unlike the large-scale Thriller performances, these videos are widely ignored outright (as comprehended by generally low view-counts, mostly in double digits) or quickly dismissed by the culturati as inconsequential, narcissistic, and/or vulgar – they are not taken seriously because they are not seen as serious.

Figure 4.8. Domestic Thrillers. On the left, YouTuber Houdaloth Ali demonstrates his Thriller routine from the privacy of his home, which he describes as part of a weight monitoring process (2013), in ‘Thriller dance routine rehearsals at home.’ On the right, YouTuber Юлианна Лебедева rehearses the Thriller dance in 2012.
Figure 4.9. One of the many instructional Thriller dance videos, as offered here by YouTuber and dance instructor David Levesque (2009). For the price of $5 he invites YouTubers to download this instructional video for posterity.

Figure 4.10. Home movies of babies and toddlers dancing to Thriller are another immensely popular sub-category of Thriller dance videos. Videos by tempranight (2009) and The Funnyrats (2013).

Figure 4.11. Since December 2010, a new version of Thriller dance videos have appeared on YouTube – ‘gameplay’ recordings of dancing to Wii’s Michael Jackson: The Experience. Left, YouTuber Dillon Mack’s festive 2010 video; right, YouTuber TheShabazzel uploads his family dancing to Thriller while watching the screen carefully (2012).
When examined collectively, the broad overview of *Thriller* home dance YouTube videos reveals some noticeable shifts in cultural practice. Four general categories of home dance videos emerge:

1. The solo, ‘private,’ *Thriller* rehearsal (Figure 4.8)
2. The instructional, educational *Thriller* video (Figure 4.9)
3. The family, home-movie style *Thriller* video, featuring babies, children, grandparents, and even pets (Figures 4.7; 4.10)
4. Intergenerational *Thriller* gameplay videos, post-December 2010 after the release of the music video game *Michael Jackson: The Experience* (Figure 4.11)

Through enacting an aspect of *Thriller*, the domestic sphere is here transformed into a multi-functional space, however fleeting. Through a dance step, a fancy costume, or even a simple gesture, these videos capture something that goes beyond the domicile: the humble living room is recorded as a dance studio, a classroom, a playroom – a place of intimacy, of learning, of the extraordinary and the everyday experience.

While these categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive or intended to be exhaustive, they outline the various functions that *Thriller* dances, and *Thriller* dance videos, play in the everyday lived experience. Furthermore, they trace a gradual shift in markedly different dance practices, especially through the introduction of *Thriller* in the music video game *Michael Jackson: The Experience*. Initially released in November 2010 for Nintendo DS, PlayStation Portable, and Wii, these *Thriller* dance videos usually depict one, two or three dancers facing a flat-screen television, dancing primarily with their arms – not unlike the chair dancers of Merrill Gardens Retirement Community (Figure 8) – a trend has undoubtedly introduced many younger audiences
to Jackson’s music, but through a significant adaptation of Michael Peters’ infamous choreography.

Together, these *Thriller* dance videos directly call to mind Walter Benjamin’s assertion towards the shift in characteristics of modernity, whereby the camera’s close-ups serve to satisfy the desires of the contemporary ‘masses to bring things ‘closer’ spatially and humanly, which is just as ardent as their bent towards overcoming the uniqueness of every reality by accepting its reproduction’ (1969: 223). These once live performances are recreated in YouTube’s mass-media platforms, and distributed as mass media through YouTube, circumventing and manipulating time and space so that the past becomes the present, what was geographically distant is rendered intimate, but paradoxically, what was once large-scale is made miniscule. As such we can understand such *Thriller* remediated videos as directly illustrative of the technologies of new media, as promised by Benjamin (1969; see also Auslander 1999; Manovich 2000). These *Thriller* videos further highlight how the lived musical experience – that is, how art and music is practiced in the everyday – find its being, not in its unique presence, but in its omnipresence, and constant instantaneous availability.

Although the wide range of YouTube *Thriller* videos seem to promote an escape from reality, through the transcendental act of dancing to the song as well as their mediation and digital transmission, ultimately they demonstrate a very real sense of liveness – to use Philip Auslander’s definition – as a concept of both presence and mediation, whereby the live and the mediatised coexist in a close relationship (1996). In the *Thriller* home dance videos, these self-conscious, coupled performances often break the fourth wall in one sense as we see the dancer set up the track, before physically stepping away from the record button. Habitually, the dancers speak
directly to the camera’s imagined audience at the beginning or end of the performance, verbally expressing thanks for watching, encouraging or demonstrating an appreciation for comments and feedback – communicating to everyone and no one through their moves. All the while the performances remain carefully framed within a home video framework, as these dancers are filming themselves in a domestic setting, often free from the full-length mirrors that professional dance studios have that would enable a clear study of their bodies and movements. Thus through introducing a gap between self and world, these Thrillers become a method of meaning-making that facilitate a distance required for any relation to the self. ‘Various technical apparatuses — from the quill to the webcam, Peters and Seier note, place the self at a distance and at the same time bridge that distance to the extent that they make it accessible, and accessible for alteration’ (2009: 390). For these home video Thriller dancers, the playback of recorded video is their rehearsal; the screen serves as their domesticated, remediated mirror. A process of ‘remediation’ takes place in the reconfigured home of Thriller videos (Bolter and Grusin 2000), whereby something ‘new’ is gained and preserved from imitating, quoting and varying ‘old(er)’ work (Peters and Seier 2009: 394). Precisely what ‘newness’ is gained, and to whom these works speak to becomes increasingly apparent in CPDRC’s Thriller video.

**Concluding Considerations**

This chapter traces the cultural history of Michael Jackson’s Thriller, paying particular attention to its exceptionalism across multiple planes – the single, the album, the ‘music video,’ the dance, the costumes, and of course, the legacy of Michael Jackson himself. Perhaps Jackson’s Thriller legacy can be surmised in the annual Thrill the World event, an international dance phenomenon launched in
October 2007 by Canadian dance instructor and Michael Jackson fan, Ines Markeljevic.142 Simultaneously functioning as a zombie fancy-dress party, charity fundraiser, and an attempt to break the world record for the largest simultaneous dance to Thriller, the event’s broader goal is more than just dancing, but instead strives to promote ‘unity among all the peoples of the world, humanitarianism and environmental stewardship… as Michael continues to inspire the world to do so’ (Thrill the World 2013). Every October, thousands of people congregate at their local dance studios, recreational parks and gymnasiums to dance the Thriller in thirteen minutes of corporeal unison. For many Americans taking part, this dance has become a national dance. ‘I realised that “Thriller” is like the national choreography of the United States,’ Thrill the World enthusiast Shawn Sides claims. ‘I’m so excited that there’s this choreography in the world that our entire nation recognises’ (Croft 2008). As coordinator of the Austin, Texas branch of Thrill the World, Sides succinctly summarises the power vested in Michael Jackson’s Thriller by the American public.

The wide variety of mediated Thriller’s surveyed here are merely the tip of the proverbial iceberg, among YouTube’s colossal archive. The range of Thriller adaptations presented here demonstrate the extensive affordances and domestication of surveillance and mobile technology when fused with popular music and dance. Within the variety of home Thriller videos, these spaces the domicile becomes a site of collective engagement, symptomatic of changes from public to private and private to public forms of entertainment. The Thriller dance remediations, whether filmed in front of kitchen cupboards, car parks, or nursing homes, produce new aesthetic forms that structure the very foundations of YouTube’s cultural archive. Which music and

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142 The international viral popularity of CPDRC’s Thriller released in July 2007, I argue, paved the way for events such as this to take place. The organiser of the inaugural Australian Thrill the World event in 2008, Andrew Curnock, was directly inspired to join after watching CPDRC’s Thriller (Feeney 2008). See Thrill the World for more details: http://thrilltheworld.com/
dance styles deserve to be archived in such a way is of great importance, and therefore, the question of the canon’s legitimacy becomes a point of constant negotiation in these *Thriller* dance videos. *Thriller* – the song, the dance, and the fashion – is in a constant state of meaning-making through each remediation, and it holds unique and unequalled value in today’s society as it has become part of an intergenerational, international music and dance tradition.
INTERLUDE V: THANK YOU FOR THE MUSIC

It’s a hot, sleepy Thursday morning. As with every Filipino city, the sound of traffic is never far away, but as I step out of the car and approach the main gates of the CPDRC facility (Figure 5.1), I swear there’s also a distant melody in the air. Across the road from the main gates sit two street vendors, both snoozing in the shade, against their makeshift stalls selling local snacks and chilled fizzy drinks (poured into small plastic bags and sipped through a straw, as I discover). Apart from the vendors, there’s no one else on the street, save for a trio of sleeping dogs.

I introduce myself to the guard stationed at the gate, tucked behind a metal grill, who – after several searches through lists, a quick telephone call, and a rifle through my backpack – ushers me through to a waiting area, where posters proudly espousing the world-famous CPDRC Dancing Inmates (see Figure 5.2). The faint melody gradually becomes louder, but it’s still hard to make out who, or what, is making the sound. I’m introduced to the Acting Provincial Warden, Algier C. Comendador – the most recently appointed replacement since Byron F. Garcia’s departure from the CPDRC mid-2010. We shake hands, exchange introductions, and he summons another guard to escort me to another part of the prison, as he seems especially busy today. The new guard unlocks a padlocked gate to let me through, and re-locks it once I’m through. We walk down a corridor, and the locking process is repeated. Down another corridor inmates are hanging out, some outside of their cells, chatting. Guards and inmates do not appear to mind my intrusion to their daily routine: some smile, others wave and call out ‘Hello Ma’am!’ Indeed I don’t feel like I’m intruding too much – the calm atmosphere, combined with the faint background music, make for a rather relaxed, almost inviting ambience.
Eventually I’m led up a staircase to the viewing tower, above the prison yard, and see that the yard – the dancefloor that I know so well from YouTube – has transformed into a bustling, functional workspace, where preparations for this coming weekend’s
Sinulog performance is well underway. Freshly glued costumes and props lie out in the baking heat (Figure 5.3), and soon after my arrival, are presumed dry and tidied away. As I look around the yard, the source of this morning’s soundtrack’s become apparent. Two small groups of inmates are gathered, at the opposites sides of the prison yard, seated and standing around a microphone and television set. A sharp dissonance, amplified by two, opposing yet simultaneous karaoke soundtracks fills the air. On one half of the yard, someone is singing, what sounds a lot like the popular Visayan song ‘Mibalik ako’ (I returned), though it’s rather hard to be sure, because the sounds from other half of the yard is drowning out ‘Mibalik ako’s’ yearning melody.¹⁴³

![Figure 5.3. The prison yard has transformed into a site of arts and crafts preparation for the upcoming Sinulog costumes. In the distant periphery (upper left) sits one of two groups of inmates gathered to sing – read: queue up to sing – karaoke).](image)

I turn to ask the guard a question, but before I can say anything, he reads my mind and laughs, ‘Today is karaoke day!’ As if to support his assertion, a rousing chorus kicks off from the opposing karaoke machine across the yard. There is no mistaking

¹⁴³ To hear A Visayan singer (a Boholino) singing ‘Mibalik Ako,’ go to YouTube user boholdibo’s video, retrieved from: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QipK7-nzA64](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QipK7-nzA64)
this song, for I know it all too well. An inspired baritone voice sings out with gusto
lyrics that inimitably soundtrack the sweeping incongruity of the situation. I can’t
help but hum along to his warble echoing over the jangly karaoke speakers:

So I say
Thank you for the music, the songs I’m singing
Thanks for all the joy they’re bringing
Who can live without it, I ask in all honesty
What would life be?
Without a song or a dance what are we?
So I say thank you for the music
For giving it to me!\(^\text{144}\)

\(^{144}\) ‘Thank You for the Music’ composed by Andersson and Ulvaeus, performed by ABBA (1977)
CHAPTER FIVE

TOWARDS AN AUDIOVISUAL FUTURE: YOUTUBE, POWER, AND MUSIC VIDEO’S ‘SECOND AESTHETIC’

When I first turned my attention to this dissertation topic in 2009, rather little had been written about the voracious digital spread of music together with moving image within online platforms – the ‘audiovisual turn’ and the new ‘media swirl’ (Vernallis and Herzog, 2014: 1) – and so in many ways and for many reasons, the initial primary aim of this research was to address this apparent oversight. As this project drew to a close, a small, but nonetheless significant body of work has swiftly appeared in print. Some of the most innovative and exciting interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary work of late includes the *Oxford Handbook of New Audiovisual Aesthetics* (Vernallis, Richardson and Gorbman (eds.), 2013), and the very recent *Oxford Handbook of Sound and Image in Digital Media (OHSIDM)* (Vernallis, Herzog and Richardson (eds.), 2014). As Vernallis and Herzog assert, ‘within this landscape, the intensified, accelerated, piercing qualities of sound and image are amplified [and] the emergent relations between sound and image, especially, call for new interdisciplinary approaches and modes of analysis’ (2014: 1). This chapter, as my overall thesis, responds to the latter OHSIDM handbook, that seeks to ‘jump-start’ a discipline and, in particular, support the emergence of a new, interdisciplinary field of audiovisual studies and digital/new technologies (2014:1). Indeed, ideally such an approach to this field of study should encompass a range of interdisciplinary understandings ranging from musicological, technological, film, and audiovisual perspectives. Historical, theoretical, comparative, reflexive, dialogical and social
contexts and perspectives are also of great import, and may often be successfully balanced through anthropologic or ethnographic approaches (Cohen 1993: 123). Although this chapter (and thesis) is certainly not the first to address the current digital media practice and audiovisual landscape, it serves a similar purpose to recent publications in that it engages with this fledging field by offering a close reading of this ‘new’ generation of networked music video.

Addressing Vernallis and Herzog’s proclamation then, this project seeks to go conceivably further and perhaps deeper into the unknown (and under-represented) by closely reading a recent internationally recognised digital text that is not made by or of professional media makers. Rather than privileging the small minority of professional makers of audiovisual content on YouTube, I focus instead on the role of the amateur (and pro-am) audiovisual content producer within YouTube, who despite increasing corporatisation, continue to represent a significant proportion of uploaded content at the time of writing. I place emphasis on the CPDRC’s situatedness as not in the West and going to the East but rather made and disseminated from the Far East and spreading to the West. Contrary to much recent and important new audiovisual work that is often focused on theorising high and relatively high-budget texts such as Hollywood and art-house film, video-art installations, and the burgeoning area of interactive app albums,\textsuperscript{145} or such widely practiced, mainstream mediums as PlayStation, Xbox or Wii videogames, I rethink audiovisual embodiment within lower-budget (or non-existent budget), often non-mainstream, non-polished and decidedly unfinished-aesthetics of YouTube videos. As mentioned earlier in this thesis and highlighted again in this chapter, the performances of the CPDRC inmates that I refer to notably gained notoriety through a \textit{rehearsal} performance – not any of

\textsuperscript{145} I refer here to Lola San Martin Abride’s work on Brian Eno’s musical apps; also Björk’s \textit{Biophilia} app album launched in July 2011, as detailed in Nicola Dibben’s ‘Visualizing the App Album with Björk’s \textit{Biophilia}’ (in Vernallis, Herzog and Richardson (Eds.) 2014: 682-706).
their other, earlier, more finished displays. Today, digital video-making equipment’s relative affordability and mass mobile mediation possibilities enable its use by various media users and consumers, particularly those who feel underrepresented among mainstream media texts. Thus, I simultaneously draw attention to the protagonists of the CPDRC video, to the inmates’ non-white, markedly disenfranchised, alienated bodies – bodies that are in opposition to the mainstream mediated Philippine image of high social status, beauty and empowerment – as the politics of race, ethnic difference, and hybridity remain complex in Filipino society today.146

Early YouTube videos such as CPDRC’s Thriller, are imbued with an aura of immediacy. YouTube’s screen – initially the reserve of personal computers and laptops, and later moving to smaller-screen formats with more mobile accessibility – speaks to an imagined, digital community that converse through clicktivism, textual and audiovisual comments. Perhaps it is as much a testament to the evolution and mainstream acceptance of YouTube that since my initial research on the CPDRC videos in 2009 the academe has recently began to recognise the significance of this new medium, as well as the challenges and at times, immense importance, that these new kinds of texts breed. Often presented as remediated, intertextual texts soaked in nostalgic rhetoric, YouTube texts’ apparent innocuousness affords them the potential to evoke real societal change,147 as well as very real dangers in concealing or even

146 There is a voracious market for skin-whitening products in the Philippines today, primarily among Filipina women, and is purportedly a 22 billion pesos (GBP£300million) market (Moral, C. (2010) Philippine Daily Inquirer). Bleaching (brown) skin so that it appears lighter and whiter is understood as a form of cultural conditioning leftover from Spanish and American colonialism, as well as an act of empowerment – as a way to achieve higher social status through historic connections of affluence and privilege. I point to scholarship of Elaine Laforteza (2007). ‘The Whitening of Brown Skins and the Darkening of Whiteness,’ and recent statistics that state one in two women in the Philippines use skin whitening products – the highest usage in Asia (Lapeña, C. G. (2010). GMA News Online).

147 Examples of YouTube videos that have affected societal change include the CPDRC videos; also YouTube videos that fall under the social activist category, such as Kony 2012, the Arab Spring 2012 videos, and the Obama ‘Yes We Can’ viral campaign. Other YouTube videos have enacted music industry change, such as Psy’s ‘Gangnam Style’ breaking the 1 billion (now 2 million) YouTube views record, thus pushing record companies to count YouTube views in chart listings.
erasing the very markers of their production. As a consequence, it is imperative that attention be paid to these kinds of media products, despite the fact that not all of these videos are necessarily as rife with complexity and socially significant as the case study presented here. Building from the broad contextualisation of the CPDRC video phenomenon provided in previous chapters, this chapter provides a close textual analysis of CPDRC’s *Thriller*, including an overview of the range of YouTube comments left by the community. As a result this chapter charts the recent ‘hyperrealist’ audiovisual turn, and firmly inserts *Thriller* within an imagined new music video ‘canon’.

In a way, this chapter follows on from Chapter One, drawing attention to the current audiovisual landscape in what I contend is most certainly a post-MTV era, thus completing the circle. Addressing the seductive power of CPDRC’s *Thriller*, I unpack the video performance to reveal YouTube’s aesthetic ordinariness: a combination of hybridity and nostalgia. Both Jackson and CPDRC’s *Thriller* operate as distinctive hybrids: the original *Thriller* is a long-play music video, an intertextual film-within-a-film while CPDRC’s *Thriller* provides an amalgamation of Peter’s original choreographic sequences with prison calisthenics to create a form of mass-digital entertainment. Michael Jackson himself serves as the quintessential, personified hybrid. His paradoxical visual appearance transformed before the public eye from childish boy to adulthood, and went on to fluctuate between masculine and feminine identities, and between black and white racial markers. Free from the traditional censorship means of MTV, I demonstrate how CPDRC’s *Thriller* enables an approach and exploration of different identities that remain under-represented in mainstream media such as the Filipino and the Filipino male body (and by extension, 148 As Margo Jefferson has argued, Jackson’s fluid race and gender identities represented a form of ‘black femininity’ (2006).
the Asian male body), as well as ostensibly queer and transgender figures. Building on from what Carol Vernallis calls music video’s ‘second aesthetic’ (2013: 207), I provide a detailed analysis of how CPDRC’s *Thriller* serves and functions within its YouTube environment. I pay particular attention here to CPDRC’s relationship to Michael Jackson’s original *Thriller*, noting the cultural parallels between Michael Jackson’s and CPDRC’s respective *Thrillers*; I see both *Thriller* performances as significant cultural moments, the after-effects of which served to shift the entire course of the music industries. In an attempt to clarify this shift, I trace the development towards current YouTube practice, and note how it is markedly different from the YouTube landscape of 2007. Furthermore, I intimate that YouTube videos often create a sense of ‘false polis,’ precisely because of their short (and often miniature) format that serves to quell further investigation or what Vernallis terms ‘extended dialogue’ (2013: 150).

**Tracing the seductive power of CPDRC’s *Thriller*: YouTube and Music Video’s ‘Second Aesthetic’**

Drawing from the growing body of YouTube scholarship from scholars including Henry Jenkins, Patricia Lange, Lev Manovich, Pelle Snickars and Patrick Vonderau (*The YouTube Reader* 2009), Michael Strangelove (*Watching YouTube* 2010), Carol Vernallis (*Unruly Media* 2013), Joshua Green and Jean Burgess (*YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture*, 2009), my research speaks to these recent works while also forging new connections and perhaps contrasting conclusions about YouTube, participatory culture and in particular, the integral and often overlooked role that music plays in seducing audiences to visit YouTube in the first place. It is worth first revisiting some of YouTube’s spectacular data that was mentioned in Chapter One, in part because it shifts so rapidly that last year’s figures quickly
become obsolete. Since its foundation in February 2005 and official launch in December that year, YouTube primarily served as a personal video-sharing service rather than a video search engine, and by July 2006, YouTube debuted in the ComScore Media Metrix Top 50 at number 40 with 16 million visitors, a 20 per cent increase from the month before (Jarboe 2011). In hindsight, it is easy to see why Google purchased YouTube in October 2006 – upon Google’s acquisition, CEO Eric Schmidt announced that Google ‘look forward to working with content creators and owners large and small to harness the power of the Internet to promote, distribute, and monetise their content’ (Schmidt 2006 quoted in Jarboe 2011: 10, italics mine). When, in December 2006, YouTube was the butt of the New Yorker’s botched surgery cartoon joke, it was clear YouTube’s moment had arrived.149

By 2011, YouTube had localised in 25 countries across 43 languages, which saw 48 hours of video uploaded onto YouTube every minute, and three billion views each day. As YouTube’s official December 2011 statistics boast, ‘More video is uploaded to YouTube in one month than the three major US networks created in sixty years’ (YouTube 2011). Hurtling forward, YouTube’s statistics continue to venture into the sublime: three years later YouTube receives visits from over one billion unique users each month, over six billion hours of YouTube video is watched each month, and over 100 hours of video is uploaded to YouTube every minute (YouTube 2014). YouTube’s availability is even more global today with 80 per cent of YouTube traffic coming from outside the US. Available now on hundreds of millions of devices across the world, with YouTube mobile accounting for almost 40 per cent of YouTube’s global watch time, YouTube’s audience is further fortified through its Partner Programme, which comprises over one million ‘creators’ from over 30

149 See Marshall Hopkin’s cartoon: ‘God, this is going to be all over YouTube,’ The New Yorker (December 25, 2006)
Dangerous Mediations

million countries (YouTube 2014). The present YouTube Partner Programme, according to YouTube’s statistics, enables thousands of ‘partners’ to earn revenue into the six figures (although what currency these six figures is in is never actually specified). Popular content is highly sought after by YouTube, and financially rewarded, either through the Partner Programme and/or advertisements, leading to the founding of several YouTube studios such as Machinima and Zephyr. Driving all of this content production, however, is YouTube’s audience. YouTube’s audience decides the fate of YouTube’s texts, from user-generated content to the professional. The audience’s direct, and near-instantaneous feedback invests them with the power to effect the success or failure of a work, thus playing the most fundamental role in shaping how the online video archive operates.

 Nonetheless, for music scholars at least, how this archive operates, how it is managed and what material gets pushed to the fore is of major significance. As the number of users, and hours of material uploaded continue to increase in magnitude, crucial questions relating to music copyright, genres, and labels grow in tandem. As we have seen before from the printing press to the transistor radio, advancing technology changes the information landscape in numerous ways, and we must be clear that the relative open-access afforded to YouTube and other online audiovisual media serve as equally important ways of disseminating information, culture and images of contemporary identity. Agency is central to YouTube’s operations, and as it currently stands, YouTube functions as a site of co-labour. YouTube’s supposed democratization of online audiovisual space is rooted in accessibility and agency; power lies in the hands of ‘any’ of YouTube’s users, as is so often celebrated in YouTube’s ‘Broadcast Yourself’ ethos.

150 YouTube production studios evolved to fill a niche in the market, inheriting and reproducing in many ways, the cultural gatekeeping practices from television and film.
However my findings on the CPDRC’s *Thriller* troubles the notion that ‘every’-body can upload video content onto YouTube, and participate in a global conversation with fellow YouTube cohorts. As *Thriller* most pointedly demonstrates, although nearly anybody can now be featured on YouTube, not every body has the ability, nor the agency to use YouTube, let alone participate in the site’s next level, intermediated level – that is, to publically broadcast oneself. Many of YouTube’s most viewed videos, music-related or other, are not what I term ‘self-shared’ – that is made and distributed by the author of the text; rather they are often shared by those who hold the camera, rather than the performer who remains in the video’s frame. The implicit challenges embedded in YouTube’s participatory culture are highlighted by media scholar Eggo Müller, who coined the term ‘participation dilemma’ to account for the twofold relationship between the participatory achievements and disadvantages that digital media culture breeds. Müller problematises this as follows:

On the one hand, critics embrace new possibilities of participation as a democratization of our media culture: untrained non-professionals can now gain access to the formerly exclusive world of professional media and start redefining the tacit norms and standards of the established media culture. On the other hand, this is identified as a problem, since the new, ‘uneducated’ participants neglect professional standards of craftsmanship, aesthetic quality or ethic norms (Müller 2009: 127).

Building from Henry Jenkin’s McArthur White Paper findings (2006), Müller postulates that this dilemma occurs because new YouTube participants must achieve some fundamental skills that enable them to contribute to YouTube culture in a meaningful way. Yet ‘whenever a cultural elite starts to train and thus to professionalise new ‘ordinary’ users, those traditional cultural barriers and hierarchies that have been questioned by the emerging participatory cultures are rebuilt’ (2009: 128). Like Müller (2009: 128), I believe this dilemma stems from a romantic thinking of media practice as a binary opposition of top-down versus bottom-up forces, of the
‘user’ as an authentic, self-conscious subject, and ‘the industry’ as manipulative exploiters by definition; this thinking posits said industry versus the audience, producers versus consumers, and as such, to conceptualise YouTube and the complexities behind ‘self-shared’ videos, one must go beyond such unproductive oppositions.

Furthermore, YouTube reveals how mediated agency is temporal. It lies not only in the here and now, but instead YouTube conveys multiple ‘interpenetrative temporalities,’ to borrow Stanyek and Piekut’s term (2010), that can yield rather messy relationships. Whilst Stanyek and Piekut use the term interpenetration to articulate the collaboration between living and dead artists in recorded music, I find their concept of the arrangements of co-labour that takes place within the creation of works such as Natalie and Nat ‘King’ Cole’s ‘Unforgettable’, lends itself to extension into the realm of YouTube operations. As a site of co-labour, of intertextuality and collaboration between humans and machines, between analogue and digital, between bodies that are present at that moment and bodies that are not present at that moment, YouTube interpenetrates a variety of worlds in a variety of ways. Digital technologies afford certain possibilities for bodies in the current moment and bodies from past moments, which are markedly different to those afforded by analogue technologies.

As an online media archive that doubles as the second most popular search engine in the world, at this point in history it is perhaps somewhat redundant to question YouTube’s mainstream mass media status. Yet it remains important to note that international access to such mainstream media is not without exceptions, and these exceptions should be noted. Since YouTube launched, it continues to experience various levels of access in various parts of the world at any given time.
Figure 5.4 displays YouTube’s accessibility status across the world; green designates countries that have in place localised versions of YouTube (i.e. US, Germany, Australia), pink is where YouTube was previously blocked but subsequently lifted (i.e. Armenia, Brazil, Russia, Turkey, Sudan), countries in purple experience a limited block (UAE), and red is where YouTube remains banned outright (i.e. China, Iran). Indeed, the wide range of levels in which YouTube is accessible problematises any concept of rendering YouTube as a homogenous, inter- and transnationally equal, mass media platform.

An Overview of CPDRC’s Thriller’s YouTube Commentary

To return to our case study, CPDRC’s Thriller can be considered one of the earlier exemplars to gain YouTube ‘viral video’ status. With reference to direct audience

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151 Image used under Creative Commons License, retrieved from http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/3/30/YouTube_world_map.png/640px-YouTube_world_map.png (Accessed May 1, 2014).
responses garnered from the YouTube comments it elicited, certain prominent features of this kind of user-generated viral video are foregrounded. YouTube comments are gradually beginning to be researched as a form of reception studies which may give insights into audience reactions to particular videos or highlighting certain pertinent or recurring issues (see Lange 2007 & 2009; Thelwall, Sud & Vis 2012). Drawing from a sample of 1,800 comments posted underneath the original video, I highlight the features of CPDRC’s *Thriller* that recur most frequently within the comments, as well as illustrating the various ways in which YouTube users engage with the text, and thus simultaneously connect with other YouTube user’s engagements. Utilising the categories into which the various comments can be considered, in addition to a close reading of CPDRC’s *Thriller*, I identify certain audiovisual characteristics that may offer some insight into how we conceptualise the generic category of ‘YouTube videos.’ Using CPDRC’s *Thriller* – as an example of a YouTube (music) video that achieved viral status, and building from the framework laid by Carol Vernallis in her recent reconfiguring of music video and new media aesthetics, in conjunction with Henry Jenkins’ analysis of spreadable media – one can distinguish four basic aesthetic commonalities that contribute to the spreadability or ‘virality’ of this video and others of its’ kind. Based on initial, surface appearance, tenacious videos such as CPDRC’s *Thriller* feature noticeable degrees of (1) parody, or absurd/sardonic humour, (2) repetition (which may breed nostalgia), (3) puzzle and/or enigma that begs further investigation, and (4) cotextuality, intertextuality, intermediality. The comments utilised for this analysis were all written in English,
and were chosen at random (as random as YouTube’s inner algorithm mechanism would allow).

YouTube comments provide a general indication, however limited and limiting it can be, of the international reception to CPDRC’s *Thriller*. From the examined sample of 1,800 comments posted underneath the original video, noticeable trends and commonalities emerge. I subsequently grouped CPDRC’s *Thriller* comments into thirteen classifications based on identifiable, similar thematic parameters. It must be noted that these categories are not mutually exclusive, nor is it likely – across over 70,000 comments in total – that they are completely exhaustive. The (relative) anonymity, asynchronous, solipsistic, physically safe, and escapist nature of YouTube comments (and many Web 2.0 interactions), means that users may post any kind of comments at all as there in but a modest chance that another YouTuber will read their comment, and an even more minuscule possibility that someone will respond to it directly with another comment. In essence, the following categorisation serves only to demonstrate the breadth and difference of marked responses to CPDRC’s *Thriller*, and are summarised in the following categories (Table 9):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>General Comment Features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Amusement</td>
<td>Generally positive feedback often laced with flippant humour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Approval</td>
<td>Positive to overtly positive responses, often expressing a strong emotional response, a sense of immersion and/or connection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Disbelief</td>
<td>Positive and negative remarks expressing scepticism over the dancer’s status as inmates, to conspiracy theories that</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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154 There is insufficient space here to adequately discuss the rate, and range, of changes that have been made to YouTube’s (read: Google’s) privacy settings in recent years. In short: while it was once possible to be leave near-anonymous comments on YouTube videos (it was never truly ‘open’ like some other comment-communities), since 2012 YouTube have officially implemented changes to their commenting system, now actively prompting – almost forcing – users to link their YouTube accounts with their ‘real names’.

155 The probability of a YouTube comment being responded to is greatly enhanced if the comment is seen as a ‘flame,’ ‘flamebait,’ or ‘troll’ as numerous studies have shown (discussed in more detail in the following paragraphs).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. Facetious/Sardonic Humour</td>
<td>Jokes frequently made about their apparent/imagined criminal acts; interactive comments that respond directly to other comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Homophobic</td>
<td>Expressing hatred of drag performance, disgust at transsexuality, and/or making specific remarks against the bakla</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Intertextual Citations</td>
<td>Comments citing their route to this video; many pop culture references and requests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Michael Jackson Fans</td>
<td>Extensive messages professing love, adoration, praise and longing from Jackson’s fans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Other</td>
<td>Vague, unidentifiable comments, or expressions of concern for the inmates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Philippines /Filipinos</td>
<td>Comments made from self-identified Pinoy and Pinays, within the homeland and across the diaspora; generally positive, encouraging, and on occasion, humorous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Questions about Germany</td>
<td>Questions or disparaging remarks pertaining to the copyright restrictions in place in Germany (re: GEMA licensing) &amp; to a lesser extent, Sony (the copyright holders)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Questions posed to the YouTube community</td>
<td>A quest for further knowledge or a search for answers to aspects of the video content made to the collective intelligence of YouTube’s participatory culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Racial</td>
<td>Subtle to overtly ignorant to categorically offensive and disparaging remarks specifically pertaining to the performers as Asian, Filipino, or ‘Other’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Religious</td>
<td>A mixture of comments that contain religious verses, quoted verbatim, to comments that credit the performance to a higher power, and prayers for their souls</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 9. Categories of YouTube Comments left by CPDRC’s Thriller audiences.

Bearing in mind the popular 90-9-1 rule of Internet participation, this list is not representative of all audience responses to CPDRC’s Thriller; rather it primarily serves as a starting point to discuss the video’s reaction among YouTube viewers, as well as providing a general sense of the video’s reception through the structural features offered by YouTube’s technological, communicative interface.

On the one hand, YouTube comments on CPDRC’s Thriller are, of course, speaking directly to the specifics of this video performance: citing prisons, Michael Jackson, the Philippines, and other significant features. Most YouTube users who have taken the time required to engage in this additional level of social interaction –

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156 See Appendix IV, Table 1 for select examples from each of the thirteen comment categories.

Note: All YouTube comments reproduced throughout this thesis appear sic erat scriptum, as they were originally published on YouTube, with the username – also reproduced exactly as it appears in the source text – identified in the brackets immediately succeeding each comment.
they have created a YouTube/Google account in order to post a comment – do so because they seek to share specific observations about the video, their reaction to it, or how it is that they came to find it. As the list of categories illustrates, comments range from remarks laced in irreverent humour (2), calls to introduce this programme to prisons around the world (and especially in the US, the location where a significant number of YouTubers comment that they are based) (3, 4, 5), to frequent statements attesting to being moved to tears – that the inmate’s performance had elicited a fantastical form of emotional contagion (4). A significant number of comments express utter disbelief at witnessing such a vast number of apparently criminal bodies dancing to Michael Jackson (5):

These people committed crimes?! (Aeroforce14)
Only 5 inmates were shanked in the making of this film. (isaac12345johnson)
if you can’t afford a dance school kill someone and go to this prison! (Healthy 2808)
I find it so hard to believe that these people are criminals. Society has painted criminals as evil people who are beyond redemption, monsters with no souls, but that’s just not true. […] (aerdna14)
lmao,[laughing my ass off] luv da drag queen. But are they really inmates? Honestly... killers, rapists, gangstahs dancing to Thriller. (Belkis Martinez)

The above YouTube users have utilised the comment section to register the absurdity of the performance, mocking the surrealist fusion of pop music and dance performed by assumed ‘killers, rapists, and gangstahs.’ Other YouTubers use the comment section to praise the dancers, but in effect their compliments are addressed to the YouTube audience more so than the dancers themselves (4). While wishfully admonishing the video’s highly compressed digital image, user Gary Thayer writes that:

The guy playing Michael Jackson is REALLY good! Wish this was better quality (Gary Thayer)

User Frances Zapata compliments their perceived collaboration, stating that:

This is the epitome of teamwork. (Frances Zapata)
Perhaps users like Thayer and Zapata imagine, on some level, that the CPDRC’s ‘Michael Jackson’ may find the opportunity to read such words of positivity and encouragement, however unlikely the reality may be.

A significant number of YouTubers openly identified as Filipino, and felt compelled to share with the global YouTube community their Filipino perspective on the performance (7). These YouTubers encompass Filipinos located in the Philippines, balikbayan, and some who identify as members of the Filipino diaspora, and for the most part, Filipino YouTubers display a sense of pride and identify a sense of humour in the CPDRC performance:

- to anyone who isn’t Filipino, understand that this is perhaps the most Filipino thing imaginable. I dunno how to explain it, but it completely does (LouieMan)
- Lots of talent, and crossdressers. Accurate depiction of the homeland right there. <3 (Ivan Opina)
- that is why the philippines always win many international dance contes, thumbs up (Ralton Tamayan)
- This is so cool #proudtobefilipino (HazardousCurls)

From 2012 onwards, some of these types of comments often embed extra metadata such as hashtags like #pinoypride, connecting their YouTube comments to a wider Filipino social media narrative which extends across Twitter, Facebook and other Internet networking sites.

Other YouTubers comment that they interpret the dancers as a symbol of difference (1, 6). A significant number choose to comment specifically to address CPDRC’s ‘girlfriend’ character, with some expressing facetious humour while others convey an extreme and at times aggressive homophobia (1, 2). For others it is their status as Filipino that marks them as different; some write to describe the spectacle as ‘Asian’ with little or no contextualisation, while others again simply recognise its apparent ‘Otherness’:

- Asian Invasion.!!!!! (Tony Her)
they need asians to do something like this (Simonsmsm)
There probably in prison for Hacking or having Too many Kids.
(danger2bad1)
The definition of Filipino= STUPID! Stupid people dumb fucks! So dirty they contaminated the sea, the land and the air with their burning food everyday!
Disgusting people. (Yoda Ydyxz)

Comments such as Tony Her’s and Simonsmsm are vague at best. Meanwhile danger2bad1 and Yoda Ydyxz’s comments are exceptionally racist, inflammatory and grossly offensive. Yet they may also be examples of ‘flaming,’ ‘flame trolling,’ or ‘flame bait’, an Internet phenomenon whereby a member of an online forum posts a deliberately offensive, insulting, or provocative comment intended to garner a hostile response or heated argument, often over a topic the poster has no vested interest in.

Studies of flaming on YouTube found that, although many YouTubers said they did not flame, it is perceived to be very common among the video-sharing site (see Moor, Heuvelman, & Verleur 2010; Johnson 2009; Bishop 2012). Sometimes motivated by frustrations, offense or misunderstandings – either from the video content or from other comments, YouTube users also flame purely for entertainment at the expense of others, sometimes moved solely by the desire for attention. While the above four comments may each contain multiple interpretations within YouTube (and by extension Web 2.0) protocol – a social etiquette that is riddled with trolls, haters, flaming, and vast kinds of polarising behaviour – on a fundamental level it is clear from these comments that the video has forced the inmates into a global discourse that is often centred around and about them, and one that frequently focuses on their status as Filipino and/or criminal.

Of the comments that make clear intertextual references, approximately half of these are comments written by YouTube users to voice their musical requests (12). As user cmc42561 and user bigeyesxx publicly announce, using block capitals for added dramatic and demanding effect:
These users appear to envision that the inmates will see their shout-outs for songs like ‘Harlem Shake,’ LMFAO’s ‘Party Rock Anthem,’ or the latest Katy Perry or Miley Cyrus single; to these users the inmates appear to represent an abstracted karaoke machine, a kind of digital jukebox, or dancing cover band who will gladly pander to their requests. As a captive but creative corps, some YouTubers seem to imagine that they enjoy a standard of incarceration on a par to US and European prisons, with education programmes and Internet access.

On the other hand, while the comments shown above make explicit reference to CPDRC’s Thriller, other YouTubers posts appear to have their own agenda. These users use the comments section to promote and perhaps even convert the YouTube community to join their own ideologies. This is particularly evident in the case of ‘Racial’ (6), ‘Religious’ (8), and ‘Michael Jackson fans’ (11) categories. For example:

Yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. Matthew 13:21 (YahGodIs)

Homosexuality is a sin. Like you didn’t know....

(TruckTurner_Jesus_Has_Risen)

I LOVE YOU FOREVER MIKE <3 (Sıtkı Hıdış)

The above comments, in conjunction with the ‘Racial’ category, may make implicit or explicit reference to the video, but for the most part such comments often function as standalone conversations. YouTube’s anonymous comment-based communication does not exist in real time; rather it is based upon back and forth interactions, thus most comments, such as the above, exist in a state of stasis.
Other YouTube comments take a surprising, particular issue with the video’s lack of copyright in Germany (10),\(^{157}\) and take to the comment section to pose further questions about this to the YouTube collective, whilst others see this restriction as a springboard to make disparaging remarks about Germany, German, and/or Sony Music (who some view as the culprit behind the restricted access):

“Video can be viewed worldwide except in Germany.” More proof that the German’s don’t have a sense of humour. (Xavi Bob).

It becomes particularly salient from reading CPDRC Thriller’s comments is audiences reaction and interaction to the video is not straightforward, nor is it entirely predictable. Many commenters note how this video is experienced as part of an ordinary, everyday YouTube video experience, as YouTuber pokemaniac408 notes:

this is just good YouTube (pokemaniac408)

Comments such as these suggest how videos such as CPDRC’s Thriller entertain audiences; however momentarily, but for the most part remain an example of an unexceptional YouTube cultural fare – most likely soon forgotten, disappearing into YouTube’s digital sinkhole. While some users take to the comments to credit the source that recommended the video (such as ‘Thumbs up if Reddit/Glee/Vitamin Water ad sent you here’), many other comments highlight the fact that users encounter with and experience of this video appears to be entirely random, with expressions of surprise, shock and disbelief occurring frequently. Perhaps these

\(^{157}\) The first sentence of the video’s ‘About’ section states: ‘Video can be viewed worldwide except in Germany.’ In addition, a pop-window appears a few seconds into the video and announces: ‘Audio of this video has been claimed by Sony Music Entertainment. They lifted the ban except in Germany.’ GEMA and Germany’s lisencing laws operate distinctly differently to most other nations. (See Appendix III for CPDRC’s Thriller metadata.) This copyright issue is worthy of further investigation, as it belies several inherent paradoxes within YouTube operations. Sony Music attempted to remove the audio from this copy-protected audio soon after it first went viral by requesting that YouTube remove Sony’s audio-track. However upon realising that they could maximise this opportunity to convert YouTube views into paying customers of Jackson’s back catalogue, Sony retreated. This becomes painfully obvious post-Jackson’s death in 2009, when Sony fly a team of Jackson’s choreographers, backing dancers, and HD camera crew from Los Angeles to Cebu to film the Dancing Inmates in a promotional video for Jackson’s posthumous DVD release, This is It (January 2010).
YouTubers searched for the original Michael Jackson *Thriller* video, and CPDRC’s *Thriller* appeared as an option in the ‘Results’ category. Perhaps it was generated through YouTube’s internal recommendation algorithm after watching a clip on prisons, or automatically played as part of a YouTube’s mechanised, promoted playlists. Perhaps they searched for a video to learn the *Thriller* dance. Whatever their reason or route to locating CPDRC’s *Thriller*, these comments demonstrate that a substantial number of YouTubers are motivated to join in the community discussion covering a wide-range of thematic threads. In addition, this viral video’s YouTube comment thread accommodates a vast array of socially emotive interaction, from the banal to the brazen.

**Pop Music, YouTube and the Thrill of Transformations**

Narratives of transformation play an important role in the overall case of the CPDRC’s ‘music therapy’ programme (Garcia 2007). Such compelling narratives are, of course, not limited to music or the arts, and can be found across society as part of societal aspirations, whereby narratives of self-improvement through social mobility continue to play an important role. Neoliberalism has done much to encourage this particular version of advancing one’s social positions, in addition to increased widespread belief in the social impact of the arts, and increasing governmental policies reflecting this discourse. While transformative agency is a powerful narrative, one of the main critiques of transformation narratives, particularly in relation to reality-based TV programmes (including quasi-musical shows such as *X-Factor* and the now international *Idol* franchise), is that they encourage the repurposing of myths, and delivers false possibilities – often to society’s most vulnerable people.158

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158 Children and teenagers feature frequently in such reality narratives of transformation, and particularly in talent shows (where child singers and dancers often progress to the show’s finale).
The cultural tropes of music’s transformative agency are attractive to many of us. However the poor, the subaltern and the disenfranchised are perhaps particularly susceptible to the irresistible rhetoric of the transformation trope. Incarcerated men and women such as the CPDRC inmates – housed in a detention centre awaiting trial, with limited options and alternatives but to participate in the dance as the songs fill the prison soundscape – have been indoctrinated in the thrill of transformation, without being allowed to question or refute its’ actuality. What the discourse of transformation obfuscates is the lives of the overwhelming majority, those who did not win the talent show, the inmates who were not granted access to Garcia’s ‘Ambassadors of Goodwill’ touring troupe and instead eventually went to Manila to stand trial, were incarcerated elsewhere and never seen (dancing) again.

Captivated by the thrill of transformation, we fail to address the complexities of exactly what it is that is being transformed by this narrative. Based on the corporeal performances of the CPDRC inmates, judgments are made, time and time again, on how the dance programme has transformed the inmates from ‘lowly criminals to celebrity criminals’ (Garcia qtd in CNN 2007). There remain questions regarding the elusive nature of fame itself, in addition to why (Internet) fame is widely advocated among prisoners and deemed worthy of so much attention. The programme has undoubtedly enhanced aspects of the incarcerated experience for some inmates, perhaps partly through the ritual and format offered by regular dancing and live performances, through ordinary individual’s participation in the programme’s
draw special attention to a particular Philippine incident on one of the Philippines most popular noontime TV shows, Willing Willie, where a crying, six-year-old boy was prodded and forced to dance – to gyrate to Dr. Dre’s ‘The Next Episode’ on stage for a cash prize of 10,000 pesos – in front of a live studio audience and TV cameras. The 2011 incident sparked national debate, the show’s sponsors pulled out, the Commission on Human Rights, Classification Board and Social Welfare Secretary of State investigated, and ultimately the show was cancelled. Multiple videos of the boy’s humiliating experience still circulate online on various video-sharing platforms, and certainly point to the dangers of continually mediating harmful recordings of our most vulnerable citizens – the young, the poor, and the disenfranchised.
transformative space – what Nick Couldry calls a process of ‘celebrification’ (2003; 2004). Transformative spaces are forever intertwined with an often short (but none-the-less intensive) moment of fame, delivered through an overly saturated media economy, but include a degree of tangible and intangible power. The transformation of criminal bodies through the intervention of music and dance, is a reflection of our desire for instant gratification in transformative narratives, and to believe that non-invasive solutions to ‘curing’ criminal deviances and remedy socially constructed inequities can, and do, work. Much like ‘the reveal,’ that forms the heart of many reality television shows such as the ‘makeover’ genre where audiences get to witness the physical, and often drastic, transformation of the subjects (and objects), CPDRC’s *Thriller* conveys to audiences, in part, this ‘Cinderella’ effect. As many of the CPDRC YouTube comments reveal, in addition to widespread Internet reception, the dance performance functions as public restorations of order, control, health and vitality to lives that were previously deemed socially deviant. In this discourse of transformation and the heroic narrative, both prison warden Byron Garcia (and to an extent, Michael Jackson) is credited as the hero who brought salvation to poor prisoners.

Again, CPDRC’s *Thriller* highlights several potentialities. It might be that YouTube has arrived as a new form of digital rehabilitation, on the one hand. On the other, it points to the return of historic, and well-documented forms of oppression and public humiliation, albeit en masse to a degree we have never before experienced. It also questions the slippery foundations of morality as we struggle to find our footing in the digital era: is it ethical to publish audiovisual media of someone who may not be in a position to give consent? Uploading, sharing, and publicly inviting free-for-all commentary on the pop video performances of unconvicted men and women awaiting
trial at CPDRC, many of whom are named in the accompanying media or in the video themselves, demonstrates the extent to which we need to reconsider music, dance and other creative practices in relation to digital technological advances, and social networking. As increasing aspects of our lives are lived online, the ramifications of making the work of the CPDRC programme available online without restriction, may have real life consequences the dancing inmates. Henry Jenkins once asked, when discussing the rise of Indo-chic culture in America – the widespread cultural appropriation of Asian and South Asian art, films, fashion and music: ‘Does the ability to dance to the Other’s music lead to any real appreciation of the Other’s social condition or political perspective?’ (2006: 164). In CPDRC’s Thriller, a similar question runs both ways: does the ability to watch videos of Other’s dancing to (global pop) music lead to any real appreciation to the Other’s social condition? Conversely, in the case of the CPDRC performances, does the ability to dance to music from a former colonizing nation lead to any real appreciation of the colonisers political perspective?

Locating Pleasure in CPDRC’s Thriller: National Pride and Postcolonial Nostalgia

Security must be approached not only physically but also from the cultural and behavioral context. Inmates at the CPDRC are required to go through a workout regimen. While the goal is to keep the body fit in order to keep the mind fit, such may not actually happen if it is not done in a manner deemed pleasurable. Music, being the language of the soul, is added to that regimen (Garcia 2006, italics mine).

159 Recent studies have shown that increasing numbers of employers use Internet search engines and social networking sites to vet potential job candidates, and are influenced based on their online presence, e.g. Harris Interactive (on behalf of Career Builder) reported in 2013 that two in five (43 per cent) of hiring managers research candidates through social media and have found information that has caused them not to hire a candidate, an increase in 9 percentage points from 2012. Retrieved from: http://www.careerbuilder.com/share/aboutus/pressreleasesdetail.aspx?sd=6/26/2013&id=pr766&ed=12/31/2013
From the beginning, YouTube was synonymous with audience-driven entertainment, thanks to its remarkable feedback loop that gave content creators near-instant commentary on what content was deemed successful, and what content was utterly forgettable (See Table 10).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good community service, entertaining the Internet. (Mary L)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amazing Philippines People! Very Entertaining. Show your best in the World. (jenise david)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I got goose bumps. (merlin1997ish)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I need to schedule a vacation to the Philippines and see this place. This is just beyond awesome. (Zen53GT)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>please tell me Michael Jackson knew about this. I think the entertainment of this video alone would have made his life that much better :P (1cj12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happiest criminals in the world. (cruchb3rty)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This was pretty awesome, made me laugh. Then I realized they have all done horrible things… -.- (7keno7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can hear Michael’s boyish laugh saying how great this is. He would have loved it!!! I know I enjoyed watching it!!! (Cyndi L)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I was link six (I am 12 now) I saw my mom watching this with her friends laughing and she said “Aye boys! If you don’t dance you get no slop for the week!” I was very confused!! LOL (MythStalker .Productions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fantastic michael would be so proud of you guys. (…) this is therapy for these guys that is what music is for, to bring happiness and hope. (Isabelle Speed)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10. A sample of CPDRC’s Thriller YouTube comments expressing being entertained –through an incitement of pleasure and/or amusement – from watching Garcia’s original CPDRC’s Thriller video.

Over the past nine years it has given birth to a cultivated entertainment culture that operates outside of, yet constantly in dialogue with, traditional audiovisual media ecosystems. An early study of YouTube pointed to the primary motivations for using the site based on Papacharissi and Rubin’s Internet motives scale (2000). Authors Hanson and Haridakis (2008) identified four key factors that attracted users to YouTube: (1) leisure entertainment, (2) interpersonal expression, (3) information seeking, and (4) companionship. The comments left underneath CPDRC’s Thriller support these factors to varying degrees, however the majority of comments point to an effect of entertainment; the comments reproduced in Table 5.1 indicate a small sample of CPDRC’s comments that affectively display entertainment, and pleasure.
Taken as a whole, the range of comments left underneath CPDRC’s *Thriller* convey a range of different pleasure activators from amusement, empathy, and wonder. A significant number of YouTubers cite their admiration for Michael Jackson, as the CPDRC’s performance appears to trigger emotions of nostalgia, and loss.

The ideology behind packaging embodied discipline (and/or rehabilitation) as pleasure (and mass entertainment) is inextricably bound up with issues of bodily agency, and furthermore, begs the question: what pleasures are being activated in CPDRC’s *Thriller*? And is this a sustained pleasure derived from CPDRC’s YouTube cover of *Thriller* that continues to captivate hundreds of millions of viewers, incite vigorous debate, and inspire original creative output in a wide range of unexpected ways eight years after it first went viral? The perceived success of the CPDRC’s *Thriller*, and the thousands of YouTube comments that convey audience pleasure and entertainment in witnessing their performance, supports Garcia’s claim for keeping the body fit in manner deemed pleasurable. However perhaps rather than pleasure being activated in the inmates embodied performance, Garcia may instead be referring to his perceived pleasure, and by extension, the YouTube audience’s pleasure. Key to this pleasure activation is through the video’s YouTube dissemination, which points towards the video’s perceived success in its intimate relationship with various forms of nostalgia and hybridity, intertwined with the early 20th century US colonialisation of the Philippines and subsequent post/neo-colonial states.

I suggest that CPDRC’s *Thriller* video also taps into another kind of pleasure, in the form of pride, or more specifically, national pride. The performance text invites us to question the tactics of popular culture consumption and globalised cultural

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160 Or to borrow Anne Philips phrase ‘bodily integrity’ (2011: 725).
convergence. Garcia, along with many Filipinos and non-Filipinos alike express pride in seeing Filipino prisoners gain national attention and cultural recognition through YouTube’s digital visibility.

I wanted something to thrill the world. I just found it so hilarious, so melodious. What an irony. They’re right here in this jail, considered the rejects of society, and yet these rejects are now making our province and our country proud (Garcia, qtd in Hunte 2007).

Garcia, quoted here in an interview with ABC News, imbues the CPDRC performances with a sense of regional and national pride; pride at having reformed the so-called ‘rejects of society,’ and a proud satisfaction in bringing Cebuanos to the intra-national and international stage. The inmates have become representatives for and of the Philippine nation, which carries a weight surpassing the realms of most prison sentences.

In Christi-Anne Castro’s vivid account of the University of the Philippines Madrigal Singers (the Madrigals) international successes in the field of music, she highlights the extra-musical meaning that becomes infused in their performances as they become musical ambassadors and representatives of the Philippines. The Madrigals are regularly billed as ambassadors of the Philippines and as a result, ‘it is possible for audiences to transitively interpret musical success as a symbolic triumph for the Philippine nation and for Filipinos as citizens and expatriates of that nation’ (2011: 158). This may seem far-fetched at first, but Castro carefully dissects this metaphor, with an important revelation, as she explains how this seeming leap is not actually as large as one might think, especially when we consider how sports teams in international meets (e.g. the Olympics, the World Cup) neatly stand in for their respective nations. She continues:

Once this interpretive framework has been set up, it is easy to fill in a variety of metaphors that relate the activities needed for successful singing with the positive attributes of a national body. As such, it seems a natural
enough leap that a successful performing group might be adopted by the state and nationalised in order to support and even control the network of meanings that arise from music and its performance. The Madrigals are particularly effective at promoting certain national ideals because of their repertoire and performance practice. They are young and vigorous performers, ideal for representing a new society (Castro 2011: 158-9).

As Castro succinctly describes, if we use such interpretive framework it is rather straightforward to see how such young, vigorous performers – athletes, dancers, and opera singers alike – can serve to project a very specific international image of the Republic of the Philippines. The Philippine nation is thus reflected, in the case of the Madrigals, during their international concert tours each year, to audiences that have included a variety of Presidents, Prime Ministers and Popes. Through hundreds of hours of rigorous rehearsals, meticulous appearance, and detailed choreographed movements, the Madrigals present themselves as cultural ambassadors of the Philippines with an impeccable award-winning background to support, and indeed sanction, this image.

To return our focus to YouTube, both the Madrigal Singers and the CPDRC inmates enjoy thousands of video uploads, with hundreds of thousands to millions of views. The viral popularity of both performance troupes demonstrates the international extent of their fame, while YouTube’s level playing field renders both groups as strangely equal, despite utilizing disparate musical texts and operating from vastly different contexts (see Figure 5.5). While the Madrigals perform physically, touring the international concert circuit ‘in the flesh’ at least twice a year, the CPDRC performances circulate through a distinctively digital yet nonetheless similarly

\[161\] Two quick examples: their careful medley of ABBA songs, performed in concert in 2010 (PaulJacob ‘ABBA Medley – Philippine Madrigal Singers’ Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6PbHl3vcc90), and their performance of the William Tell Overture (gene27vid’s channel (2011) Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2plKy7ooIU4). Note the Madrigal Singers immaculate dress, hair, make-up, precise gestures and subtle choreographed movements (leaving aside the potentially questionable comedic tropes, particularly in the former video).
international circuit. Intended purposes aside, both groups serve as international representatives of their city, their country, and in some cases, are transformed into ambassadors of the entire continent of Asia.

![YouTube search](image)

**Figure 5.5.** A YouTube search for ‘philippine singers dancers’ brings up videos of both the CPDRC dancing inmates and the Philippine Madrigal Singers.

As this subchapter’s opening quote from Garcia details, the CPDRC’s performance achievements share a sense of international recognition, and are simultaneously tasked with bringing a very real sense of pride to the Cebu province and to the Philippine nation. While the Madrigal Singers projected a particular identity that was beneficial to the Philippine government – that of world-class prestige, musical excellence and virtuosity that naturally give the Philippines a sense of pride according to Philippine Ambassador J. Eduardo Malaya (Gov.ph 2012) – they are simultaneously internationally recognised as ambassadors of the wider region and for promoting ‘dialogue and understanding among peoples in Southeast Asia’ (UNESCO 2009). A cursory glance through YouTuber comments on CPDRC’s *Thriller* point out the extent to which, for many YouTubers, the Philippine inmates stand as representatives of the world’s largest continent; an ‘Asian Invasion,’ as YouTuber Tony Her exclaims.\(^{162}\)

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\(^{162}\) For more *Thriller* YouTube comments, see Appendix IV.
Meanwhile, the embodiment of Western popular music and dance choreography by CPDRC’s Filipino performers can be read as a literal performance of hybridity. As detailed in Chapter Three, cultural hybridity lies beneath much postcolonial Philippine performances (see Lowe 1996; Buenconsejo 2000; Castro 2011). For Castro, the performance of Western music of any kind in the Philippines by a Filipino is partially an outgrowth of the colonial experience, yet simultaneously ‘it is a performance in which the native identity is not completely subsumed by the coloniser’ (2011: 56). In our current system of globalised capitalism (Hart and Daughton 2005: 330), it can be difficult to separate what can be attributed to colonialism and what can be understood as homogeneous Western enculturation. Castro goes further however, conceptualising Filipino hybridity as a fundamental characteristic of modernism:

From a nationalist standpoint, the adoption of Western music might better be unpacked theoretically as a potentially empowering mimetic act as much as an expression of hegemony. Even more symbolically potent, however, hybridity in composition and performance practice is the deliberate carving out of space for the native. It creates a partnership of equal grounding that, significantly, has been manipulated creatively by the native. Hybridity validates the claim of the native on Western music, not as an immutable universal product, but rather as birthright. Hybridity, as a nationalist and creative strategy, might even be constructed as a hallmark of Filipino modernism (2011: 56).

This hybridity that is embedded deep within many Filipinos, is a powerful and empowering expression; for Castro it becomes ‘birthright,’ as a result of such an international and imperial history. Certainly, hybridity is not an obstacle towards cultural homogenisation. Rather, cultural theorist Stuart Hall sees in the aesthetics of modern popular music a certain alignment with ‘the aesthetics of the hybrid, the aesthetics of the crossover, the aesthetics of the diaspora, the aesthetics of creolization’ (1997: 39). Others have suggested that hybridity is powerful, and hybridised cultures and identities may be subversive (Bhabha 1990). When
considered in tandem with CPDRC *Thriller*’s play on nostalgia, we get a sense to just how quietly subversive a work it has the potential to be.

Far from being an eternal concept, we know that the concept of nostalgia originates from the late seventeenth century, after a Swiss physician coined the term – from the Greek *nostos*: homecoming, and *algos*, pain – to describe the pathological condition of homesickness among Swiss soldiers fighting abroad. The medical origins of nostalgia, then understood as a pathological condition, manifested itself in physical, and psychological ways with symptoms including despondency, weeping, melancholia, and not infrequently, attempts at suicide. However the meaning of ‘nostalgia’ changed and developed over the centuries, and by the eighteenth century nostalgia was associated with a longing for home (Boym 2001). By the nineteenth century, nostalgia accrued an artistic and literary association, and a century later, it acquired kitsch preconceptions (Maier 1996; Boym 2001). Recently, scholars have demonstrated that such feelings of longing are not necessarily as ‘natural, nor as pan-human, and therefore not necessarily as innocent, as one might imagine’ (Rosaldo 1998: 72).

To further explain how *Thriller* might trigger nostalgia among YouTube (and live) audiences, I enlist Svetlana Boym’s concept of nostalgia. For Boym there are two nostalgic tendencies: what she terms restorative nostalgia (which involves attempts to restore the past, seeking to reproduce what they perceive to be the essence of lost and, in many cases, impossible objects) and reflective nostalgia (which reflects on how things were, and thrives in wistful longing). Using Boym’s framework, we see that CPDRC’s performance has prompted both reflective and restorative nostalgia: firstly, CPDRC’s *Thriller* is situated within a restorative framework whereby Garcia’s uses the medium of *Thriller*’s song and dance to rebuild inmates
sense of self, to rehabilitate by projecting his longing for a humanitarian method of
disciplining bodies through his favourite music. Secondly, *Thriller* operates as a
reflective text in its ironic humour, revealing, as Boym states, that longing and critical
thinking are not always opposed to one another, ‘as affective memories do not
absolve one from compassion, judgment or critical reflection,’ and thus I argue that
the inmates’ reflective nostalgia is indeed ‘enamoured of distance, not of the referent
itself’ (Boym 2001: 41-50). CPDRC’s *Thriller* taps into a digital archive of nostalgia
(after McClintock 1995), and in doing so articulates nostalgia, accents hybridity,
while all the time affecting forms of pleasure.

Lastly, CPDRC’s *Thriller* functions on a visceral level, as a remediated
reimagining of Michael Jackson’s *Thriller* short film. In explaining his choice of
*Thriller*, Garcia neatly calls upon *Thriller*’s poetics, stating that ‘unless we stop
breeding demons in jails, gruesome ghouls from every tomb will seal the doom of
nations and civilizations’ (Garcia 2007). Produced in 2007 some two years before
Jackson’s death, and subsequent (re-)launch into the stridently nostalgic mainstream
media, it would appear that Garcia consciously chose *Thriller* to be the ‘language of
the [inmates] soul’ precisely because of *Thriller*’s immense, international cultural
capital. As recounted in Chapter Four, *Thriller*’s overwhelming and continued chart
success – over 100 million worldwide record sales to date – has firmly embedded
*Thriller* within popular culture’s psyche, as a formally recognised historically and
aesthetically significant work. A mere reference to a pop text of this caliber is
irrefutably equipped to trigger a wave of globalised nostalgia; commanding 1500
inmates to perform *Thriller*’s choreographic sequence, considered by many to be the
‘most important communal dance of the last three decades’ (George 2010: 107; also
Mkrdichian 2009: 2), and sharing a recording of that performance on a public forum such as YouTube, was almost guaranteed to be effective.

CPDRC’s *Thriller* has achieved over 100 hundred million views since it was uploaded in 2007,\(^{163}\) spawned countless spin-offs,\(^{164}\) and most notably it has been implemented as public policy in all prisons across the Philippines with the introduction of the BJMP’s ‘dance rehabilitation’ legislature in March 2010. Through the immense power of nostalgic rhetoric, CPDRC’s *Thriller* has had very real life effects for this group of former inmates, the Ambassadors of Goodwill, who have achieved this intangible, YouTube fame through touring the Philippines under Garcia’s strict tutelage, blurring the boundaries between freedom and servitude.\(^{165}\)

CPDRC’s *Thriller* mass circulation of nostalgia via YouTube displays the vast potentials of the site, where anyone, including Philippine prisoners, can achieve international attention and recognition. As mentioned in Chapter Four – and throughout this thesis, I propose that CPDRC’s *Thriller* viral video, released in 2007, marks a milestone in contemporary pop cultural history that echoes the impact Michael Jackson’s original 1983 *Thriller* had on shaping popular music and global culture for decades to come.

Reading CPDRC’s *Thriller* as a work of nostalgia has some notable theoretical implications. In conceptualizing *Thriller’s* power in affecting pleasure, in seducing audiences to its nostalgic power, Marxist psychoanalyst and cultural critic Slavoj

\(^{163}\) It is difficult to accurately assess the exact number of views the original posting of CPDRC’s *Thriller*, plus every mirror (those videos that have been reproduced on YouTube, as well as those reposted elsewhere, on Dailymotion, Vimeo, Facebook, and so on), but a conservative estimate puts the collective views at 100 million. [The original video has in excess of 52 million views alone.]

\(^{164}\) Some of the more notable CPDRC-influenced projects/products include *Prison Dancer*, a Canadian enterprise, which started out as an off-Broadway musical and became an original, 12-episode web musical in 2012. In 2013, the CPDRC inspired independent Filipino film *Dance of the Steel Bars* was released, starring Filipino actor (and heartthrob) Dingdong Dantes, and Irish actor Patrick Bergin. It was filmed on location at the CPDRC, and a large-scale, cinematic dance sequence performed by the inmates plays a crucial role in the film’s narrative.

\(^{165}\) See Chapter Two, Part Two for further details on the Ambassadors of Goodwill programme.
Žižek’s discussion of film noir proves useful (1989). When we watch American film noir of the 1940s, Žižek suggests that although we can no longer identify with it, what fascinates us is a certain gaze of the ‘other,’ a hypothetical, mythic spectator from the Forties who was purportedly still able to instantly identify with the world of film noir. ‘What we really see when we watch a film noir is this gaze of the other; our relation to a film noir is always divided, split between fascination and ironic distance – ironic distance toward its diegetic reality, fascination with the gaze’ (Žižek 1989: 39). The function of the nostalgic object, for Žižek, is precisely to conceal the antinomy between eye and gaze by the power of fascination, and in nostalgia, the gaze of the other is pacified, domesticated, ‘gentrified.’ As a result, we experience the illusion of seeing ourselves seeing – of seeing the gaze itself (Žižek 1992: 114). Thus, CPDRC’s *Thriller* functions through providing a variety of gazes: the gaze of the Eighties audience watching and reminiscing over the inmates *Thriller*; and the neocolonial gaze through combining the quintessential American pop song and Eighties archival choreography within the confines of a contemporary Philippine prison setting.

Further, in showing how this type of nostalgia is operative in the case of CPDRC’s *Thriller*, the aggressivity of this particular kind of expression of cultural dominance speaks directly to cultural anthropologist Renato Rosaldo’s (1989) understanding of imperialist nostalgia. Rosaldo highlights the ironic nature of imperialist nostalgia, that utilises a pose of ‘innocent yearning’ to capture people’s imaginations while simultaneously concealing its complicity, with often-brutal domination (1989: 34). Establishing a Pilipinas cultural identity after ‘three hundred years in a monastery and a half-century in Hollywood’ (Rosaldo 1989: 77) is not without challenges, and indeed serves to highlight the inherent paradox faced by new mediated subjects. Digital media platforms have given a voice to postcolonial and
subaltern subjects, while simultaneously problematising the Filipino performers, presenting them as uniform, ‘highly trainable,’ Orientalist stereotypes, powerless to personally participate in the digital swirl within which they operate. As such I suggest that this quasi-MTV style video, with hundreds upon hundreds of clearly marked Filipino prisoners at its core, becomes metaphor for 21st century postcolonial Philippine attempts to assert independence from the US.

Yet to go a step further, extending philosopher Marshall Berman’s metaphor of ‘idealised fantasies’ that gloss over violence, I argue that CPDRC’s Thriller recreation of nostalgic fantasy is imperative to this pop music production, and is manifested threefold. First, CPDRC’s Thriller reveals a longing for an idealised past and an imagined future: through enacting Garcia’s projected nostalgia for a universal language of rehabilitation on criminal bodies, the inmates convey seemingly oppositional binaries through their portrayal of prison life as ostensibly harmonious. Calling upon such inherent oppositions – widely held presumptions about (Filipino) inmates, as well as assumptions about life in a detention centre (fuelled, in part, by popular media depictions) – CPDRC’s Thriller dramatises such juxtapositions and expectations. Secondly this enforced performance of nostalgia can create a longing for autonomy as well as immunise inmate performers through the momentary liberty afforded through musical performance. Thirdly, it displays a kind of cultural hybridization, calling to mind what Anne McClintock calls ‘neocolonial nostalgia’ through combining American pop superstars and Eighties archival choreography within the confines of a contemporary Philippine prison setting. The YouTube audience of CPDRC’s collective performances are, in a sense, bound together – connected to this imaginary space where American pop nostalgia articulates a liminal,  

Berman questions the acclamation of traditional society by claiming that our century has been prolific in constructing idealized fantasies of life, which are fundamentally designed to gloss over the violence, cruelty, and brutality of modern life (1992).
exoticised community on the other side of the world. Their overall oeuvre is defined by irreconcilable contrasts and co-existing oppositions, such as the inmates determined, libertarian act of Philippine flag waving to Eighties synth pop sounds of Phil Oakley and Giorgio Moroder. Whilst I consider their performance to be entrenched in nostalgic rhetoric this should not in any way depoliticise their performance.

In reality, I argue for the opposite. To read the inmates performance simply as an exploration of Eighties nostalgia, as it so often is, both inflates and reduces the significance of their YouTube video, which conveys and reproduces a complex ideology of neocolonial progress at the expense of other experiences. Their thrilling, nostalgic performances, that continue to be disseminated globally on digital screens, is politically productive despite of, and precisely because of, the range of embedded nostalgic gazes we identify without necessarily noticing.

167 This line of thought was influenced by Tony Mitchell’s discussion of Icelandic music and psychogeography (2009: 196).
168 Although videos of this performance are no longer available on YouTube, the homogenous rows of orange-clad inmates moving in unison to the Village People’s disco anthem ‘YMCA,’ espouting – at face value – the virtues of brotherhood, and the Young Men’s Christian Association, while the song is widely understood as a celebration of male homosexuality.
Coda

Dangerous Mediations and Other Concluding Considerations

Sitting in the curiously chilly library of Ateneo de Manila University one day, I stumbled upon a most peculiar video through one of my regular YouTube trawls. After catching up on the most recent CPDRC routines (and after indulging in a few obligatory cat-playing-the piano videos) I happened upon an old black and white film called ‘Manila – Castillian Memoirs 1930s,’ digitised and uploaded as an eight minute and fifteen second YouTube video. The unnamed narrator, an added voiceover to what was evidently originally a silent film, describes a 1930s tour of Manila, which was firmly established as a ‘proud’ American colony. The video displays both US and Spanish colonial histories, with clear traces of a recent Spanish past as we observe stylish Manileños going about their business in camisa blouses and shopping for the latest fashionable hats. The narrator furnishes each visual image with additional details as they unfold, providing an overview of a cosmopolitan Manila life, from city sidewalks and cigar factories to caramatas (horse drawn carriages) and caribou pulling carts. However it was the film’s depiction of Bilibid prison, at six minutes in, that particularly caught my attention. The narrator describes Bilibid prison as embracing seventeen acres and harbouring some 3500 transgressors of the law, making it the largest penal institution in the world. He continues:

Retreating every afternoon at four-thirty o’clock, is an impressive half-hour ceremony, when visitors are admitted to a central tower, from which the ward buildings radiate like the spokes of a wheel, thereby enabling spectators to view the entire scene with ease. (Manila – Castillian Memoirs 1930s)

169 The delicate, often hand-embroidered, and usually expensive camisa blouse is made from woven piña thread (pineapple cloth), and when worn in the Philippines is seen as a sign of wealth. 170 Thanks to Hannah Bulloch and Piers Kelly for their YouTube diligence with this video particular excerpt.
At this point the film shows the marching band performing in the prison yard, with trumpets, trombones, bass drums, etc. Following this musical performance, the entire prison company perform a display of short callisthenic exercises, a feature our narrator is quick to point out, notably distinguishes Bilibid from other penitentiaries (Figure 5.6).

The narrator continues, by pointing out that during the calisthenics performance, the men are treated not unlike soldiers, as they are subjected to a system that
‘grants privilege and metes out punishment according to conduct and industrial
skill.’ He continues:

Uniforms of different colours indicate whether they are trustees, prisoners
of the first, second or third class or apprentices. A drill by the crack Bilibid
Scouts, bearing wooden arms and comprising chiefly life and good
behaviour prisoners conclude the afternoon display.

The Bilibid performances were remarkable, as the narrator noted, and set this
facility apart from others both intra-nationally and internationally. According to
our unnamed reporter, the motivation behind this musical revue and performance
programme is drawn from an imperial rhetoric that remains all too familiar today.
The goal of this ‘model’ programme is to prepare inmates for eventual good
citizenship through regular work, recreation and rest. Such is the popularity of this
programme, ‘so beneficent is the regime that most of the guards are stationed
outside to restrain immigration rather than inside as is customary to thwart
emigration’ (Manila – Castillian Memoirs 1930s).¹⁷¹ This familiar language of
inmate transformation connects at once with Foucault’s reconditioning of a
soldier, while simultaneously reminding us of Byron Garcia’s declarations of
‘Responsive Rehabilitation’ in his 2006 article for Cebu Sun Star newspaper. In
this Garcia states that the CPDRC approach to rehabilitation is:

discipline, physical fitness, dismantling of the culture of corruption and
preemptive decongestion. It is a concept that views behavioral change and
culture in the microcosm of a sick society, which is, the jail. (…) While the
goal is to keep the body fit in order to keep the mind fit, such may not actually
happen if it is not done in a manner deemed pleasurable. Music, being the
language of the soul, is added to that regimen (Garcia qtd in Campbell 2007,
non-paginated).

¹⁷¹ The filmic grain and vignette of Pizor’s documentary, filmed on 16mm original print, and the
narrated voiceover complete with an opening orchestral melody – grainy, warbling and softly distorted,
harks back to its original format as an early phonograph cylinder or gramophone recording. The short
film was released by Pizor’s own production company, Imperial Distribution Corporation. Formed in
1931, Imperial Distribution Corporation was founded by Pizor to distribute and produce documentary
films, low-budget Westerns, melodramas and short subjects; ‘Manila – Castillian Memoirs 1930s’ and
the Port O’Call series was just one such enterprise.
The addition of music to the exercise routines gives a task that might ordinarily be seen as objectionable, a pleasurable appearance in comparison. García’s approach at an holistic, and seemingly quintessentially Filipino approach to discipline can be traced at least to the US colonial rehabilitation practices evidenced at Bilibid prison. García too aims to prepare his inmates for eventual good citizenship through a combination of keeping the body fit in order to keep the mind fit, which crucially – as previously mentioned, may not happen if it is not done in a matter deemed pleasurable. ‘True rehabilitation may need revolutionary change in policies and approaches,’ García claims, and ‘at the CPDRC, the experience in responsive rehabilitation has proven that revolutionary change can be done from within’ (2006).

Consciously or subconsciously, García taps into a prison practice that, on the one hand, harks back to the American colonial project. On the other, he connects his argument for music as the language of the soul to an historical idea of music as the language of the soul. This discourse can be traced to the classical world, but came into its own nineteenth century German philosophy. As Arthur Schopenhauer eloquently expressed in *The World as Will and Idea*,

> [music] is such a great and eminently splendid art, it creates such a powerful reaction in man’s inmost depths, it is so thoroughly and profoundly understood by him as a uniquely universal language, even exceeding in clarity that of the phenomenal world itself (Schopenhauer 1819, reproduced in Le Huray and Day 1981: 324).

For Schopenhauer, and countless others since, music *is* powerful. We can see how García is replicating an argument with tradition, a historicised belief in music’s magnificence and an ability to be truly universal. And it is in this quest for universality that music’s use becomes ‘dangerous’, for when exercising all forms of power comes an inherent responsibility.
Furthermore this statement indicates at least two possible interpretations. Firstly it suggests a holistic approach, a cost-effective method of keeping the inmates in good health throughout their incarceration. Secondly, however, it may refer to keeping the inmates mentally fit in order to absorb the prison’s – and by extension the state’s – disciplinary ideology. The meaning inferred and interpretations yielded from Garcia’s statements are not wholly self-evident. Even so, the performances are justified, and feed into, the discourse that surrounds them. Conversely such discourse is constantly justified by the frequent public performances, creating a digital feedback loop with real-life, human consequences.

We currently face a crossroads; technology has shifted the mobility of what can be considered presence, and what might be the present. Audiovisual cultures – sonic histories and visual contextualisations – are today continuously preserved as history due to increasingly accessible technological devices that enable any performance to be recorded, disseminated and archived with the press of a button. Multiple histories of musical performance can be present in mediated forms. The actuality of the live – of witnessing performance, of participating in an intense communal activity – has not been hampered by the rise of digital media, for the qualities of liveness and mediation are not in opposition. To fully comprehend YouTube videos such as CPDRC’s *Thriller* as a performance, and arguably, a performing art, is not just to say that such a work is performed in itself, but crucially ‘it is to say that through it we perform social meaning’ (Cook 2003: 207). The notion of the performing self – the CPDRC Dancing Inmates’ performance personae – is somewhat troubled in the case of CPDRC’s *Thriller*, if we approach their performance as that of a musical performance. The inmates dance and move in time to the music, and at times, many appear to be singing (or mouthing) along to the song’s
lyrics, and clapping in time to the beat. If—*if*, we were to consider such actions
musical performances, then, according to Philip Auslander, the direct object of the
verb *to perform* is the representation of the self—*to perform first and foremost, one’s
own musical personae* (2006: 102). Their recorded video remains both a documentary
of a performance from another time and place whilst also serving as a performance
that ‘performs’ each moment it is experienced (Auslander 2006).

Studies on digital audiovisual media are appearing with increasingly
frequency in recent years, utilising a range of approaches from an array of disciplines
thus far (i.e. anthropology, sociology, ethnography). As noted at the beginning of this
chapter, early research within this (burgeoning) field has so far tended to privilege
professional (or the celebrity-made) over amateur creative work, perhaps for obvious
reasons. In addition chosen subjects and works are often located in the West and often
consciously or subconsciously, rooted in a class, gender, and/or race. Looking toward
the future, we must be mindful that despite YouTube’s obvious digital foothold, the
digital and the analogue are not antithetical. This becomes pertinent in discussions of
YouTube’s musical texts, as YouTube becomes a site for analogue and digital
convergence. There are constant, multiple overlaps or what Vernallis calls ‘co-
mingling’ across YouTube’s audiovisual media.

The rise of YouTube accentuates the fundamental importance of audiovisual
and digital literacy within our increasingly mediated environment, and how likely it is
to shape our future. From my research on new media and the audiovisual turn it
becomes obvious that audiovisual platforms like YouTube necessitate clear
comprehension across the entire population. As TED curator Chris Anderson
intimates, the rise of online video is driving a significant worldwide phenomenon that
he terms ‘crowd-accelerated innovation,’ a self-fueling cycle of learning that goes
beyond age, race, nation, and discipline. In his own words, delivered with a more than a pinch of bright-eyed TED fervor, Anderson declares that ‘it’s not too much to say that what Gutenberg did for writing, online video can now do for face-to-face communication’ (Anderson 2010). While there is much to celebrate about YouTube’s egalitarian promise, Anderson and many new media scholars disregard the many real and dangerous potentials imbedded within digital video.172 Simultaneously others encroach into an overly negative spectrum, which is equally reductionist and ultimately unhelpful. While film and television studies are part of de rigueur across many educational institutions today, digital audiovisual studies (in particular knowledge about YouTube) remain discounted (the work of the Institute of Networked Cultures173 being a fair exception). As we approach YouTube’s tenth anniversary and witness its variety of spin-offs, by-products and developments174, the social impact of YouTube upon private individuals and large conglomerates becomes increasingly apparent, and as such, it is necessary to pay close attention to how such media affect, and reflect, contemporary society.

CPDRC’s extensive and widely viewed YouTube oeuvre represents an underlying shift in popular music and media representation, on a fundamental level. While international audiences may or may not consider CPDRC’s Thriller video to be

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172 It is worth quoting Anderson’s words directly here, as they are representative of the overtly sanguine new media optimists: ‘very happily, here’s one class of people who really can’t make use of this tool. The dark side of the web is allergic to the light. I don’t think we’re going to see terrorists, for example, publishing their plans online and saying to the world, “Please, could you help us to actually make them work this time?”’ (TED Global 2010). Since 2010, if not before then, it has become increasingly apparent just how voracious the ‘dark side of the web’ is – both the dark Internet or Lost Net (internet sites that are no longer accessible through conventional methods), Deep Web and Darknet (underground websites and file-sharing networks that are hard to locate).

173 The Amsterdam-based Institute of Network Cultures (INC), founded in 2004 and based at the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences (Hogeschool van Amsterdam), is one of the earliest examples of an interdisciplinary and sustainable research network that brings together researchers, artists, activists, programmers, designers, students and teachers who research the interaction between new forms of media, and the users of such new forms.

174 Recent spin-offs or by-products of YouTube (although each serve distinctly different purposes) include, for example, Vimeo and Vine. Such developments refer specifically to the increasingly advertisement-saturated YouTube environment, with 25 per cent of embedded ads on YouTube videos now un-skippable.
a mainstream cultural text, what is clear is that the Filipino public measure the CPDRC performances as equal to if not above Hollywood films (as demonstrated by this exemplar of the Philippine bootleg DVD trade (Figure 5.7)).

Figure 5.7. Bootleg DVD featuring Cebu Dancing Inmates: Gangnam Style and a pirated copy of American police thriller drama End of Watch (dir. David Ayer, 2012) on sale from a street vendor stall in Marikina, Metro Manila, October 20, 2012.

This DVD, and others like it demonstrate how there is a market – albeit a black market – for the CPDRC performances that exists offline as well as on; how digital and analogue worlds collide in the ordinary world. Incongruously (or congruously?) paired, a scene of dancing inmates led by Wenjie Resane flanks a cop drama starring Jake Gyllenhaal on the cover of a Filipino DVD. The existence of this

\[\text{175 This relates to the CPDRC’s appearance on the the } \text{CPDRC Gangnam Style/End of Watch bootleg DVD, from October 2012.}\]
bootleg DVD forced me to reconcile the ways in which YouTube videos are consumed – the attention they command and their perceived value – are of great significance, as they raise important questions regarding affect, participatory culture, and everyday new media practice. Not limited by Internet connectivity, YouTube videos are part of daily life in ways far beyond what we might initially imagine, thus raising important questions regarding popular music, the self and embodied media technology practice across the world.

YouTube’s outcome is not unidirectional, but dialectical, enabling expansive dialogue between spatially disparate communities. This relationship between digital and analogue communities – indeed between freedom and incarceration – is difficult and uneven, truly affecting the lives of those who live both online and off.

CPDRC’s pervasive online existence and widespread popularity highlight how in YouTube’s open-access, highly networked globalised media market, digital music video may be read as expressing cultural, ideological, historical and political self-identities. As a site of much contestation, YouTube is both critical and mundane, lofty and of the every day. A socio-cultural harbinger, it is precisely in YouTube’s mutability – its ability to deliver meaning and pleasure – that YouTube’s seductive power lies. CPDRC’s Thriller, and its many repeated and varied remediations, has become embedded into public consciousness. However it is seldom given the same social and cultural significance as other mass mediated content, primarily because it is framed within and inextricably linked with its hosting platform YouTube. YouTube’s ubiquitous mediation far exceeds the boundaries of the domestic and public spaces, but fall into the multiplicity of in-betweeness – a state of chronic hyper-attentiveness, of distributed subjectivity – that characterises so much of how we fill small pockets of time in today’s mediated environment. As YouTube develops and appears to move
ever further away from its DIY, user-generated origins, and much of its recent content seems polished, higher definition, and almost like TV or film, we are simultaneously reminded that hundreds of thousands of YouTube videos, such as CPDRC’s *Thriller*, would not – could not – exist anywhere else.

An alternative trajectory of CPDRC’s *Thriller*’s origins demonstrates the vital role YouTube’s real-time, user-generated communities contribute to the platform’s success. Indeed, if not for the specific near-instantaneous feedback loop built into YouTube, CPDRC’s *Thriller* might never have happened in the first place. On April 27, 2007, YouTube user ‘TalkingBackFlow’ left a comment left under Byron Garcia’s video of the CPDRC inmates performance of Queen’s ‘Radio Gaga,’ with the simple request: ‘Do thriller!’ Garcia read this comment and replied two days later with ‘ok, will do!’ (See Figure 5.8). The interplay, and interconnectedness, between music and YouTube’s communicative platform is paramount, and worthy of attention within popular music and music industry studies, new media and audiovisual theory. Though we may never know the ‘true’ origins or impetus behind this video, in an increasingly mediated culture where images and information flow freely, affecting and inspiring even the most unlikely citizens, perhaps no such singular truth exists. Thus, themes of interconnection, agency, and power run that through this work have served as frameworks in my textual and contextual reading of CPDRC’s *Thriller.*

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176 For byronfgarcia’s ‘Radio Gaga with Prisoners’ (uploaded April 24, 2007) visit: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lAVVVMcTShQ. To view the comments left on this video visit: https://www.youtube.com/all_comments?v=lAVVVMcTShQ
Figure 5.8. ‘Do thriller!’ commands YouTuber TakingBackFlow. ‘ok, will do!’ replies byronfgarcia. Could this be the original inspiration for CPDRC’s Thriller?

The interconnected histories between the Philippines and the US, between public and private, between freedom and captivity are made luminous through music, for better or for worse. This thesis represents only a preliminary step in the journey towards a more socio-critical musicology that I argue is essential in our current digitally mediated environment. Alongside other scholars and activists working in the fields of critical musicology, new media, postcoloniality, and cultural studies, I hope that together we can interrogate the operations of music, YouTube, and power.
### APPENDIX I. TABLE OF THE ‘MOST VIEWED’ YOUTUBE VIDEOS OF ALL TIME (AS OF JUNE 30, 2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Video name</th>
<th>Uploader/Artist</th>
<th>Views</th>
<th>Upload date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>‘Gangnam Style’</td>
<td>Psy</td>
<td>2,050,799,476</td>
<td>July 15, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>‘Baby’</td>
<td>Justin Bieber featuring Ludacris</td>
<td>1,067,465,415</td>
<td>31 July, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>‘Love the Way You Lie’</td>
<td>Eminem featuring Rihanna</td>
<td>721,533,588</td>
<td>August 5, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>‘Party Rock Anthem’</td>
<td>LMFAO featuring Lauren Bennett &amp; GoonRock</td>
<td>720,262,913</td>
<td>March 8, 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>‘Waka Waka (This Time for Africa)’</td>
<td>Shakira featuring Freshlyground</td>
<td>716,889,983</td>
<td>June 4, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>‘Gentleman’</td>
<td>Psy</td>
<td>716,270,704</td>
<td>April 13, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>‘Wrecking Ball’</td>
<td>Miley Cyrus</td>
<td>690,582,918</td>
<td>August 25, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>‘Bad Romance’</td>
<td>Lady Gaga</td>
<td>597,172,829</td>
<td>November 23, 2009</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>‘Roar’</td>
<td>Katy Perry</td>
<td>582,707,342</td>
<td>September 5, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.</td>
<td>‘Call Me Maybe’</td>
<td>Carly Rae Jepsen</td>
<td>575,407,013</td>
<td>March 1, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>‘Thrift Shop’</td>
<td>Macklemore &amp; Ryan Lewis featuring Wanz</td>
<td>560,581,042</td>
<td>August 27, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>‘Somebody That I Used to Know’</td>
<td>Gotye featuring Kimbra</td>
<td>531,515,680</td>
<td>July 5, 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.</td>
<td>‘Not Afraid’</td>
<td>Eminem</td>
<td>529,387,448</td>
<td>June 4, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>‘Rolling in the Deep’</td>
<td>Adele</td>
<td>524,647,561</td>
<td>November 30, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>‘The Lazy Song’</td>
<td>Bruno Mars</td>
<td>521,692,105</td>
<td>April 15, 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>‘Rain Over Me’</td>
<td>Pitbull featuring Marc Anthony</td>
<td>499,830,618</td>
<td>July 22, 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>‘Oppa Is Just My Style’</td>
<td>Psy featuring Hyuna</td>
<td>498,518,954</td>
<td>August 14, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>‘Dark Horse’</td>
<td>Katy Perry featuring Juicy J</td>
<td>495,583,058</td>
<td>February 20, 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>‘Firework’</td>
<td>Katy Perry</td>
<td>466,797,663</td>
<td>October 28, 2010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>‘Diamonds’</td>
<td>Rihanna</td>
<td>457,921,860</td>
<td>November 8, 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.</td>
<td>‘The Fox (What Does the Fox Say?)’</td>
<td>Ylvis</td>
<td>435,718,748</td>
<td>September 3, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29.</td>
<td>‘We Can't Stop’</td>
<td>Miley Cyrus</td>
<td>430,005,360</td>
<td>June 19, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.</td>
<td>‘Just the Way You Are’</td>
<td>Bruno Mars</td>
<td>427,709,681</td>
<td>September 8, 2010</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** Statistics supplied by the auto-updated YouTube charts (see, for example, the Top 500 ‘Most Viewed Videos of All Time’ auto-updated YouTube playlist, ‘The Most Viewed Videos,’ and Wikipedia entry ‘List of most viewed YouTube videos.’)
## Appendix II. Table of CPDRC Dancing Inmates YouTube Videos Uploaded by Byron F. Garcia (as of March 23, 2011)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Title of the YouTube Video/Song Title</th>
<th>Artist &amp;/or Composer</th>
<th>Views</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>08/12/'10</td>
<td>‘I Gotta Feeling’ by The Quezon City Dancing Inmates</td>
<td>Black Eyed Peas remix</td>
<td>4,932</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08/12/'10</td>
<td>‘I Gotta Feeling’ by The Manila Dancing Inmates</td>
<td>Black Eyed Peas remix</td>
<td>5,768</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/11/'10</td>
<td>Ambassadors of Goodwill Montage – Former Inmates</td>
<td>Michael Jackson remix</td>
<td>62,027</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27/02/'10</td>
<td>‘This Is It’ (remix) Promotion with Sony Pictures</td>
<td>Michael Jackson w/Payne, Daniel, Dres</td>
<td>41,696</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/11/'09</td>
<td>‘Grease [sic] Lightning’</td>
<td>John Travolta</td>
<td>178,199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04/11/'09</td>
<td>‘Queen Medley’</td>
<td>Queen &amp; Styx</td>
<td>866,550</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26/07/'09</td>
<td>‘Dangerous’</td>
<td>Michael Jackson</td>
<td>2,151,651</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18/07/'09</td>
<td>CPDRC Guests: ‘And I’m Telling You I’m Not Going’</td>
<td>Alvin/Beyoncé Knowles</td>
<td>81,981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03/07/'09</td>
<td>‘Sorry Sorry’</td>
<td>Super Junior</td>
<td>5,009,280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28/06/'09</td>
<td>‘Ben’, ‘I’ll Be There’, ‘We Are the World’</td>
<td>Michael Jackson</td>
<td>5,456,886</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01/06/'09</td>
<td>‘Jai Ho’ Remix</td>
<td>Sukhwinder Songh</td>
<td>3,090,474</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27/04/'09</td>
<td>‘Tell Me’, and ‘Lies’ Remix</td>
<td>The Wonder Girls &amp; Big Bang</td>
<td>739,312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30/03/'09</td>
<td>‘Nobody’</td>
<td>The Wonder Girls</td>
<td>3,221,538</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16/03/'09</td>
<td>(Comedy Sketch)</td>
<td>Ai Haruna</td>
<td>13,179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13/03/'09</td>
<td>‘Just Can’t Get Enough’</td>
<td>Depeche Mode</td>
<td>51,693</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05/02/'09</td>
<td>‘Pump It’</td>
<td>Black Eyed Peas</td>
<td>28,462</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02/02/'09</td>
<td>‘My Sharona’</td>
<td>The Knack</td>
<td>17,464</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16/01/'09</td>
<td>CPDRC Song’ (with dance routine)</td>
<td>Byron F. Garcia</td>
<td>29,230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09/10/'09</td>
<td>CPDRC Song’ (photo montage, no routine)</td>
<td>Byron F. Garcia</td>
<td>163,470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27/07/'09</td>
<td>‘Macarena’ (Jon Secada Remix)</td>
<td>Los del Rio</td>
<td>253,276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28/06/'08</td>
<td>‘Low’</td>
<td>Flo Rida</td>
<td>2,349,431</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28/04/'08</td>
<td>‘I Need a Hero’</td>
<td>Bonnie Tyler</td>
<td>2,023,306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02/04/'08</td>
<td>‘Gloria’</td>
<td>Laura Branigan</td>
<td>1,350,415</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/03/'08</td>
<td>‘My Sassy Girl’</td>
<td>Korean Sun Dance Troupe</td>
<td>8,768,443</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23/02/'08</td>
<td>‘Soulja Boy’/’Can’t Touch This’ Remix</td>
<td>Soulja Boy &amp; MC Hammer</td>
<td>11,255,922</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22/01/'08</td>
<td>‘Mabuhi ang Sugbuanon’</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>42,826</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22/01/'08</td>
<td>‘Simolog 2008, Homage to Santo Niño’</td>
<td>Big Brass Band Medley</td>
<td>53,896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21/12/'07</td>
<td>‘Jump’</td>
<td>Pointer Sisters</td>
<td>2,759,780</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15/11/'07</td>
<td>‘The Haruhi Dance’</td>
<td>The Melancholy of Suzumiya</td>
<td>1,139,986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15/10/'07</td>
<td>‘Canon in D, Rock Version’</td>
<td>Joel Oporto (Pachelbel remix)</td>
<td>727,725</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07/10/'07</td>
<td>‘Gregorian Chant’ a.k.a. ‘Sadness’</td>
<td>Enigma</td>
<td>1,484,731</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07/10/'07</td>
<td>‘Do the Hustle’</td>
<td>Van McCoy</td>
<td>2,977,980</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07/10/'07</td>
<td>‘Rico Mambo’</td>
<td>The Breakfast Club</td>
<td>1,271,908</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25/09/'07</td>
<td>‘Music is the language of the Universe’</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>80,451</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/09/'07</td>
<td>‘Do the Hustle/In the Navy/The March’</td>
<td>KC &amp; the Sunshine Band/Village People</td>
<td>209,031</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08/08/'07</td>
<td>‘Thriller’</td>
<td>Michael Jackson</td>
<td>163,868</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01/08/'07</td>
<td>CPDRC Concepts’</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>46,776</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17/07/'07</td>
<td>‘Hail Holy Queen’</td>
<td>Deloris &amp; Sisters</td>
<td>1,459,397</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17/07/'07</td>
<td>‘Thriller’</td>
<td>Michael Jackson</td>
<td>48,164,350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30/04/'07</td>
<td>‘Dayang Dayang’ &amp; ‘Sister Act’</td>
<td>Aishwarya Rai</td>
<td>943,354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29/04/'07</td>
<td>‘I Will Follow Him’</td>
<td>Deloris &amp; Sisters</td>
<td>4,075,724</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26/04/'07</td>
<td>‘Jumbo Hotdog’</td>
<td>The Maskulados</td>
<td>1,230,092</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24/04/'07</td>
<td>‘Radio Ga Ga’</td>
<td>Queen</td>
<td>4,713,079</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02/10/'06</td>
<td>‘Bebot’</td>
<td>Black Eyed Peas</td>
<td>7,466,571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01/10/'06</td>
<td>‘Algorithm March’</td>
<td>Itsumo Kokoara</td>
<td>2,374,223</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX III. “THRILLER” (ORIGINAL UPLOAD)’ METADATA
(ALL DATA AS OF MAY 12, 2014)

YouTube user: byronfgarcia
Views: 53,713,243
Likes/ Thumbs Up: 122,687
Dislikes/Thumbs Down: 5,609
Subscribers: 58,509
Comments: 71,102

Section: About
Uploaded on Jul 17, 2007

Update: 1/29/01 Video can be viewed worldwide except in Germany.

Why “Thriller”? visit: http://byronfgarcia.com
1,500 plus CPDRC inmates of the Cebu Provincial Detention and Rehabilitation Center, Cebu, Philippines at practice! This is not the final routine, and definitely not a punishment! WHY THRILLER? What made me choose Michael Jackson's Thriller for the aerobics routine is that Michael Jackson was a convicted man to the eyes of those who hated him. He would have been in imprisoned had it not been for settlement arrangements, they would say. Still Michael Jackson's frailty as a human being makes him like one of us – whether one is a prisoner or not.

I saw in the lyrics and video of Thriller much of what jail culture is like. Because of the hideous conditions in jails, prisons are like tombs and inmates are like ghoulish creatures. The only difference is that dancers in the MJ Thriller video come with make-up and costumes. The Dancing Inmates come as themselves. People perceived to be evil.

The message of the Thriller is a message for all of us. The funk of forty thousand years embedded in the cycle of sin and punishment is a legacy no mere mortal can resist or is capable of resisting. No prison wall can and will stop evil from lurking in the dark. No shackle can stop the beast about to strike. No punitive or brutal treatment is ever too strong to stop creatures crawling in search of blood. Unless we stop breeding demons in jails, gruesome ghouls from every tomb will seal the doom of nations and civilizations.

What I wanted inmates to do in dancing to the Thriller was for them to be convicted to sin. When I uploaded this on the YouTube, what I wanted viewers to see is how evil dances in our lives without knowing its deathly consequences.

But then the song and dance number is but a medium to the message. The message is, governments must stop looking at jails darkly. We have to stop being entertained and thrilled by the sting of sin. We have to look at prisons beyond the cycle of crime and punishment and certainly look inside underlying social, cultural and psychological implications of rehabilitation.

No matter how jails are called, prisons by any name are still hell – the corpse’s shell. It is a location in the map that governments would like to hide but cannot conceal. It's like the ‘horror looking right between the eyes, you're paralyzed.’ This paralyzing
reality is such that if we make jails a living hell, we may be breeding the next
generation demons or beast and we may be sending out devils once they are released
and reintegrated to society. Michael Jackson may have exposed the evils of this
Earth in the Thriller but he had a strong message of saving humanity from doom in
his ‘Heal the World’ where he said ‘heal the world, make it a better place, for you and
for me and the entire human race.’ Michael Jackson's message was a message of
salvation. ‘There are people dying if you care enough for the living, make it a better
place for you and for me.’ We may have missed out what Michael was trying to say
beyond the lyrics.

PEACE TO ALL MANKIND! Byron F. Garcia

Category People & Blogs
License: Standard YouTube License
### APPENDIX IV. CPRDC’s ‘THRILLER’ YOU TUBE COMMENTS CATEGORIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>Comment 1</th>
<th>Comment 2</th>
<th>Comment 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amusement</td>
<td>loved the ending LOL shazenmaire</td>
<td>i bet this is a distraction so that one guy can tunnel Ravor Aran</td>
<td>All of this in flip flops. Amazing!! lalin59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval</td>
<td>They are awesome Leyla A. Roberson</td>
<td>This is how the 2008 Olympics should have opened. dstebbin</td>
<td>better than the original mkatmakat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disbelief</td>
<td>These people committed crimes?! Aeroforce14</td>
<td>saw this years ago, and was like what the fuck? And still to this day, im like what the fuck?? Lol Cyanide7662</td>
<td>Are they really inmates in a jail ? Vortex93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facetious</td>
<td>Dance! or it's two weeks in the hole! MrEDK1985</td>
<td>I'm not impressed by a bunch of murderers, rapists and child molesters. Max Trantham</td>
<td>if you can't afford a dance school kill someone and go to this prisson! Healthy 2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homophobic</td>
<td>The zombies... scary. The “chick”... terrifying Diplomatik Juan</td>
<td>Homosexuality is a sin. Like you didn't know.... Truck Turner Jesus Has Risen</td>
<td>Eww dude, that was a man! You nasty!! sarah Jackson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intertextual/ Pop Culture Reference</td>
<td>i didn't know that Nicki Minaj was in a jail in the Philippines ogdron</td>
<td>WE NEED A GANGNAM STYLE NOOOWWW cme42561</td>
<td>Is anyone else on here because of Glee?:) SoniaHPProductions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael Jackson Fans</td>
<td>please tell me Michael Jackson knew about this. I think the entertainment of this video alone would have made his life that much better :P 1cj12</td>
<td>we miss you Michael Jackson. More michael dancing please. How about dancing to mj’s Black or White…or his Rocky My World! =) HealTheWorld4mj</td>
<td>oh dear that dude sure is uglieeeeeeeee but the dance is good anything of mj we all love and miss u MJ angie nguyen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>I actually feel sorry for them, I'd hate that shaytinirau</td>
<td>More views than the actual thriller video, haha Mark Springer</td>
<td>Renember they shudnt have too much fun TalkRMe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>finishes reading comments</em> Moral of the story....as long as you can dance in unison, other people will like and approve of you no matter how many people you've</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Philippines / Filipinos**
Lots of talent, and crossdressers. Accurate depiction of the homeland right there. <3

**Ivan Opina**

**Questions about Germany (GEMA)**
I'm curious why is this film banned in Germany? What specific German law prevents it? Just wondering.

**Stefan Lopuszanski**

**Questions posed to YouTube community**
So does this help or hurt them during parole hearings?

**allencraig02**

**Racial**
This shows that all of the Philippinnes is one giant party. Yes, even the prisons.

**Steelclaw717**

**Religious**
Yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.

Matthew 13:21

**YahGodIs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Philippines / Filipinos</th>
<th>Lots of talent, and crossdressers. Accurate depiction of the homeland right there. &lt;3</th>
<th>While the rest of the world has prison fights, they are having dance battles. Definitely it's more fun in the Philippines! lol</th>
<th>Proud to be a Filipino.</th>
<th>to anyone who isn't Filipino, understand that this is perhaps the most Filipino thing imaginable. I dunno how to explain it, but it completely does</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ivan Opina</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Louiemann</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions about Germany (GEMA)</th>
<th>I'm curious why is this film banned in Germany? What specific German law prevents it? Just wondering.</th>
<th>why can't Germans watch this? Not that I really care what Germans can or can't do, but I'm curious if there's some law in Germany that forbids Germans from watching prison videos or if the uploader or YouTube just doesn't like Germans. Knowing that Youtube LOVES Germans like Germans love David Hasselhoff, I doubt it's that.</th>
<th>“Video can be viewed worldwide except in Germany.” More proof that the German's don't have a sense of humour.</th>
<th>mindblowing,,,, and mif....cckkk SOONNyyyy what,? are they gonna charge the inmates with royalties from the music,,, assholeessss,, why germany,?, i mean.. no sense in banning it there at all, besides it was done in the philippines ..michael jackson did not record this song with sony anyway it is morally very wrong although they hold the rights,,,, and mind you im not a MJ fan but it pisses me off....</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stefan Lopuszanski</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Bob</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions posed to YouTube community</th>
<th>So does this help or hurt them during parole hearings?</th>
<th>At the end did anyone else think prison rape? Maybe that's why they cut the video short.</th>
<th>Or to be more specific are those actual prisoners doing the dance and not just actors or dancers.</th>
<th>This is so weird. Why do these inmates do this? Or better question, why do they ALL do this. I can see them getting a few of them to want to...but what about the normal people?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>allencraig02</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>TimeForAReview</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Racial</th>
<th>This shows that all of the Philippinnes is one giant party. Yes, even the prisons.</th>
<th>Asian Invasion!!!!!!!</th>
<th>0:40 what makes this worse they are all asian</th>
<th>The definition of Filipino= STUPID! Stupid people dumb fucks! So dirty they contaminated the sea, the land and the air with their burning food everyday! Disgusting people.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tony Her</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Yoda Ydyxz</strong></td>
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| Religious | Yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. Matthew 13:21 | If you want to know without a doubt, HOW to go to HEAVEN when you die, please click on my name and watch "Mankind's Greatest Question... ANSWERED."

**MankindsQuestion** | I hope ELLEN show would feature this one!!... God bless you all!! Good job. | The full description of this video made me cry. Prison systems need to be about rehabilitation not always punishment. (...) Besides, who are we to play God? These are children of God as well, they just are lost and need help. |
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APPENDIX V. THRILLER LYRICS AND MUSICAL INFLUENCES

a. ‘Thriller’ Lyrics (Album Version)

Published by: © Universal Music Publishing Group
LP version: 5.59 minutes
7” Single version: 4.04 minutes

[Verse 1]
It's close to midnight and something evil’s lurking in the dark
Under the moonlight you see a sight that almost stops your heart
You try to scream…but terror takes the sound before you make it
You start to freeze…as horror looks you right between the eyes,
You’re paralysed

[Chorus]
'Cause this is thriller, thriller night
And no one’s gonna save you from the beast about to strike
You know it’s thriller, thriller night
You’re fighting for your life inside a killer, thriller tonight
You hear the door slam and realise there’s nowhere left to run
You feel the cold hand and wonder if you’ll ever see the sun
You close your eyes…and hope that this is just imagination
But all the while…you hear the creature creepin’ up behind
You’re out of time

‘Cause this is thriller, thriller night
There ain’t no second chance against the thing with forty eyes
You know it’s thriller, thriller night
You’re fighting for your life inside a killer, thriller tonight

[Bridge]
Night creatures call
And the dead start to walk in their masquerade
There’s no escapin’ the jaws of the alien this time
(they’re open wide)
This is the end of your life
They’re out to get you, there’s demons closing in on every side
They will possess you unless you change the number on your dial
Now is the time…for you and I to cuddle close together
All thru’ the night…I’ll save you from the terrors on the screen,
I’ll make you see

[Chorus]
That it’s a thriller, thriller night
‘Cause I can thrill you more than any ghost would dare to try
Thriller, thriller night
So let me hold you tight and share a killer, diller, chiller, thriller here tonight

Coz that it’s a thriller, thriller night
‘Cause I can thrill you more than any ghost would dare to try
Thriller, thriller night
So let me hold you tight and share a killer, thriller
I’m going to thrill you tonight.

[Rap/Sprechgesang performed by Vincent Price)]
Darkness falls across the land
The midnight hour is close at hand
Creatures crawl in search of blood
To terrorise your neighbourhood
And whosoever shall be found
Without the soul for getting down
Must stand and face the hounds of hell
And rot inside a corpse’s shell

The foulest stench is in the air
The funk of forty thousand years
And grizzly ghouls from every tomb
Are closing in to seal your doom
And though you fight to stay alive
Your body starts to shiver
For no mere mortal can resist
The evil of the thriller
[Evil Laugh]

b. Thriller Musical Influences

i. Bass line for ‘Give it to me Baby’ by Rick James
(Released February 20, 1981)
Main two-bar, four note, bass riff that repeats for most of the song:

\[\text{MIDI notation of bass line}\]

ii. Bass line for ‘Thriller’ performed Michael Jackson
(Written by Rod Temperton, Recorded between April 14-November 8, 1982,
Released November 30, 1982)
Main Riff repeated for most of the song:

\[\text{MIDI notation of bass line}\]
i. Opening ‘1999’ syncopated synthesizer motif by Prince
Released as a single September 24, 1982
(This motif is clearly influenced by The Mamas and the Papas ‘Monday Monday’
(Composed by John Philips, 1966))

ii. Opening ‘Thriller’ synthesizer motif by Rod Temperton, arranged and co-produced by Quincy Jones, performed by Michael Jackson.
Recorded sometime between April 14-November 8, 1982, Released November 30, 1982.
APPENDIX VI. DANCING FOR DISCIPLINE (DIR. DIOKNO, 2008)

Description from YouTube’s ‘About’ section:
A short documentary about the ‘Thriller’ – dancing prisoners from Cebu, Philippines.
(2008)

Additional details:
Time: 14.57 minutes
Uploaded by Pepe Diokno, on 5 Feb 2011.
Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c1-ns6_skxE

Film Transcript:
(Dialogue transcribed from English by Author; Cebuano/Taglish translations by Joanes Paulus Sy and James de la Vega)

Byron Garcia [from prison tower-balcony]: Ok. We have visitors. Let’s give them a welcome address – Let’s just give them a welcome clap.

Noynoy Suico (Inmate): Comrads, let’s show them our enthusiastic clapping! Ready? Go!

[Inmates clap together, shout] ‘Mabuhay! Mabuhay! Mabuhay!’

BG [from prison tower-balcony]: Is it ok now?
Good afternoon to all my beloved inmates here at CPDRC.

Inmates [collective response]: Good afternoon.

BG [from prison tower-balcony]: Even if you don’t have teeth you’re still handsome.
[Raises eyebrows]

Inmates laugh

BG [pointing to one of the inmates]: You’re pretty.

BG [in interview]: Cebu Provincial Detention and Rehabilitation Center. But now, this is called the new… ‘The New’. ‘The old’ was like any ordinary jail. If you look at a sick society – It’s like a microcosm of a sick society. It is the survival of the fittest here.

CPDRC has 70% high-risk inmates. Murder… drug trafficking… There are rape. Heinous crimes. They’re all in here. [Juxtaposed with image of particularly smiling inmate fooling around in the prison yard /’dancelfloor’]

So. You have to be mean!
BG (into the microphone): Ok listen up! This is what’s going to follow, ‘Thriller.’ Go play it.

[Prison yard loudspeakers play intro to Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II’s ‘The Lonely Goatherd,’ from The Sound of Music (1959)].

BG [to his friends/colleagues in the tower]: The faggots – look at them.
BG [into the microphone]: Hey, look at the faggots everyone!

[Julie Andrew’s voice sings ‘High on the hill was a lonely goatherd. Layee oddly ee odl lay hee hoo. Loud was the voice of the lonely goatherd. Layee oddly ee odl-oo. Folks in a town that was quite remote heard ‘Layee oddly ee odl lay hee hoo.’]

[Laughter from some inmates and visitors]

BG [into the microphone]: Stop the music. I have a contest. Whoever doesn’t know that song, I will throw into solitary confinement.

(Laughter from some inmates)

BG [into the microphone]: No, just kidding.

BG [interview]: We incorporated dance and music to our physical fitness program. If you ask a military man what is there sign of courtesy, their sign of courtesy is a salute, right?

BG: So now, we made it such a point that this physical fitness program will be the sign of their discipline – through dance.

BG [into the microphone]: On Saturday, we have a performance. Not this Saturday, next Saturday. You, the famous… detainees and inmates of CPDRC will perform for a company. All their employees will come all the way here to see you in person.

BG [interview]: Well, we have received a 160,000 donation from a company who wants to let their employees watch the… p.. um, the Dancing Prisoners! (laughs)

BG [into the microphone]: many companies want to come here and watch you. This is going to become a tourist destination! Beware, if you stop dancing… If you stop dancing, we won’t get any money.

BG [interview]: Discipline is when the inmates follow your rules. Then they should be… Number one is they have to follow your rules. Number one. The second one is not just ‘follow the rules,’ You must show discipline. Because discipline cannot be quantified, right? Discipline is subjective. How do you express that discipline? How do you show that discipline?

BG: So, when I say: Ah, please, I don’t want to talk about discipline! Please look at my inmates. Now dancing. That is discipline at work.
[Camera cuts to inmate’s thriller dance sequence.]

Crisanto Niere (Dancing ‘preso’): My name is Crisanto Niere. I’m charged with ‘drugs.’ But in real life, I am not a drug pusher. I was dragged into this. Sir Byron got me and made me dance.

CN: My face looks like it’s for ‘Thriller,’ he said. The zombie. The one from Michael Jackson. That’s how they see me. I look like a zombie.

Wenjiel Resane (Dancing ‘preso’): I am Wenjiel Resane. Drugs. Our cases take so long in court we will be here for many more years.

WR: I don’t know with Sir Byron, what he saw in me. He had me called, and told me I’d carry the dance. I didn’t want to, but I couldn’t do anything.

WR: The planning [is] by Sir Byron. He’s the one who programs us here.

BG [in interview]: Music soothes me every time I am angry. Every time I feel bad, I listen to music. If it can do that to me, so, this kind of people, (laughs), these are bad people. Maybe music will soothe them too.

WR: Sir Byron. He is the security consultant here. He’s just the brother of the governor, the governor here in Cebu.

BG [into the microphone]: This Tuesday you start practising.

[Screen caption: 7 Days ‘till 160,000 show]

BG [interview]: It came to me after I told them to ‘Line up. Everybody should participate in a physical fitness program. I want you lined up with your uniforms.’ When I saw them, I said, ‘Wow, it’s so nice to look at!’

[Caption: 160,000 showtime]

Nonoy Suico (Head, Inmate’s Organization): We prisoners are rotten and twisted. But we do not forget what God says, ‘Nothing is impossible with the Lord.’ If we are released, we will not be the scum of society but good people in our community.

BG [into the microphone]: It is easier to penetrate the hard-headed here in CPDRC if it is done with music. Look, aren’t our inmates so nice?

[Audience, including Garcia’s parents Congressman Pabling Garcia and Retired Judge Esperanza ‘Inday’ Garcia, clap]

BG [into the microphone]: They say, there is no hard bread in hot coffee, and there are no hard bones in a wise dog. They’re lucky that a wise dog has seen them, as their hard bones have softened since they started swaying their hips.

Watch them, with their dancing so I won’t have to explain to you what discipline is.
You will see in their performance what discipline is. And you will see discipline at work here at CPDRC. So, ladies and gentlemen, please welcome our inmates of CPDRC!

[Audience clap]

[Inmates stand in formation, the sound of Queen’s ‘Radio Gaga’ opens. Freddie Mercury sings: ‘I’d sit alone and watch your light. My only friend through teenage nights. And everything I had to know I heard it on my radio. All we hear is Radio ga ga. Radio goo goo. Radio ga ga. All we hear is Radio ga ga. Radio blah blah. Radio what’s new? Radio, someone still loves you!’ Performance segues into the final scenes of the Thriller dance.]

BG [in interview]: After you have laid out everything, and you have created the culture of discipline, now, then you have to, like an examination. You have to examine whether they are disciplined or not.

NS: With all our hearts, we offer this to the Garcia family, especially our security consultant, Sir Byron Garcia, and his father, the honourable congressman of the second district, Sir Pabling Garcia. Sir, good afternoon. And his wife, Retired Judge Esperanza Garcia.

BG [interview]: My father, my brother, and my sister are the governor and two congressmen. But what can I say? They’re great politicians. What can we say, if we are the emerging political clan?

NS: Without the Garcias, especially Sir Byron here in our province of Cebu, we would not be so honoured and we would now not be known all around the world.

BG [interview]: We have already achieved. We already have laid down the grounds for the culture of discipline. Some say it’s brilliant. Some say it is genius. Ok, detractors, they say anything, at least they are negative comments. There are negative comments and there are also positive comments on what I do here. And the problem is, to my detractors, you are only 1%. 99% are good comments. [Smiles broadly.]

BG [into the microphone]: Ok. Who’s famous?

Inmates: We are!

BG [into the microphone]: Your heads are getting big!

(Laughter)

NS: Let’ give our visitors our ‘Mabuhay clap’! Ready go!

Inmates clap, and shout ‘Mabuhay! Mabuhay! Mabuhay!’

[End Credits: Directed, shot, edited, produced by Pepe Diokno Executive producer; Gang Badoy]
Dangerous Mediations

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Production assistant: Leslie Anne Umaly
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