

THE INTERNET AS A DIGITAL THIRDSPLACE: EVOLVING REPRESENTATIONS OF
ASIANS AND ASIAN AMERICANS IN POPULAR CULTURE

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To my sons, Casey, Aiden, Nolan, and Terrence

ABSTRACT

In response to the nominations for the 2016 Academy Awards' top acting categories, the 2015 hashtag, #OscarsSoWhite, was resurrected and addressed by almost every major news organization in North America. While many treated this as a "black and white" issue, the topic of media representations of Asian Americans (or a lack thereof) seemed to come to fore. Scholars and academics have addressed the recurring social constructions of Asian American "otherness" in the traditional mainstream media productions of Hollywood and popular culture, and research has shown that such representations affect how Asians and Asian Americans are perceived and treated by others and themselves. The advent of the Internet and its ability to disrupt the power arrangement that dominated American popular culture has enabled more equitable representations of Asians and Asian Americans. This study aims to reveal the rhetorical dimensions of the Internet as a Digital Thirdspace as a purveyor of popular culture and how this Digital Thirdspace's productions of new media texts, texts created primarily in digital environments, are a convergence of exigence, the rhetoric of empowerment, the subaltern counterpublic (a space where members of marginal groups can communicate), and the dialectic of the participatory culture of Digital Thirdspace.

This project reviewed of a selection of Asian American (or Asian) related new media texts on Digital Thirdspace and examined the content and participatory culture of YouTube. Analyses of the videos, online actions (e.g. "likes"), and comments demonstrated that the Internet not only provided a venue for beneficial representations for Asians and Asian Americans in media industries but also provided a space for like-minded individuals to create and/or strengthen communities due to the participatory culture of Digital Thirdspace. YouTube users have created a bounty of new media text selections for consumers, and among these are

positive representations of Asians and Asian Americans in popular culture. These developments have countered the stereotypic tropes of Asians and Asian Americans that have been prevalent in American popular culture for generations.

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CHAPTER ONE: CULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS IN POPULAR CULTURE

So that is how to create a single story, show a people as one thing, as only one thing, over and over again, and that is what they become. It is impossible to talk about the single story without talking about power. There is a word, an Igbo word, that I think about whenever I think about the power structures of the world, and it is "nkali." It's a noun that loosely translates to "to be greater than another." Like our economic and political worlds, stories too are defined by the principle of nkali: How they are told, who tells them, when they're told, how many stories are told, are really dependent on power. Power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person...The consequence of the single story is this: It robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar. - Chimamanda Adichie¹

Race has become an increasingly central factor in American life. Following centuries of apparent racial hegemony -- when racial minorities were marginalized, discriminated against, and rendered nearly invisible -- the role of those minorities has at last been recognized in politics, educational institutions, and popular culture. Although representations of race in American popular culture have been frequently discussed, contested, and criticized in specialized research areas of academia, mainstream news regarding lead roles (and the lack thereof) for entertainers of color in Hollywood have become more pronounced only recently. For example, the call by a number of African American actors, directors, and civil rights leaders to boycott the 2016 Academy Awards in response to the absence of nominees of color for the top acting categories was covered by numerous news outlets and has brought to the fore a mindfulness, and in some cases, bewilderment, for consumers of American popular culture.² Alarmed commentaries and analyses of this seemingly new situation abounded in entertainment

¹ from her *TedTalk* "The Danger of a Single Story," July, 2009

² <https://www.usmagazine.com/celebrity-news/news/oscars-2016-boycott-a-timeline-of-the-controversy-w162120/>

sections of major news outlets in North America, giving rise to the resurrection of the 2015 hashtag #OscarsSoWhite,³ but this was hardly a new concern for academia.

Yet, in regards to the dearth of non-white leading actors and actresses in American popular culture, most of the commentaries initially involved in this 2016 #OscarsSoWhite phenomenon highlighted the binary between black and white actors/directors in Hollywood. Soon after, commentaries citing the exclusion of other ethnicities began to make their rounds. What had initially been a discussion that saw race in narrow black/white contexts broadened to embrace the much wider ethnic and racial variety of American society and the role and portrayal of non-black racial and ethnic minorities in the media.

In one example, Yohana Desta, a writer for the digital media site *Mashable.com*, penned an essay “Latino, Asian, and Native American Actors Aren’t at the Oscars Either”⁴ that begins with the line “Oscar diversity is more than a black and white issue” (Desta). In another, CNN’s Felix Sanchez wrote a commentary titled “Shame on Academy for Snubbing Latinos, Asians, and Other Minorities”⁵ that problematized Hollywood’s notions of diversity by citing its basis “on an outdated black/white paradigm” and correctly insisting that “[t]he diversity concern needs to be triangulated to include Latinos, Asian/Pacific Islanders and Native Americans, who are marginalized in the film and television business despite shifting demographic numbers” (Sanchez). The Associated Press’s Twitter account also engaged in the topic by tweeting “In aftermath of #OscarsSoWhite, Asian-American, Latino activists say lack of diversity not just black and white: <http://apne.ws/1OK7Zqy>”⁶ (@AP). If the news on the Internet were any

³ Created in 2015, the hashtag refers to the absence of actors of color among the academy award nominees in major categories. The hashtag reappears in 2016 due to the same.

⁴ http://mashable.com/2016/01/20/oscars-diversity-2016/#2Q_aE52oVZqW

⁵ <http://www.cnn.com/2016/01/21/opinions/sanchez-academy-awards-diversity-problem/index.html>

⁶ <https://twitter.com/AP/status/704499172553183232>

indication, it has become clear that the topic of representation of race on television shows and movies could no longer be limited to being just a black and white issue.

The role and representation of Asian Americans in the popular media were particularly problematic. As many commentators, especially Asian Americans, have pointed out, the image of the Asian (and the Asian American) as the perpetual “other” is promoted and exacerbated by the traditionally less-than-flattering representations of Asian Americans in television shows and movies. More recent texts raising this issue include online writer Zak Keith’s essay “Hollywood Asian Stereotypes: Unfair and Pernicious Portrayals of East Asians”⁷ and former *Slant Magazine* contributor Ashley Qiang’s article “When Asians Americans Appear On TV, It’s Usually As One of These Racist Stereotypes.” Many of these stereotypes -- the inscrutable evil Asian villain, the mysterious and sexy dragon lady, the emasculated clown, etc. -- on screens big and small, have become tropes in American popular culture. Actor George Takei addresses this reality in his autobiography *To the Stars* with his own commentary on the creation of the Star Trek character of Sulu in the 1960s: “...this character was a breakthrough role for Asian Americans. Hollywood, and especially television, had a long history of stereotypical depictions of Asian men as buffoons, menials, or menaces” (218).⁸ In her 2016 case study of Asian American online writers on the social network site *Xanga*, digital rhetorician Linh Dich argued that representations and popular culture had real consequences in society and revealed that all participants in her study “...took offense to particular stereotypes that diminish Asian Americans as overly studious, weak, and socially awkward” and “attributed these stereotypes to popular media and culture production” (97).⁹ Research by psychologists Teresa Mok¹⁰ and

⁷ <http://www.zakkeith.com/articles,blogs,forums/hollywood-asian-stereotypes.htm>

⁸ Takei, George. *To the Stars: The Autobiography of George Takei, Star Trek's Mr. Sulu*. Pocket Books, 1995.

⁹ Dich, Linh. “Community Enclaves and Public Imaginaries: Formations of Asian American Online Identities.” *Computer and Composition* 40 (2016): 87-102. Print.

Sumie Okazaki¹¹ and education policy scholars Stacy Lee and Sabia Vaught¹² illustrates that these negative depictions have detrimental effects on Asians and/or Asian Americans; this point to be elaborated on later in this project. Moreover, because these characters in the movies and mass media help viewers form worldviews and define roles of people in society, these persistent depictions often misrepresent Asian Americans and encourage a sizeable number of consumers of popular culture to have at best a partial and generally a distorted sense of social reality when it comes to Asians and Asian Americans (Bolante).

Though some may think that the contemporary negative stereotypes of Asians are recent productions of Hollywood, the origins of unfavorable representations of Asians and Asian Americans began soon after the arrival of the first Chinese immigrants who came to the United States in the mid-19th century. Hired as cheap laborers, these Chinese immigrants were also used as strikebreakers, stoking animosity against them by the Euro-Americans they replaced (Hoyt 24). Because most of the laborers were men, these early Chinese immigrants were also known as a collective Chinese “bachelor society” based on the conditions that defined their situation:

For one, social custom dictated that married women remain at home rather than accompany their husbands, many of whom viewed their visit to...“Gold Mountain” as only temporary. Second, the needs of American capitalism were served nicely by a nonpermanent alien labor force, because, as a yellow proletariat, Chinese migrant workers would not have families in America, and America would not have a Chinese population granted citizenship by birth. Finally, with the passage of successive Chinese

¹⁰ Mok, Teresa A. “Getting the Message: Media images and Stereotypes and their Effect on Asian Americans.” *Cultural Diversity & Mental Health* 4.3 (1998): 185-202. JSTOR. Web. 17 Apr 2013.

¹¹ Okazaki, Sumie. “Teaching Gender Issues in Asian American Psychology.” *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 22 (1998): 33-52. ERIC. Web. 17 Apr 2013.

¹² Lee, Stacy J. and Sabina Vaught. “‘You Can Never Be Too Rich or Too Thin’: Popular Consumer Culture and the Americanization of Asian American Girls.” *The Journal of Negro Education* 72.4 (2003): 457-466. JSTOR. Web. 17 Apr 2013.

Exclusion Acts inspired by virulent anti-Asian racism, the supply of marriageable females was all but cut off. (Hamamoto 6).

The presence of this large, male, labor force in the United States was resented by many Euro-Americans due to the fact that the Chinese were considered harder workers for less pay. “As the numbers of Chinese laborers increased, so did the strength of anti-Chinese sentiment among other workers in the American economy” (Milestones). The anti-Chinese movement was a manifestation of “the yellow peril,” the notion that combined the “racist terror of alien cultures, sexual anxieties, and the belief that the West [would] be overpowered and enveloped by the irresistible, dark, occult forces of the East” (Marchetti 2).

The yellow peril threat was also the impetus for the images that were produced in American culture. “The Chinese Must Go” (Figure 1) became the slogan of that part of the [American] press that had suddenly discovered ‘the yellow peril’” (Hoyt 25).



Figure 1

The unflattering depictions (Figure 2) of the Chinese laborers (mostly males) in the United States became a rallying political point, and the resulting legislation limited immigration of Chinese workers in The Chinese Exclusion Act (Milestones).



Figure 2

In her monograph *Romance and the "Yellow Peril,"* cinema studies scholar Gina Marchetti describes the images used by Americans to depict the yellow peril and to promote the notion that ...all nonwhite people are by nature physically and intellectually inferior, morally suspect, heathen, licentious, disease-ridden, feral, violent, uncivilized, infantile, and in need of

guidance of white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants. This concept has been ingrained in the popular imagination since the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in mass media creations like Sax Rohmer's insidious villain Fu Manchu, in the Hearst newspapers' anti-Asian editorial policies, and in Homer Lea's *The Valor of Innocence*, a 1909 treatise on Japan as an evil military giant. (3)

The promotion and persistence of such notions continued for Asians and Asian Americans via popular culture that began in the twentieth century, but this enabled such yellow peril-related tropes to persist in the mid-to-late twentieth century as well. In his monograph *Monitored Peril: Asian Americans and the Politics of TV Representation*, Asian Americanist Darrell Hamamoto writes that:

Just as the popular entertainment forms of the previous century helped provide ideological justification for the maintenance of inequality along racial lines, contemporary mass-mediated popular culture on television serves a similar function. For example, such diverse television programs as *Bachelor Father* (1957-62), *Have Gun Will Travel* (1957-63), *Bonanza*, (1959-73), *Valentine's Day* (1964-65), *Star Trek* (1966-69), the eminently forgettable *Highcliffe Manor* (1979), and *Falcon Crest* (1981-90) all featured the stock Chinese bachelor character, a social type that has its origins in the discriminatory immigration policies of the late nineteenth century. (7)

These shows that Hamamoto mentions demonstrate instances of the dehumanization of the Chinese male in popular culture and the inverted power relationship where the Chinese male is the social subordinate who provides the sage wisdom and/or training to a white male hero (Hamamoto 8).

While there have been some instances of positive representations of minorities in contemporary American popular culture, (e.g. the immensely popular 1980s sitcom *The Cosby Show*, the 1959 movie *The Crimson Kimono* with James Shigeta,¹³ etc.), Carmen Fishwick's 2016 opinion piece in *The Guardian*: "Will Hollywood Ever Respect East Asian Actors?" addresses the mechanisms of Hollywood's gatekeeping practices. Fishwick writes:

The consistent lack of roles for Asian actors leaves talented people with the same dilemma [Burt] Kwouk faced: give up on your career aspirations, or act out racist stereotypes...Although we're now more likely to recognise racism against east Asian people, the problem now is that very little is changing in the film industry.¹⁴ (Fishwick)

In his *New York Times* 2016 commentary "Why Won't Hollywood Cast Asian Actors?", Keith Chow asks the pointed question "Why is the erasure of Asians still an acceptable practice in Hollywood?"¹⁵ However, there are changes occurring, and they're coming from decentered sites of representation and dispersed power. Focusing on this issue of representations of (and lack thereof) Asians and Asian Americans in popular culture, this dissertation will examine how the Internet has created "a disruption to existing media business models and is emerging as a new site of media power" (Burgess and Green 15).¹⁶ This dissertation also argues that the new space that is the Internet functions as a Digital Thirdspace¹⁷ and provides a venue for beneficial representations for Asians and Asian Americans in media industries.

The uniqueness of this new space plays a significant role in the methodology used in this dissertation. While many of my sources come from scholars in traditional academic

¹³ Detective Joe Kojaku (played by actor Japanese American actor James Shigeta), is romantically paired up with the white female character Christine (Victoria Shaw) who also happens to be the romantic interest of the white lead actor, Glenn Corbett.

¹⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/may/26/hollywood-east-asian-actors-burt-kwouk-racist>

¹⁵ "Opinion | Why Won't Hollywood Cast Asian Actors?" *The New York Times*, 22 Apr. 2016.

¹⁶ *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture*. Polity Press, 2009.

¹⁷ Further defined in this chapter's next section titled "The Internet as a Digital Thirdspace and a Participatory/Public Sphere"

sources, I also rely on many sources culled not only from journalistic venues and but also from mundane and vernacular internet spaces. This move to use such venues was intentional, essentially because of the way the Internet has collapsed (and continues to collapse) the separation between critiques in academia and the critiques in popular press. This new space and the freedoms of production that accompany it have created a leveling of sorts of the critiques that were only hosted in academic journals up to the early 2000s. But in 2018, the legitimacy of online sources is no longer considered suspect. Because the crux of this dissertation is predicated on the rhetorical implications of the shapings of social practices and perceptions in the Internet vis a vis Asian American representations, I am invested in audiences in this space and their roles as receivers, producers, sharers, contributors, etc. to the popular culture material that is analyzed in this dissertation. In fact, one may even say that it could be considered unrhetorical of me to look only at such content in the context of academic responses and discussions.

Rhetoric

To say that I would be unrhetorical is not to say that I would be less than persuasive; though the term “rhetoric” itself is most often bandied about and correlated with persuasion and argument, another understanding of the term “rhetoric” generally used in the field of rhetoric and composition is also used in this dissertation. In 1967, rhetorical theorist Robert Scott penned “On Viewing Rhetoric as Epistemic,” his seminal article which originated the understanding that “rhetoric is epistemic” (17), or in other words, rhetoric is a means to construct knowledge. Art theory scholar Aleksandra Łukaszewicz Alcaraz defines epistemology “as the study of cognition...[a] historical science that deals with historically shaped and conditioned belief systems” (Alcaraz). Alcaraz, in her study of analog and digital images, writes that the “epistemic function of photographic images is their active role in construction and reconstruction of our beliefs concerning the world and human identity, since we often consider photographs as presenting reality or even the Real itself” (Alcaraz). This evaluation of how opinions about society are shaped is not limited to visual stills; my dissertation endeavors to show how the epistemic role of films and/or videos does the same. Discerning rhetoric as epistemic and linking the epistemic role of videos, e.g. the videos that exist on YouTube, are significations summarized by Sonja Foss, rhetorical scholar of communications. In her monograph *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration & Practice*, Foss writes that “in the field of communication, the idea that rhetoric creates reality is known as the notion that rhetoric is epistemic, which simply means that rhetoric creates knowledge; epistemology is the study of the origin and nature of knowledge” (emphasis in the original) (Foss 122). Traditionally speaking, the language used by popular culture to describe Asians and Asian Americans has not always been compassionate. To use some examples, the early American popular press was able

to use editorial cartoons (rhetoric) as an epistemic function to create knowledge to help promote the cause of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 and to promote the othering of Japanese Americans in 1942, ostensibly resulting in the acceptance of or the indifferent feelings of the forcible internment of Japanese Americans (Dr. Seuss was one of the more prominent anti-Japan cartoonists). Reading and interpreting print materials and editorial illustrations in the late 19th and early to mid 20th centuries created knowledge, given that the rhetoric, or the text and illustrations of those times, created reality or knowledge. Rhetorical criticism scholar Celeste Condit Rainsback writes that “Rhetoric is thus a creator of what is known by humankind, both technical and social knowledge.” As we will see in the case studies of this dissertation, there is an epistemic function of the videos of the Internet presented here since they also create knowledge (equitable or positive representations of Asian Americans) against the knowledge that has already been produced by Hollywood (stereotypical or prejudicial representations of Asian Americans). Today’s popular culture representations of Asian Americans on the Internet modify, change, and confront the negative inscriptions of Asian Americans in the dominant culture, and by doing so, these videos create knowledge.

Moreover, this project does not try to ignore the fundamental problems regarding the definition of Asian Americans. Whether Asian Americans agree that they are a homogenous body or not, they are viewed and treated that way, and as such, the discourse of this group is considered a minority discourse. This discourse, then, and the case studies seen in this dissertation, are interpreted as rhetorical acts that refute language that misrepresents or threatens the interests of Asian Americans. Additionally, to be clear, this dissertation does not attempt to act as an exhaustive or representative analysis or overview of all Asian Americans in popular culture on the Internet as a whole. Nor is this dissertation trying to make empirical claims about

what Asians and/or Asian Americans are saying about themselves and what they are saying about others. The case studies used here include some Korean Americans and Japanese Americans, among others, but do not include Southeast Asian American or Chinese American examples. Many of the case studies address representations of Asian and Asian American males because statistically speaking, there have been more normalized roles for Asian and Asian American females in comparison. All things considered, the case studies in this dissertation, then, are not meant to serve as a comprehensive survey. This dissertation argues that the forums created by the Internet allowed for a successful evolution of representations of Asian Americans in popular culture in addition to the Internet's capacities for what I am calling participatory culture in Digital Thirdspace (to be defined in the next section of this chapter). This is an argument borne out of rhetorical analyses of representations of Asian Americans in television, films, and the Internet. These analyses are developed and supported from theoretical frameworks and constructs from media studies, popular culture, English studies, rhetoric, and Asian American studies. (Chapter Two provides a more comprehensive explanation of the theoretical framework used in this dissertation.)

The Internet as a Digital Thirdspace and a Participatory/Public Sphere¹⁸

As a new media space, the Internet has played a vital role in providing new avenues for the dissemination of information and creative material that differ from the traditional paths used by the mainstream media. The significance of this fact can not be overstated: prior to the advent of the Internet, advertising and the production and circulation of music acts, television shows, and/or films existed in what can fairly be described a “closed system.” That is, mainstream media corporations could and did act as the “gatekeepers,” and the artifacts of American popular culture “allowed” to be presented to the masses were chosen by those in charge of the mainstream media corporations under the guise of protecting advertising or box office revenue. The system involved was “closed” in the sense that it followed the tenet of critical theorists Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s theory of “the economic mechanism of selection,” (which will be covered further in Chapter Two), the sentiment among the mainstream media corporations being “there is the agreement...of all executive authorities not to produce or sanction anything that in any way differs from their own rules, their own ideas about consumers, or above all, themselves (407).¹⁹ In contrast, the unfettered nature of the Internet allows any individuals and/or groups to avoid the traditional gatekeepers so that they can freely distribute to potentially enormous global audiences creative productions and/or expressions that do not follow the industry’s monolithically traditional American popular culture narrative. Thus, Asian and Asian American entertainers have been able to share their talents with, and in many cases, challenge stereotypes for larger audiences around the world, an idea that would have been inconceivable -- not to say impractical -- as early as when Horkheimer and Adorno

¹⁸ The public sphere is a central term that I’ll be defining through the works of Hannah Arendt, Nancy Fraser, Jürgen Habermas, and Gerard Hauser.

¹⁹ “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception.” *The Cultural Studies Reader*. 3rd ed. Ed. Simon During. Routledge, 2008. 405-415

were writing their mid-20th century criticism, but also as late as the early 2000s. What is more, the Internet has not only greatly increased the variety of material available, it has also provided a means for the consumer of material to share reactions with a global audience. Prior to the mid-1990s, reacting to a magazine article, film or a television show may have consisted of simply muttering to oneself or sharing with immediate companions “that’s good” or “this is terrible.” In some cases, writing letters (either as an individual or as part of a coordinated letter-writing campaign) through the U.S. post office allowed fans and/or critics to add their voices to the relevant discussions and issues surrounding popular culture. The Internet, by contrast, allows for instantaneous active audience participation by way of commenting, “liking,” or creating some sort of response (textual or audiovisual) to something seen online. The new media texts and the participatory acts of all involved online function as rhetoric, and because such discursive exchanges can lead to a myriad of different possibilities and/or productions, it is fair to echo the observation of many scholars (but with apologies to Jürgen Habermas)²⁰ that the Internet can and does function as a public sphere. Though Chapter Two will present a more thorough clarification of Habermas's conception, here I briefly offer scholar Marshall Soules’s slightly modified version of Habermas's public sphere: a virtual or imaginary community which does not necessarily exist in any identifiable space (Soules).

Traditionally, the notion of a community was one that existed in an identifiable space, and in many instances, history has shown that communities could be exclusionary. But the “virtual or imaginary community” that Soules identifies is conceptually a new space; though the virtual community could be exclusionary (and some parts are), the openness of the Internet can be seen as liberatory for communities which do “not necessarily exist in any identifiable space.”

²⁰ “Internet and Public Sphere: What the Web Can't Do: Jürgen Habermas interviewed by Markus Schwering.” <http://www.resetdoc.org/story/00000022437>

This concept can be linked to the work of theorist and scholar Edward Soja. Soja's conception of Thirdspace equates it to "a space of extraordinary openness...a space where issues of race, class, and gender can be addressed simultaneously without privileging one over the other..." (Soja 5).²¹ The extraordinary openness of this space will be used later in the chapters of this dissertation to theorize representation, public sphere, participation, worldviews, and social imaginaries.

For the purposes of this project, then, I classify the term "Firstspace" to refer to the real world, and I claim that the lives that we all lead take place in Firstspace. I use the term "Secondspace" to refer to the worlds created by Hollywood and conveyed on screens big and small. It should be understood here that the actors and key players (directors, producers, staff) who are part of "Secondspace" are the ones who gained entry to the industry through the media gatekeeping mechanism that is predicated on the advertising revenue which in turn shapes Hollywood standards of what an audience is ready for (e.g. the producers of Pokemon eliminating "the squinty eyes of one character because (white) American test audiences felt he looked too Asian" (Nornes 219)).

The new avenues born out of digital technologies and technical communication have not only helped present a diverse array of representations of Asians and Asian Americans but have also addressed the issues of the confluential reality of race matters in popular media. The Internet, as a counterpoise to mainstream media, functions as a positive "Thirdspace" for representations of all ethnicities, but for the purposes of my project here, specifically Asians and Asian Americans. In his article "Asian-Americans Are the New Kings of the Internet," journalist Justin Chan aptly observes that "The internet has offered Asian-Americans, particularly those interested in pursuing a career in entertainment, more exposure than the film

²¹ *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. Blackwell, 1996

and television industry ever have or will” (Chan).²² By highlighting the works and online presence of Asian and Asian American actors, YouTube celebrities, and netizens and the way they utilize the Internet, either deliberately or inadvertently, one can see that the reach and scope of various sites on the Internet have allowed for audiences to experience a wider array of (and less stereotypical) representations of Asians and Asian Americans in the United States of America.

²² <https://mic.com/articles/75907/asian-americans-are-the-new-kings-of-the-internet#.LxKvkzIJM>

Kairos

The timing of my interest in studying the rhetorical dimensions of Asian American representations in popular culture in Digital Thirdspace as the crux of my dissertation coincided with many others in academia. This had become an apparent challenge as my writing and researching struggled to keep up with the abundance of new scholarship produced in relation to Asian American digital rhetorics. This timing, then, could be attributed to an appeal to kairos, the Greek rhetorical concept defined as “timeliness, appropriateness, decorum, symmetry, balance—awareness of the rhetorical situation or ‘the circumstances that open moments of opportunity’” (Kinneavy; Sipiota; Vatz; Bitzer; Hill 217 qtd by Pantelides et al). But the timeliness of the exploration of Digital Thirdspace’s frontiers, so to speak, from young, attractive, spry, precision-choreographed K-pop artists based in Seoul to a vlogger of Japanese/Okinawan descent from Hilo, Hawaii, makes apparent the capability of the Internet to serve as a viable stage of popular culture to convey more even-handed representations. Moreover, as will be demonstrated in the case studies of this dissertation, the participatory culture of Digital Thirdspace also allows for the community building that Mao and Young refer to in their definition of Asian American rhetoric (defined in Chapter Two), resulting in Gerard Hauser’s concept of reticulate public spheres²³ or to some, Nancy Fraser’s subaltern counterpublics²⁴ (to be detailed in Chapter Two).

But the Secondspace mainstream media’s having taken heed of the under representations and misrepresentations of Asian Americans in popular culture worked in tandem with the proliferation of the efforts and presence of Asians and Asian Americans in

²³ a discursive space in which individuals and groups associate to discuss matters of mutual interest and, where possible, to reach a common judgment about them.

²⁴ parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs

Digital Thirdspace and with larger social movements. In fact, there exists a pronounced effort by Asian Americans to gain a more visible presence in the online realm of popular culture. An example of the convergence of exigence, the rhetoric of empowerment, the subaltern counterpublic, and the dialectic of the Digital Thirdspace is seen in the work of Paget Kagy, an Asian American creator, writer, and actor of her YouTube show, *Kat Loves LA*.²⁵ The Indiegogo²⁶ financed romantic comedy series' first season began on December 17, 2017 and ended on March 3, 2018 for a total of 9 episodes, each episode averaging a little over 8 minutes with the exception of the eighth episode which was split into two parts (for a grand total of some 17 minutes). *Kat Loves LA* chronicles the daily life of Kat, a Korean American woman navigating the vagaries of dating and the acting industry as a twenty-something year old in Los Angeles, California. On the Indiegogo crowdfunding site for the second season of *Kat Loves LA*, Kagy writes "Imagine spending your whole childhood never having seen yourself as the main protagonist, the heroine, or the leading man. Instead, the media relegates you to the villain, the sidekick, the seductress, the insert-profession-here. That's the reality for most Asian Americans who are raised in the States"²⁷ (Kagy). Though *Kat Loves LA* has no connection to the 2018 blockbuster film *Black Panther* or the memoir *Big Little Man*, Kagy addresses the same exigence given by Jamil Smith and Alex Tizon, the respective authors of the two epigraphs that begin Chapter Seven of this dissertation. In a June 2018 interview on Nextshark,²⁸ Kagy also states:

Asian male emasculation is a real issue in Hollywood that isn't being addressed as fully as it should. We need to see more content championing romantic Asian male leads, full

²⁵ https://youtu.be/_2zEJLiali0

²⁶ Crowdfunding Internet site

²⁷ This Indiegogo campaign began in June 2018

²⁸ English Asian Website with the tagline: The Voice of Global Asians

stop. While I love seeing the increasing number of strong Asian female roles, I want to see a balance in the narrative. We as a community aren't whole, without both halves," she told NextShark...I want future generations of Asian Americans to be able to see themselves reflected on screen as the main protagonist, the romantic lead, or the hero, so they grow up knowing that they can be the hero of their own lives. (Kagy).

The second season's Indiegogo's site contains the evidence of community building in the form of positive blurbs from Secondspace industry insiders (Appendix A) and from "both Asian and non-Asian communities"²⁹ (Appendix B). The community building here takes place in a new space that adheres to Habermas's definition of his public sphere: "a virtual or imaginary community which does not necessarily exist in any identifiable space" (Soules). More specifically, this space is essentially "a discursive space in which individuals and groups associate to discuss matters of mutual interest and, where possible, to reach a common judgment about them" (61), also known as Hauser's concept of a reticulate public sphere (I will elaborate on Habermas and Hauser in more detail in Chapter Two). The inclusion of these blurbs as testimonies for the crowdfunding campaign fulfills the three rhetorical appeals of ethos, pathos, and logos, and as already mentioned in this chapter, the kairotic moment is now, given the activity of those with electracies³⁰ in the participatory culture of Digital Thirdspace.

But it is the apparently kairotic moment of this movement in Digital Thirdspace that is dovetailing with some of the developments that are occurring in Secondspace. On July 12, 2018, Korean Canadian actor Sandra Oh became "the very first woman of Asian descent in the 69-year-history of the awards to be nominated for a lead-actress Emmy Award" (Yang)³¹ for

²⁹ <https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/kat-loves-la-love-drama#/>

³⁰ term that is used to define the kind of skills and facility necessary to exploit the full communicative potential of new electronic media (Sarah Arroyo)

³¹ <https://www.cnn.com/2018/07/14/opinions/sandra-oh-emmy-nomination-asian-americans-opinion-yang/index.html>

her role in BBC America's show, *Killing Eve*. Oh, a seasoned actor who starred in supporting roles in the 2004 movie *Sideways* and the 2005-to-presently running television drama *Grey's Anatomy* (for ten seasons), states the significance of her nomination and how this may affect audience perceptions of representations in popular culture:

“I am happy in this present moment...Now, let's move it forward. It's a long game. Let this be a moment where some girl who is 12 and Thai-American can look at her Instagram and say, 'Huh, that can be me.' Let this be a moment where she can believe in herself.” (Yang).

In spite of her years of acting and in light of her Emmy nomination for lead actress, Oh is aware that the conventional practices of Secondspace and the media determinisms³² that accompany them are shaping American perceptions, especially perceptions of young Asian Americans. But because of the shift in Secondspace, Oh and others can see that media determinism enables individuals to believe themselves, much like *Black Panther* did for Jamil Smith and how a “single [*Asian*] face” could have achieved the same for Alex Tizon.³³ And in fact, Asian Americanists are enjoying their moment right now with the successes of Aziz Anzari's Netflix show *Master of None* and director John Chu's film, *Crazy Rich Asians*. According to BoxOffice Mojo's list, *Crazy Rich Asians* is the highest grossing romantic comedy of the 2010s.³⁴ Though the successes of these productions of popular culture suggest that a paradigm shift may be taking place in Hollywood, such hope and excitement can be easily tempered by those who remember historically similar situations when successful Asian American films such as *The Joy*

³² Popular culture rhetorician Barry Brummett describes the phenomenon of media determinism: the content of a culture will be dictated by the inevitable domination of a medium of communication

³³ Please see the epigraphs that begin Chapter Seven of this dissertation.

³⁴ <http://screencrush.com/crazy-rich-asians-box-office/> (Singer)

Luck Club (1993) and *Better Luck Tomorrow* (2002) also offered promising hype but nothing more thereafter in the way of better representations for Asian Americans on the big screen.

The Broadway stage is another facet of Secondspace, since it still follows the definition given Hollywood in Chapter Two, an imagined world of traditionally moderated and generally commercially controlled productions, albeit live on stage. Like Hollywood, the Secondspace of Broadway parallels similar patterns of yellowface or erasure of Asians and Asian Americans on the stage. An example is the casting of white British actor Jonathan Pryce to play the role of an Asian in the 1989 musical, *Miss Saigon* (Paulson).³⁵ Additionally, the most recent report of the Asian American Performers Action Coalition reveals that “Asian Americans were the only minority group to see a drop in representation on New York City stages during the 2015-2016 season, even as nearly two in five roles — a record high over the last 10 seasons — went to minority actors” (Fuchs).³⁶ However, in July of 2018, Filipino American May Adrales, the associate artistic director of Milwaukee Repertory Theater, won the Alan Schneider Director Award from Theatre Communications Group (Ang).³⁷ Adrales’ award is another example of a movement in Secondspace that addresses the exigency that pervaded the theater world. In her acceptance speech, she states that

Representation matters. Telling stories that have not found their way into the main stream matters. Dismantling stereotypes and reframing history to reflect those who have been left out of the telling of that history. This [award] matters. I am a living testament to that...I want to show that work directed by me, or women like me, works written by women and or artists of color are not risky. They are essential. They are essentially American. (Adrales qtd by Ang)

³⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/17/theater/the-battle-of-miss-saigon-yellowface-art-and-opportunity.html>

³⁶ <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/broadway-diversity-improves-all-asian-americans-report-finds-n838351>

³⁷ <http://usa.inquirer.net/13752/fil-wins-alan-schneider-directing-award>

Though Oh and Adrales are Asian Americans who work within the confines of Secondspace, Digital Thirdspace has provided a space and a means to have such developments reach the public almost instantaneously in real time as it happens. Much of the information is conveyed through various social media sites, which in many cases act as the primary conduit through which new media texts and news are shared with others.

In her monograph *Participatory Composition: Video Culture, Writing, and Electracy*, digital compositionist Sara Arroyo presents a list of actions that make up participatory culture by electrates:³⁸ “Embed. Share. Comment. Like. Subscribe. Upload. Check in” (Arroyo 1). These operations represent the extent of what allows the proliferation of information in Digital Thirdspace today. And Digital Thirdspace also includes social media sites such as Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, etc., avenues that create shortcut routes, so to speak for entertainment or news links and videos. The “Korean Americans” page on Facebook (with 10,189 followers as of June 18, 2018) is an example of the confluence of Firstspace, Secondspace, and Digital Thirdspace. Like minded Korean Americans, members of the Korean diaspora, or non-Koreans who might be interested in things Korean can gain access to this page if they do a search for the term “Korean American.” But if, for example, someone sees a friend’s Facebook profile and learns that the friend is already a member of the Korean American page, that person may follow the site as well. Moreover, if that friend shares a video from the Korean American page and places it on another friend’s Facebook wall so that their friends can also see it, this provides visibility for the page for people who are connected, hence enabling them to follow if they wish.

³⁸ Electracy is term that is used to define the kind of skills and facility necessary to exploit the full communicative potential of new electronic media (Sarah Arroyo); “electrate” is to electracy as “literate” is to literacy.

Such Facebook pages like the Korean American page also act as an aggregator of news items, images, rants, and/or videos, all relevant to the site. An example of this exists in “Meet My Mom,” a show on Facebook Watch, the video sharing arm of Facebook. The show’s creator, “Hello Sunshine,” describes the “Meet My Mom” series as “An intimate, heartwarming and revealing chat between your favorite celebrity and their mom” (Meet My Mom). And in fact, “Hello Sunshine,” the parent media/news company of “Meet My Mom,” purports “to show women as the flawed and often complicated heroes of their own stories” (Hello Sunshine) on this particular area of Facebook. Although there are various celebrities of different ethnicities profiled in the “Meet My Mom” series, the custodian(s) of the “Korean American” page embedded the “Meet My Mom” episode with Korean Australian actor Leonardo Nam and his mom. Though he was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina and grew up in Sydney, Australia, Nam acts in Hollywood. Nam’s interview with his mother on the page “Meet My Mom” is shared on the Korean Americans page in spite of his Korean Australian background since he is represented in Hollywood. The humanization of Nam in this series mitigates the negative aspect of media determinism covered in Chapter Two — the audience, now privy to the personal life of a member of the Korean diaspora who acts in Hollywood, is more likely to be able to form a relationship and identify with the actor due to the backstory provided in the series. However, social media sites do not limit the number of special interest groups or shared interest pages. Facebook houses a plethora of such sites, each allowing for participatory culture among those with electracacy skills.

The KoreanAmericanStory.org website also maintains a presence with the same name on Facebook. One of the kickstarter campaigns supported by both the KoreanAmericanStory.org site and Facebook page promotes a film with the following plea:

“Dear Facebook community - PLEASE SHARE THIS POST! There are so few films from the mainstream media that depict the lives of Korean Americans in an authentic manner. This is the reason we decided to make a feature length film titled Happy Cleaners with our partner Jebby Productions. With your support, we were able to shoot this film in July of 2017, and we now need to work with artists, musicians, sound professionals and translators to finish post-production. Once completed, we will be submitting the film to all major film festivals, and you can help us get to the finish line. Join the movement and donate whatever amount you can, and just as importantly, please help share this Kickstarter campaign to help the film get more exposure.”

The concept of a reticulate public sphere of Gerard Hauser provides a promotive space not only for films like “Happy Cleaners” but for other similar sentiments in Digital Thirdspace. But in addition to pages or spaces housed on Facebook or other social media sites, individuals on Facebook or Twitter can also affect this public sphere. In a Facebook post on April 28, 2018, “fat_fab_feminist” wrote

“Wonder Woman made women everywhere feel so strong so brave so powerful. Coco made latinx/mexican people feel the elation of their visually stunning arts being shown, feel extra proud of their traditions, feel cherished. Black Panther made black people from every culture every continent feel such pride such happiness such warmth. Love, Simon has made lgbt+ people from the youngest to the old feel understood feel overjoyed feel magic. It’s more than just a movie.”

“fat_fab_feminist” also has the first comment underneath her post, in capital letters

“REPRESENTATION IS IMPORTANT REPRESENTATION IS IMPORTANT...” With 15,590 likes as of April 28, 2018, “fat_fab_feminist” lists movies from 2017 and 2018 to make

her point that “representation is important,” the same sentiment that KoreanAmericanStory.org asserts and “Meet My Mom” with Leonardo Nam implies. Had the 2018 film *Crazy Rich Asians* been released prior to April 28, 2018, it is almost certain that “fat_fab_feminist” would have been able to include it in her list of justifications for the importance of representation, this exigency addressed in Digital Thirdspace as mentioned throughout this dissertation.

Invention in Digital Thirdspace

Digital Thirdspace is an egalitarian space in that new media texts from any culture or nation (such as South Korea) can be accessed by those of any other culture or nation (as long as they have Internet access). For example, when a video goes “viral,” a phenomenon where a video clip is spread rapidly through online sharing,³⁹ the popularity of the video is almost never dependent on the national origin of the new media text (e.g. Psy’s Gangnam Style was not popular because it was South Korean). This idea of a Digital Thirdspace egalitarianism is of a piece with Soja’s aforementioned conception of Thirdspace: “a space of extraordinary openness...a space where issues of race, class, and gender can be addressed simultaneously without privileging one over the other...” (Soja 5).⁴⁰ This extraordinary openness and the idea that the discourses of different races, classes, and genders could coexist concurrently both temporally and proximally lead to the inevitability of an exchange of ideas to create new meanings. This space, then, shifts in terms of purpose and possibilities with the ideas put forth by critical theorist Homi Bhabha and his reckoning of...

...a marginal space, for contact or translation between cultures or identities. It is the space where new forms of action and interpretation are developed, where an understanding of the hybrid nature of cross-cultural exchanges is achieved. (Bhabha 2000)(qtd in Mattos)

Although he is not talking about social media or the Internet as we know it today, the marginal space articulated by Bhabha shares similarities with this project’s Digital Thirdspace.

Two examples of Digital Thirdspace’s egalitarianism and the ways this egalitarianism develops new forms of action and interpretation are *muk-bang* and the mundane viral video.

³⁹ <https://www.techopedia.com/definition/26863/viral-video>

⁴⁰ *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. Blackwell, 1996

Both broadcast styles are found in the genre creation capabilities popularized in South Korea, a country often referred to as the most wired nation in the world due to the government subsidized Internet infrastructure that provided and continues to provide some of the fastest Internet speeds on the planet. The popularization of *muk-bang* began in South Korea, and South Korean audiences had a penchant for “eating rooms” or *muk-bang*, “a portmanteau...that combines the [Korean] word ‘eat’ ([muk]-da) and the first syllable for the Korean word ‘broadcast’ (bang song)” (Cheng Visceral).⁴¹ Essentially, the *muk-bang* is “a live-stream [of] people eating enormous servings of food while chatting away to those who are watching” (Cha).⁴² Notable is the fact that the most popular *muk-bang* shows reside on *AfreecaTV*, a Korean ThirdSpace of participatory culture. An abbreviated and incomplete acronym for “Any FREE broadCasting,” *AfreecaTV* is a popular streaming website that provides users the functions of broadcasting, viewing, channel listing, live chatting, and discussion boards (Cheng Visceral).⁴³ The ability of live streaming web entertainers to attract fans who pay as they watch in addition to the fact that these entertainers are getting paid in real time while engaging in non-pornographic endeavors online represent a new form of action and interpretation in Digital Thirdspace.

While the comments and replies of fans of YouTube celebrities studied throughout this dissertation will refer to videos that were uploaded, shared, and watched, the instantaneity of the comments and payments provided during live video streams in *AfreecaTV*'s Digital Thirdspace makes the participatory culture of this particular entertainment sub genre pivotal. Moreover, the unanticipated success for such a sub genre of popular entertainment and its ability to thrive among the Korean populace has been covered by participatory and traditional

⁴¹ “Muk-bang: The Visceral Feast.” <http://mukbangsocialeating.me/main>.

⁴² “South Korea's Online Trend: Paying to Watch a Pretty Girl Eat.” CNN. World Asia.

⁴³ “Muk-bang: The Visceral Feast.” <http://mukbangsocialeating.me/main>.

journalists alike in Korea and the United States in addition to spawning American muk-bangers on YouTube in addition to having some Korean muk-bangers creating YouTube channels and uploading their videos to their channels.. The bizarreness of eating in front of an audience without regard to speed or competitions with others is an idea that was really created out of nothing, yet some of the most popular Korean muk-bangers (such as the gregarious, bespectacled “Banzz”) earn five figures in U.S. dollars per month for their eating feats in front of a camera while another muk-banger by the name of “Beeryong” was visited by Anthony Bourdain during the latter’s show, *Parts Unknown*.⁴⁴

The second example, the mundane viral video, is seen in the innovative (?) videos of a Korean man who became “an instant online celebrity after publishing and live streaming several videos of him studying alone” (Ke). It is fair to say that the entertainment industry has historically attempted to engage audiences with dramatic excitement or comedic narratives, so the mundane viral video as entertainment is a new form of action and interpretation on Digital Thirdspace. With a title worthy of something one might see in a parody news site such as *The Onion*, Bryan Ke’s article “Korean Man Gains 332,000 YouTube Subscribers Filming Himself Studying for Hours in Silence” explains that:

The YouTuber, Bot-No-Jam...managed to attract over 321,000 subscribers on his YouTube channel where he uploaded several videos of him studying, which he titled “Study with Me.” These videos are not exactly your typical hours-long clips of studying — they actually last an average of 6 hours per study session or live stream. (Ke)

The writer of the article on Nextshark.com⁴⁵ does mention that the large number of subscribers could be attributed to “his K-pop star looks,” but the fascination with this story saw it shared on

⁴⁴ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L_Q5baVYEoQ

⁴⁵ English Asian Website with the tagline: The Voice of Global Asians

English social media sites as well. The fact that a “show” such as this one could garner so many views and subscribers makes it seem like anyone who produces a new media text for Digital Thirdspace has a chance to gain his/her 15 minutes of fame. Moreover, the rules of popular culture on the Internet clearly differ from the rules of Secondspace. It is safe to assume that no network executive in Hollywood or Seoul would have offered YouTuber Bot-No-Jam any contract or agreement to sponsor such a show in Secondspace. Yet, Bot-No-Jam was able to circumvent the gatekeepers, so to speak, to gain online celebrity status.

The examples of the successes of the Korean muk-bangers and the very studious YouTuber fall in line with the case studies analyzed in this dissertation. As previously mentioned in this chapter, the epistemic function of the Korean muk-bangers and the mundane viral video create knowledge by offering at the very least non-negative representations of Asians against the knowledge that has been produced by the Hollywood establishment. Digital Thirdspace and its participatory cultures have liberated the masses from the strictures of the entertainment establishment and have allowed for anyone (with the time and inclination to do so) to take a crack at becoming a YouTube celebrity. While this notion has been defined academically at the beginning of this dissertation, a redditor by the screen name of “dinosawrsareawesome” gives a more straightforward description: “What makes youtube [sic] so amazing is the lack of barriers to entry, anyone can make and upload a video. It makes for wonderful content and endless new ideas” (dinosawrsareawesome). Additionally, those who do not wish to broadcast themselves on Digital Thirdspace may remain active as proponents or opponents of online videos, essays, images, etc. by sharing, commenting, and/or criticizing, all of which we will see in the case studies (good and bad) of this dissertation.

Chapter Outline

I begin below by laying some disciplinary groundwork for my argument. In Chapter Two, the first major section following this introduction chapter, I draw the reader's attention to concerns raised by Asian American scholars when defining Asian American perceptions and identities as framed by the systems of popular culture and how the Digital Thirdspace affects these systems. I use philosopher Edward Said's notion of "Othering" from his seminal text, *Orientalism* to posit how this serves as the underlying premise for the traditional negative representations of Asian Americans in American popular culture. Along the way, I cite LuMing Mao and Morris Young's definition of Asian American rhetoric to situate its reactionary function as an exigence to the prevalent tropes of Asian American representations and erasure in American popular culture. Their definition of Asian American rhetoric is distilled here by Asian American rhetorician Huiling Ding:

[Asian American rhetoric is the] systematic effective use and development of symbolic resources in social, cultural, and political contexts" (Mao and Young 4). Asian American rhetoric is "employed to address specific occasions, whether responding to acts of racism or forming community" (Mao and Young 6). It aims not only "to carve out new space for critical and productive engagement" but also to "resist social and economic injustice and reassert their discursive agency and authority in the dominant culture" (Mao and Young qtd in Ding 151)

Then, I situate the phenotypically marked Asian as a Gramscian subaltern⁴⁶ in both North American society and popular culture drawing mostly from the critical writings of Elaine Kim, Darrell Hamamoto, Lu Ming Mao, Morris Young, and David Mura, and excerpts from articles

⁴⁶ In critical theory and postcolonial theory, 'subaltern' refers to the populations that are socially, politically, and geographically outside of the hegemonic power structure of the colony and of the colonial homeland (Oliver Stuenkel). Chapter Two provides an elaboration on this key term.

and commentaries from journalists and essayists. I do all of this in order to sketch out a profile of Asian American rhetorics being called for by academics working in rhetorical theory and popular culture. In doing so, I also attempt to narrow the concerns of these calls to one area of cultural production and circulation, namely the new media texts produced in Digital Thirdspace and the ways in which these new media texts challenge the traditional ways Asians and Asian Americans have been constructed in popular culture of the United States.

In the effort to elaborate on the show business industry as something more than just a purveyor of mere entertainment, I cite the foundational works of Barry Brummett and Sut Jhally in relation to the mechanisms of the rhetoric of popular culture, and I rely heavily on Brummett to conceptualize definitions of popular culture and media determinism to lay a theoretical foundation for rhetorical studies on popular culture which leads to Asian and Asian American rhetorical actions in mainstream media and online media. I also bring in David Altheide and Robert Snow's notion of media logic to show how the artifacts of popular culture are inherently rhetorical. The underlying premises of these ideas rest upon the formative theories of gatekeeping in popular culture, theories dating all the way back to the Frankfurt School of cultural studies, evident in the scholarship of Adorno and Horkheimer.

Last, but not least, I use the Internet to offer a working definition and appropriation of third-space, an oft-interpreted notion of the renown Soja and an idea that has been studied for over 20 years. Though much of the recent scholarly literature applies Soja's Thirdspace to classrooms and learning spaces, I contend that the Internet's space can also serve as a Digital Thirdspace of learning and participation. Working from arguments of Habermas, Hauser, and Fraser, I argue that the Internet functions as a public sphere or a subaltern counterpublic for Asian Americans while providing the evidence and rhetorical work that is accomplished by

netizens, creators and consumers alike. This is corroborated by the rise and seeming ubiquity of participatory journalism, defined by *The New York Times*' Katharine Seelye as "civic or citizen journalism" (Seelye).⁴⁷ I define digital rhetoric and media culture drawing primarily from Douglas Eyman's work, particularly the definitions he has developed in detail in his monograph *Digital Rhetoric: Theory, Method, Practice* to help the reader understand the terms that are central to the scholarly conversation and to this project.

This research adds another (albeit humble) voice to the scholarly discussions that have already begun in Asian American digital rhetorics. I believe that this project addresses Ono and Pham's call for "a critical intervention into media" (2)⁴⁸ by Asian Americans in addition to challenging their notion that "the ability of Asian Americans to create and distribute self-representations to counter those produced early in US history as part of colonial relationships is limited" (6).⁴⁹ Additionally, this conception of the Internet as a Digital Thirdspace of participatory culture and representations acts to respond to the reflections of Darrell Hamamoto at the end of his monograph, *Monitored Peril: Asian Americans and the Politics of TV Representation*. In his epilogue and as a response to better representations of Asian Americans on network television, Hamamoto writes:

Network self-reform rarely comes about without intense external pressure. Required most immediately are the sustained creative efforts of public-supported independent film and video artists, vastly improved access to existing commercial media institutions, and aggressive legal-political challenges to discriminatory employment practices in the television industry. (252)⁵⁰

⁴⁷ "Why Newspapers Are Betting on Audience Participation." *The New York Times*. Media Section. 4 Jul 2005.

⁴⁸ *Asian Americans and the Media*. Polity, 2009.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ *Monitored Peril: Asian Americans and the Politics of TV Representation*. University of Minnesota Press, 1994.

The Internet as a participatory Digital Thirdspace fulfills each of the points Hamamoto gives here. Furthermore, because statistical trends in television viewership tend to show an inverse relationship to streaming television and other Internet-based viewing sites (e.g. Netflix, YouTube), studies in how media content shapes audience perspectives may also be instrumental to consumers, investors, and entertainment industries.

Chapter Three uses the Secondspace careers of Asian American entertainers James Shigeta, Johnny Yune, and Steven Yeun to examine the role of the Digital Thirdspace as an extended territory of publicity and publics for Asian and Asian Americans celebrities and entertainers -- i.e. that the participatory culture of YouTube and other online sites provides multitudinous forums where Asian American representations in popular culture can be supported (or critiqued) and where Secondspace shows or videos (cancelled or live) can live on so that those interested in watching a show for the first time (or re-watching a cancelled show) may not only do so but also share or embed the video clip as well. After pointing out the complications that Asian American males dealt with and continue to deal with as actors in Secondspace, American films and television, I bring in the knowledge of media scholar Walter Benjamin to appropriate his definition of “afterlife,” a term he used to describe how an original text could “survive” as a translated work. I argue that videos originally meant for Secondspace can survive in Digital Thirdspace as new media texts and have a Benjaminian digital “afterlife,” a circumstance that benefits positive Asian and Asian American representations in popular culture. This chapter also contends that the relatively recent larger array of positive Asian and Asian American representations in popular culture may have resulted not only from more casting opportunities and roles but also from viewer feedback, netizen activism, participatory journalism, and Internet-based news programs. Much of the participatory culture of the Digital

Thirdspace helped raised (and continue to raise) awareness of these issues in addition to influencing changes in Secondspaces and Firstspace.

Chapter Four addresses the significance of the global spread of modern Korean popular culture and the way with which the Internet, as a Digital Thirdspace replete with participatory culture and its influences as a public sphere, was instrumental in showcasing attractive Korean popular musicians that countered the stereotypical representations of Asians in Hollywood, in this case, against the archetype named William Hung⁵¹ of *American Idol* fame. Chapter Four cites the scholarship of Euny Hong, John Lie, and Kwang Woo Noh as a way to provide an abbreviated historiography of Kpop. Though the American recording industry's protectionist popular culture gatekeeping effect may not have had to worry about Korean popular music (or other Asian/International popular music scenes) in the 80s and 90s, it is clear that the rise of digital technologies served to give new (and broader) audiences access to such genres. Because the Internet as a participatory Digital Thirdspace has allowed Korean singers and songwriters to gain a global following in addition to large revenues (from fans and advertisers), the American market share for Kpop has phenomenally become either negligible or a non-factor for many, if not all, Kpop recording artists. This astounding development, made possible by the Internet, tarnishes the traditional dominance of the American music industry since in the past, the United States' market share for any singer/songer from any country was considered the sign of having arrived as an icon of popular culture.

Chapter Four also underscores the significance of participatory culture -- that the overwhelming online interest in Korean popular music (empowered by and conveyed through digital technologies) produces empowering texts (in the form of comments) and associations (in

⁵¹ An Asian contestant whose audition failure on *American Idol* gained him fame and notoriety, ostensibly due to his cringe-worthy yet shameless performance of Ricky Martin's song, *She Bangs*.

the form of fan alliances) as Asian American rhetorical acts that have real consequences. This concept was manifested by the online efficacy of A.R.M.Y., the acronym for “Adorable Representative M.C for Youth,” a fan group whose esprit de corps is predicated on their adoration for the 7 male members of BTS,⁵² a boy band that was the first Kpop group to have won a Billboard Music Award⁵³ of any kind (thanks to A.R.M.Y.). In addition to providing a short account of the emergence of contemporary Kpop, the chapter addresses the different ways in which today’s Kpop fans have taken advantage of the different avenues available to them within the participatory culture of Thirdspace. The chapter also addresses how these strategies are being copied by fans of other Kpop groups, helping Kpop’s unprecedented popularity grow even larger and providing worthy adversaries against the popularity of William Hung.

Chapter Five introduces the reality show genre as a means to better examine YouTube’s seemingly newfound (and coincidental) position as competitor to mainstream Hollywood as a medium for purveying American popular culture. I specifically bring to fore the Korean American reality show *K-Town*, one of many ethnic reality television shows that was born in the early 2010s, but the only one that was not aired on any television stations, cable or otherwise. The chapter reiterates the scholarship of Brummett, Altheide, and Snow to highlight how media logic’s objectives created (and continue to create) a Secondspace that would not broadcast an Asian American-themed reality show. But because of the effectiveness of participatory culture that accompanies Digital Thirdspace, the Internet’s new (and perhaps unintended) role as popular culture distributor has helped those with electracies develop, foster, and promote new media texts that show *K-Town*’s Korean Americans in a new light -- as Americans.

⁵² In Korean, BTS stands for “*bangtan sonyeondan*” which translates to “Bulletproof Boy Scouts.”

⁵³ As of this writing, BTS won the Top Social Artist Award at the 2017 and 2018 Billboard Music Awards

Though Asian Americans play a key role in American society, they may be invisible or misrepresented on screens big and small. This chapter addresses this concern raised in the 2006 documentary *The Slanted Screen* by Lois Salisbury, the former director of Children NOW. More recent media coverage on this issue includes Dino-Ray Ramos' article titled "Asian Americans On TV: Study Finds Continued Underrepresentation Despite New Wave Of AAPI-Led Shows"⁵⁴ and *The Strait Times* film correspondent John Lui's article "Is Hollywood Racist? *Fresh Off The Boat* Executive Producer Says Yes."⁵⁵ The discussion that follows in this chapter points to the significance of YouTube as a Digital Thirdspace and how it has served to counter mainstream Hollywood's hold on media representations of Asians and Asian Americans in the United States. The chapter also addresses and problematizes the rhetorical function of reality television as a genre by employing the research of media scholars Gwendolynne Collins Reid and Hal Niedzviecki.

Chapter Six examines the innovative use of the Digital Thirdspace by Asian American vloggers whose online presence on social media and YouTube serves to counter the dearth of their representations on screens large and small. The fact that a number of these Asian American vloggers have become pop culture celebrities or "YouTubers," a term used to define individuals who have gained fame and fortune through their Digital Thirdspace presence, demonstrates the capabilities of the participatory culture of Digital Thirdspace to effect change. The "YouTube celebrity," an idea that was unheard of up to 2005, the year that YouTube started, is seen through the rhetorical lens of cultural studies since positive and empowering, or at the very least, non-demeaning, Asian and Asian American representations, have found large audiences and followings in a popular culture medium. The chapter revisits the aptness of the

⁵⁴<http://deadline.com/2017/09/asian-americans-in-television-study-diversity-representation-inclusion-master-of-none-fresh-off-the-boat-1202165584/>

⁵⁵ <http://www.straitstimes.com/lifestyle/fighting-racism-in-hollywood>

appropriation and application of Soja's definition of "Thirdspace" and works in conversation with the scholarship of Fatima Pashaei on the rhetoric of blogs and the work of Lloyd Bitzer's 'rhetorical situation.'

Chapter Six eventually takes a closer look at the profiles, rhetorical acts, and netizen comments of popular Asian American YouTube vloggers Kevin Wu and Ryan Higa. The significance and relevance of Wu and Higa's videos include the fact that they are considered pioneers of the YouTube vlog, and while Wu has no longer continued as a vlogger, Higa's longevity and popularity in the vlogosphere is almost unparalleled. Moreover, the vlogs of Wu and Higa are essentially broadcast as American entertainment shows that only address issues of race occasionally in response to an exigence. The Asian American presence on the Digital Thirdspace and the participatory culture that accompanies these stars act as indicators of the influential and positive online presence of Asian Americans on the Digital Thirdspace.

The conclusion, Chapter Seven, begins with some of the challenges I encountered when looking through the Internet for my socio-cultural critiques and analyses of the people and new media productions that reside on the Internet as a Digital Thirdspace. Though these new media artifacts acted as a liberating contrast to the traditional Hollywood gatekeeping mandates, there were also troubling elements to Digital Thirdspace that were brought to fore. In her monograph, *Asian American Media Activism*, rhetorician Lori Kido Lopez criticizes the lack of "intentional engagement with the politics of representation for Asian Americans" of Asian American YouTube celebrities (156).⁵⁶ In another critique of Asian American YouTube stardom, Vincent Pham and Kent Ono stress that "success is not assured, and stardom in one medium does not guarantee equivalent stardom in another" to then ask "Has the overall condition and situation

⁵⁶ *Asian American Media Activism: Fighting for Cultural Citizenship*. New York University Press, 2016.

for Asian Americans changed as a result of the prevalence of new media?” (YouTube TV Star 74-75).⁵⁷ I address these issues here by using the conclusion of Korean Americanist Stephen Cho Suh’s “Introducing K-Town,” an essay that “examines three popular Koreatown-based television/web programs” (Suh 398):

Whereas past portrayals of Koreatown were shot, interpreted, or co-opted by the predominantly white mainstream news media, *Ktown Cowboys* and *K-Town*, as projects created by second-generation Korean Americans, stand as organic movements to contest the continued racialization of Korean/Asian Americans as “forever foreigners.” (415)⁵⁸

While Kido Lopez, Pham, and Ono raise valid points, I argue that the Digital Thirdspace platform of popular culture that enables the presence of Asians and Asian Americans in a way that does not degrade or demean represents liberation. That these Asian and Asian American entertainers can ply their opinions and talents in a Digital Thirdspace that empowers both the “stars” and the “audience” validates the scholarship that works as advocacy for Asian American rhetorical actions online in Digital Thirdspaces of participatory culture and representations. But I am aware of the other challenges that exist in Digital Thirdspace and share them with my readers. With the 2016 election of Donald Trump, there was also a rise in the numbers of videos, sites, and social networking pages online that provided a platform for hate groups and white supremacy. These same platforms were used to provide a ready space for “free speech,” which is then abused by hate groups and others.

⁵⁷ *Global Asian American Popular Cultures*. 74-88. New York University Press, 2016.

⁵⁸ “Introducing K-Town: Consumption, Authenticity, and Citizenship in Koreatown’s Popular Reimagining.” *Journal of Asian American Studies*. Oct 2016 vol. 19 no. 3 397-422.

Conclusion

The contents of this project address four of the key Asian American rhetoric topics marked for future research by Morris Young, one of the founders of Asian American rhetoric: “hybrid rhetorical and discourse practices and forms; Asian American diasporic and transnational rhetorical and discourse practices, Asian and Asian American digital rhetorics, and intersections of identity and rhetorical practices -- that is, Asian Americans and issues of ethnicity, gender, sexuality, dis/ability, region, mixed-race...” (Ratcliffe 202). I would hope that the research and analyses provided in this project can serve to provide a humble contribution to the similar discussions that have occurred or are already occurring in the disciplinary confluence of Asian American rhetoric, digital rhetorics, and the rhetoric of popular culture.

CHAPTER TWO: THE INTERSECTIONS OF ASIAN AMERICAN DIGITAL RHETORICS AND THE RHETORICS OF POPULAR CULTURE

One aspect of the electronic, postmodern world is that there has been a reinforcement of the stereotypes by which the Orient is viewed. Television, the films, and all the media's resources have forced information into more and more standardized molds...standardization and cultural stereotyping have intensified the hold of the nineteenth-century academic and imaginative demonology of the mysterious Orient. - Edward W. Said⁵⁹ (in 1994, eleven years before the inception of YouTube)

As stated in Chapter One, this project argues that since the Internet has become a new purveyor of popular culture, more diverse and complex representations of Asians and Asian Americans have been made possible in this Digital Thirdspace. This development represents a remarkable transformation against the ways in which popular culture in the United States were controlled prior to the advent of the Internet. As a result of the mechanisms traditionally employed by the entertainment industry, viewing audiences around the world were generally exposed to specific tropes of Asians and Asian Americans on screens large and small, and more often than not, the images purveyed were negative and not always performed by actors of Asian descent. “Yellowface,” defined by cinema studies scholar Karla Rae Fuller, is “any performance of an Asian role by a non-Asian actor (6)...a parody and caricature of race” (10). This device was used in films such as *Breakfast at Tiffany's*,⁶⁰ but even portrayals of Asians by Asian American actors have been problematic in Secondspace -- the cringeworthy character Long Duk Dong in the 1984 film *Sixteen Candles* evoked some of the most egregious stereotypes possible. Actor Gedde Watanabe's portrayal of the “Dongle” etched a long-lasting trope on the imaginations of the 80s generation by presenting a lecherous inept loser whose lone

⁵⁹ *Orientalism: 25th Anniversary Edition*. pg 26. Vintage Books, 1994.

⁶⁰ Mickey Rooney plays a Japanese character replete with offensive stereotypes.

sexual conquest in the film feminized the Asian male.⁶¹ The assumption that the entertainment industry might have progressed in terms of being more sensitive to Asian stereotypes was unfounded when the American network station CBS produced *2 Broke Girls*, a sitcom that began in 2010 and employed a similar tactic in the character Han Lee, an accented Asian buffoon who embodied some of the most unappealing stereotypes imaginable. Correspondent Priya Elan of *The Guardian* describes the Han Lee character as “Short, asexual and work-obsessed...ridiculed for his broken English and failing to "get" US culture.”⁶² In fact, such negative stereotypes of Asians can be seen throughout American popular culture. In 2017, Sam Levin, a reporter for *Guardian U.S.*, wrote:

Asian American actors said they rarely, if ever, got auditions for leading roles, and when they did get parts, they were frequently secondary to the plot or portrayed offensive tropes. Asian men said they were often relegated to roles as tech nerds, assistants, doctors – sometimes highly emasculated, desexualized characters. Asian women, meanwhile, regularly go up for parts as masseuses and sex workers or characters described as submissive, fragile or quiet.⁶³ (Levin)

Such portrayals have consequences. The media combined with popular culture’s pervasiveness and constancy profoundly affects consumers of popular culture, and in turn, creates society. In the introduction of his monograph *The Politics of Pictures: The Creation of the Public in the Age of the Popular Media*, cultural scientist John Hartley writes: “Television, popular newspapers, magazines and photography, the popular media of the modern period, are the public domain, the place where and the means by which the public is created and has its

⁶¹ <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2015/02/06/384307677/whats-so-criinge-worthy-about-long-duk-dong-in-sixteen-candles>

⁶² <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/shortcuts/2012/may/02/2-broke-girls-racist-baffling>

⁶³ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/11/asian-american-actors-whitewashing-hollywood>

being” (1). In Chapter One, I justified the assertion of rhetorical theorists by claiming that rhetoric is epistemic, or, that rhetoric is a means construct knowledge. In *his* assertion, Hartley correlates the epistemic function of “the popular media of the modern period” to rhetoric, which leads to the outcome that popular culture creates knowledge. Along these lines, media theorist Marshall McLuhan writes in his noted text, *The Medium Is the Massage*, that “All media work us over completely. They are so pervasive in their personal, political, economic, aesthetic, psychological, moral, ethical, and social consequences that they leave no part of us untouched, unaffected, unaltered” (26). Here, McLuhan also touches on the idea as to why it is that the epistemic function of media works to construct knowledge for any audience, especially audiences exposed to Hollywood motion pictures. The realities behind Hartley and McLuhan’s statements were manifested in some of the commentaries that followed the success of the 2018 blockbuster film, *Crazy Rich Asians*. Actress Sandra Oh, for one, as co-host of the 2019 Golden Globes Award Ceremony, said in her monologue:

Just speaking for my own community, people cried a lot in [*Crazy Rich Asians*], and it’s not only because it’s a great story and a classic romantic comedy -- It is because seeing yourself reflected on screen is really emotional when you don’t even know that you’re carrying so much grief of never being seen.⁶⁴

The lack of representations and the unflattering portrayals of Asians on the Hollywood screens have constructed a certain impression for audiences, both domestic and international. Consider the reach that the American film industry has had on the world; blogger Jerry Arnold Bekolle Ngoko writes that “Hollywood has long been the symbolic center of the U.S. motion-picture

⁶⁴ https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/sandra-oh-golden-globes-host-donald-trump_us_5c2cdfd5e4b0407e90873134

industry. It dominates the world's motion-picture industry as well, with the top ten highest grossing movies of all time being American made”⁶⁵ (Ngoko).

But advancements in digital technologies and the opportunities that accompany these new developments have led to a blossoming of new representations which in turn is worthy of analyses for students in popular culture and digital rhetorics. Because this project's focus centers on the representations of Asians and Asian Americans in popular culture in Digital Thirdspace and how these representations serve as rhetorical actions, it will be helpful to present the background, the terminology, and the theoretical framework used in this project.

⁶⁵ <https://blog.uta.edu/popcult/2014/12/02/the-impact-of-hollywood/#.W-hycpPYqRu>

Asian American Rhetoric

The relative paucity of discussions of Asian Americans in American history generally has allowed the creation of a vacuum which stereotypic and misrepresented portrayals of Asian Americans has filled. The title of Ronald Takaki's 1989 seminal historiography, *Strangers From a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans*, asserts that Asians were outsiders and treated as such when they first came to America. Such is perhaps the situation of all recently arrived immigrant groups. However, Takaki argues, the outsider treatment continues to this day for Asian Americans. In the introduction to his autobiographical literacy narrative, Asian American rhetorician Morris Young provides an anecdote involving a white male taxi driver marveling at Takaki's English fluency despite the fact that Takaki's family has been in America for three generations (4). Young offers this after he relates a similar experience where a white man on the underground metro in Washington D.C. asks for the time and then addresses him in the Japanese language and then the Chinese language, highlighting "the assignment of foreignness to [an] Asian body [that] seemed to be 'natural' to that young white man" (3). These instances prompt him to ask "Why is there an expectation of foreignness?" (Young 4).

The sentiments of foreignness and exclusion in the American narrative are clearly present in the media through which popular culture is disseminated. Even in unsavory new media productions, the exclusion of the Asian American is noticed by other Asian Americans. In his 1996 memoir *Where the Body Meets Memory: An Odyssey of Race, Sexuality & Identity*, Japanese American author David Mura writes about how his viewing of a scene in a pornographic film of a black man making love to a white woman serves as the basis of his poem "The Colors of Desire." His knowledge of his marginal place in this American narrative is given in his poignant verse "I will see those bodies, black and white (and where am I, the

missing third), like a talisman, a rageful, unrelenting release” (235). Because this notion of the Asian American as either a “missing third” or a “misrepresented third” is a recurring trope in American popular culture (and not just pornography), the detrimental effects of such incessant misrepresentations can take a conscious or subconscious psychological toll on those Asian-Americans who feel ignored, misrepresented or victimized. There are other consequences of such programming for consumers of American popular culture. Psychologist Teresa Mok writes that “Mass media sources such as television and movies arguably offer up little in the way of positive Asian/Asian American images or role models...[and] that such a paucity of Asian images may greatly affect perceptions Asian Americans may hold both of their own racial group and of the larger society” (Mok 1). The hype and aftermath of the 2018 film *Crazy Rich Asians* served as a testament to this reality. Asian Americans were quoted in various online and print news outlets that they shed tears of joy throughout the film by stating that they never thought such positive, i.e. normal, representations of Asian Americans could have been possible to show on the big screen of Hollywood. Some prominent Asian Americans⁶⁶ (and other Americans)⁶⁷ bought out entire theaters in their efforts to help promote this landmark film on its opening weekend.

If rhetoric is epistemic, it is clear that the “paucity of Asian images” in “mass media sources” in the United States has led to a common assumption that Asian American men are weak and nerdy or inscrutable and lecherous, markers that emasculate and demonize. Psychologist Sumie Okazaki contends that such gender stereotypes have “potentially damaging effects to Asian Americans' self-concept as well as for dating and marriage patterns” (46). Similarly, scholars Stacy Lee and Sabia Vaught found that negative stereotypes of Asian

⁶⁶ <https://davechen.net/2018/08/that-time-i-bought-out-a-movie-theater-to-show-crazy-rich-asians/>

⁶⁷ https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/lena-waithe-crazy-rich-asians_us_5b7473e2e4b0df9b093b9921

American men (e.g. too short, unattractive, boring) were pervasive among Hmong American female high school students, and “that the women in the study who rejected Asian men tended to endorse the stereotypes ascribed by popular culture...[and] therefore favored and idealized White men and the hegemonic form of masculinity”⁶⁸ (457).

Though the research of Mok, Okazaki, Lee, and Vaught were all published in 2013, the effects of these studies are still apparent in 2018. In her 2018 article “On Dating Apps, Casual Racism Has Become The Norm For Asian Men,” reporter Brittany Wong writes that

Asian men’s experiences with dating are rooted in ugly cultural tropes. Today, Asian [American males] are boxed in as “technologically proficient, naturally subordinate” nerds who could “never in a thousand millenniums be a threat to steal your girl,” as “Fresh Off the Boat” creator Eddie Huang put it in a New York Times piece last year. (Wong)

In the same article, Korean adoptee model and actor Kevin Kreider recounts his engagement with American popular culture as a child:

I saw a lot of movies growing up. Breakfast at Tiffany’s. The typical one you see. The Karate Kid, which, when I watched those people, the Asian guys, it didn’t make me feel good about myself. When I was in grade school I remember just wanting to take this girl out to a dance. And when she told me that she didn’t find Asian guys attractive. Oh my God. Like, what’s wrong with being an Asian guy? Like why aren’t we seen attractive? And, what’s wrong with me? (Wong, 0:46 - 1:16)

Another repercussion, perhaps exacerbated with the political climate of a Donald Trump presidency, is manifested in the June 28, 2018 “Still Processing” podcast titled “Asian-

⁶⁸ Raewyn Connell defines hegemonic masculinity “as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (Masculinities 77)

Americans Talk About Racism, and We Listen — Part 1” where podcast hosts Wesley Morris and Jenna Wortham cover the topic of racism against Asian Americans by sharing messages from listeners with the audience to hear about their experiences. One caller offered:

Hey Jenna and Wesley. So one thing I’ve really been noticing ever since I discovered this phenomenon is the lack of Asian faces in even commercials or billboards or the background scenes when someone’s in a cafe or a restaurant or even walking on the sidewalk. I think I recently saw a credit card commercial where a woman of Asian descent was in the primary role, and I almost cried tears of joy because you just don’t see that -- just an Asian American being a regular American in a commercial. (24:53 - 25:29)

The aforementioned testimonies (and testimonial-like texts) have not only highlighted the absence of Asian Americans in mass media productions but also demonstrate Alcaraz’s claim (as mentioned in Chapter One) that the epistemic function of images assists in creating our beliefs concerning society since people often see those images as representations of reality “or even the Real itself” (Alcaraz). The mass media sources identified by Mok create knowledge.

In addition to creating the perception that Asian Americans are invisible, Hollywood and other mass media sources have also traditionally cast Asian Americans in roles that embody some of the most unappealing stereotypes (as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter). These moves can be attributed to the Edward Said-ian notion of “othering,” a move made to validate the superiority of the Western male by western popular culture’s complicit role in portraying Asian [Americans] in a negative light (Walzem 1).

Asian American media scholar Darrell Hamamoto summarizes this Said-ian move by writing that:

The social construction of Asian American “otherness” is the precondition for their cultural marginalization, political impotence, and psychic alienation from mainstream American life. Elaine H. Kim has described the way in which the orientalia articulated through popular literature written by whites has helped construct Asian otherness, and Eugene Franklin Wong has brought similar insights to bear in his study of the commercial cinema” (Hamamoto 5).

The Said-ian othering of Asians and Asian Americans in the United States sees them as “subalterns,” a term “derived from Antonio Gramsci’s work on cultural hegemony, which identified the groups that are excluded from a society’s established structures for political representation and therefore denied the means by which people have a voice in their society” (Stuenkel 4). Oliver Stuenkel also writes that “In critical theory and postcolonial theory, ‘subaltern’ refers to the populations that are socially, politically, and geographically outside of the hegemonic power structure of the colony and of the colonial homeland.” Considering what this project has already covered regarding American narratives and the Asian American as a social outsider of the hegemonic power structure of the United States, the status of the Asian American as a subaltern in traditional American cultural realms is not a far fetched idea. In fact, Asian American academic Elaine Kim (cited above by Hamamoto) writes that “The U.S. national narrative disavows [the facts] of American military, economic, and cultural colonization in Asia, from which Asian immigration directly emerges as the displaced and dislocated migrate to the very imperial center that disrupted their lives” (xiii). Kim, here, is referring to the United States’ military involvement in the Philippines, Korea, Vietnam, and Laos (xii), the involvement disrupting the lives of Asians, some of whom made the move to immigrate to the United States only to find themselves socially outside of the hegemonic

cultural power structure of the colonial homeland. That these issues exist as of this writing calls for an understanding and employment of Asian American rhetorics that resist hegemony, claim identity, and confront inscriptions of Asian Americans in the dominant culture.

Prominent Asian American rhetoricians Morris Young and LuMing Mao define Asian American rhetoric as the “...systematic effective use and development of symbolic resources in social, cultural, and political contexts” (Mao and Young 4). Asian American rhetoric is “employed to address specific occasions, whether responding to acts of racism or forming community” (Mao and Young 6). It aims not only “to carve out new space for critical and productive engagement” but also to “resist social and economic injustice and reassert their discursive agency and authority in the dominant culture” (Mao and Young 6). In *Representations*, their seminal text on Asian American rhetoric, Mao and Young ask questions to direct scholars to discover “those strategies or discursive forms that have newly emerged and that are in direct response to the rhetorical exigency of our own time” (Mao and Young, “Afterword” 323). Rhetorician Lloyd Bitzer defines exigency as “an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be” (Bitzer 6). “In other words, an exigence is a pressing problem in the world, something to which people must attend...Racism is an example...of exigence, one where discourse is *required* to remove the problem” (Jasinski 514).

Currently, misrepresentations and under-representations in the entertainment industry that affect Asians and Asian Americans and the perceptions that follow with movements such as #OscarsSoWhite and tactics such as “whitewashing” -- the term used to “[call] out Hollywood for taking Asian roles and stories and filling them with white actors” (Hess),⁶⁹ serve

⁶⁹ Hess, Amanda. “Asian-American Actors Are Fighting for Visibility. They Will Not Be Ignored.” 25 May 2016. New York Times Movies Section.

as a rhetorical exigency, something described above.⁷⁰ Culture reporter Cat Sandoval also cites the backlash that white actress Emma Stone faced after having played the role of Alison Eng, a half-Asian character in the 2015 American film *Aloha*. (Sandoval)⁷¹

Through Asian American rhetoric, this project addresses “intentional rhetorical acts that challenge dominant representations” (Mao and Young, “Afterword” 330) of the stereotypes applied to Asians and Asian American representations in popular culture and the Asian American discourses that occur through a participatory culture that serves “to address specific occasions, whether responding to acts of racism or forming community” (Mao and Young 6). In the upcoming chapters, we will see how representations of Asians and Asian Americans in popular culture in Digital Thirdspace not only act as responses to traditional racist stereotypes perpetuated by Hollywood but also facilitate community building through the participatory culture nurtured on the Internet.

⁷⁰ Kevin Kwan, who wrote the book "Crazy Rich Asians," which the 2018 film is based on, said he was approached by a producer who wanted to whitewash his story (Sandoval).

⁷¹<https://www.news.com/stories/crazy-rich-asians-works-to-undo-hollywood-s-racist-history/>

Rhetoric of Popular Culture

Popular culture rhetoric scholar Barry Brummett defines popular culture as “those systems or artifacts that most people share and that most people know about...things, like television, that are part of the everyday experience of most people” (“Rhetoric in Popular” 27). Brummett defines rhetoric as “the function of managing meaning within social arrangements...a dimension of the countless acts and objects comprising a cultural environment” (“Rhetorical Dimensions” 38). But Brummett also defines rhetoric “as the ways in which signs influence people” noting that “popular culture is rhetorical in...that way” and that “influencing other people is a way of securing power” (“Rhetoric in Popular” 39). Because of the extensive reach of the rhetoric of popular culture, professor of communications James Curran asserts that media can have the effect of legitimizing the social institutions they portray simply by portraying them (Curran 220); people may think that “if it’s on TV, it must be real” (“Rhetorical Dimensions” 11).

The Secondspace films and television shows support such theses as one examines the persistent stereotyping of Asian American male characters and the perceptions created as Eddie Huang and Kevin Krieder described above. Brummett refers to this learned result as a homology, “a formal resemblance across different texts, actions, objects, and other orders of experience” (“Rhetorical Dimensions” 131). The formal resemblance that exists across different mass media sources will be used as an example to better define the term homology. Though Brummett writes about the homologies of “stylistics” in his monograph, *A Rhetoric of Style*, I appropriate his explication and substitute “stylistics” with the term “popular culture:”

It is in recognizing and participating in [popular culture] homologies that imaginary communities and their subjects cohere around texts. A homology calls to such

communities, and those for whom that integrating form feels like who they are, for whom it resonates with their imagined alignments will respond. (132)

I contend that the popular culture homologies of Hollywood create knowledge for their domestic and global audiences. These homologies, or formal resemblances among text and experiences, are a pathway of persuasive influence at a formal level (Brummett and Nam 320), a notion that follows the idea that marks rhetoric as a means of securing power through influencing others. Award-winning documentary filmmaker and journalist Larry Tung Ling-hsuan bemoans the ways in which the perpetuation of these homologies and the consequences of “the under-representation and stereotypes of minorities on television have misled the viewing public to form inaccurate perception on minority groups based on mostly distorted or insignificant portrayals they see on a daily-basis” (87).

Even if the theoretical academic approaches of Brummett, Curran, and Ling-hsuan were to be questioned, it would be difficult to argue against the plethora of popular press analyses and reflections that prove their points. For example, Guy Aoki’s essay “Into the Next Stage: CBS Desperate to Maintain (Fake) [Asian Pacific Islander] Presence on [*Hawaii*] ‘Five-O’”⁷² bemoans the loss of Korean American cast members Daniel Dae Kim and Grace Park in addition to CBS’s meager attempts to replace them. Anson Ling’s article “Keiko Agena Discusses Representation, Says She Thought She Was Caucasian Growing Up”⁷³ draws attention to the meager portrayals of Asians in popular culture mentioned by Ling-hsuan. Former U.S. Deputy Secretary of Labor Chris Lu wrote the article “What We Miss When We Ignore Asian Americans,”⁷⁴ a piece that highlights the incongruity of the under-representation of Asian Americans in television and managerial and/or executive positions in spite of “[Asian

⁷² <http://www.rafu.com/2017/11/into-the-next-stage-cbs-desperate-to-maintain-fake-api-presence-on-five-o/>

⁷³ <http://www.weareresonate.com/2017/10/keiko-agena-discusses-representation-says-thought-caucasian-growing/>

⁷⁴ <http://time.com/4992021/asian-americans-pacific-islanders-representation/>

American & Pacific Islanders]...[being] the fastest growing racial group in the country” (Lu). Mary Wang’s essay in *Vogue*, “Is It Harder to be Famous as an Asian American?”⁷⁵ queries the model minority/bamboo ceiling dialectic as it relates to Hollywood. In his article “‘We’re the Geeks, the Prostitutes’: Asian American Actors on Hollywood’s Barriers,”⁷⁶ Sam Levin of *The Guardian* writes that “Films like *Ghost in the Shell* have fueled debate over whitewashing, while roles are few for Asian Americans - and where they are wanted, it’s often to play offensive stereotypes.” “Why Won’t Hollywood Cast Asian Actors?” an opinion essay written by Keith Chow, explicitly confronts Secondspace’s whitewashing controversy mentioned in the previous section of this chapter. The first five articles mentioned here were published in 2017, and Chow’s essay was published in the spring of 2016. All six address issues that were relevant decades earlier and remain relevant today. Moreover, each pointedly reminds readers that Secondspace productions affect Firstspace sensibilities. Fictional portrayals can mold human attitudes.

The ability of Secondspace productions to influence Firstspace lives is widely acknowledged and was first illustrated in sociologist David Altheide and social psychologist Robert Snow’s book, *Media Logic*. As far back as 1979, Altheide and Snow conceptualize the notion of media logic as “logics [that] become profoundly influential in a culture...and strongly influence how people think about issues and problems” (Logic 10). In a continuance of the same line of scholarship, Altheide’s 1985 monograph, *Media Power*, contends that “dominant media and culture are interactive, each producing and produced by the other” (Power 14) and that “some of the most basic organizing principles and procedures for social activity are influenced by the mass media” (Power 18). *Media Power* also sees Altheide write about how

⁷⁵ <https://www.vogue.com/article/asian-americans-racism-chloe-bennet>

⁷⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/11/asian-american-actors-whitewashing-hollywood>

categories of media logic work to “[induce] visual ways of apprehending reality” (Power 107). The power and sway (in addition to the epistemic functions) of dominant mass media sources was also recognized in the early 1980s by self described reformed academic Dennis Porter. In his 1982 article “Soap Time: Thoughts on a Commodity Art Form,” Porter writes that television “put the audience... ‘in the faces’ of people whose experiences are intense and passionate...[making] the audience intimate with those characters” (Porter & Newcomb qtd in Brummett 15). The absences of Asian American males and negative, unlikeable portrayals of Asian American males on screens, then, severely limit the likelihood of an audience’s becoming ‘intimate’ with such characters since these screens’ narrative structures promote the stereotyped Asian buffoon trope. These representations are the results of the traditional entertainment industries’ production and distribution pragmatics and how they work to produce realities, realities that deem Asian American males as marginal, risible, or perilous in American culture. Brummett argues that content of a culture is dictated by the inevitable domination of a medium of communication, something that is supported by *New York Times* David Carr Fellowship recipient and journalist Amanda Hess:

But mostly, Asian-Americans are invisible. Though they make up 5.4 percent of the United States population, more than half of film, television and streaming properties feature zero named or speaking Asian characters, a February report from the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism at the University of Southern California found. Only 1.4 percent of lead characters in a sample of studio films released in 2014 were Asian. (Hess)

Brummett takes Secondspace Hollywood to task on this point in his text *Rhetoric in Popular Culture*:

Almost any night of ordinary television viewing will yield many examples of ‘what is against what’ in the first sense of certain signs that are omitted. . . Think about the relatively low representation of some cultural or racial groups, for instance of Asian or Latino people on television, despite their rapidly growing populations in this country. When texts rarely link people of color or those with physical challenges with everyday roles such as store clerks, business office workers, plumbers, and so forth, such texts serve to further a false image of nonwhites or the disabled as uninvolved in the everyday life of our country.” (“Rhetoric in Popular” 123)

Brummett’s commentary here follows his assertion that “people need to see their engagement with popular culture as participation in rhetorical struggles over who they are” (xii), but popular culture clearly offers major challenges to those who are misrepresented or who are not represented at all.

But in an effort to justify their decision making practices for casting (or not casting) certain types of actors and for not having Asian Americans serve as lead roles if they are cast at all, some scholars and Secondspace Hollywood industry insiders often point to the economic realities of Firstspace. Communications scholar Sut Jhally’s essay titled “The Political Economy of Culture” notes that “in the United States, it is impossible to understand the media and cultural domain without recognizing the role of advertising revenues in the operation of the cultural industries. Broadcasting (television and radio) derive 100 percent of their revenues from advertisers” (54). Similarly, movie and theatre box office receipts act as the justification for decisions made in the industry. This symbiotic relationship between corporate America and popular culture then goes a long way toward establishing the content of programming:

First, the program has been able to attract large numbers of people to watch it. It cannot therefore appeal to too narrow of a minority. Second, the program has to attract the right kinds of people. Not all parts of the audience are of equal value to the networks. The programming will have to attract those parts of the audience that advertisers wish to reach...Third, the programs not only have to deliver large numbers of the correct type of people to advertisers, but they also have to deliver them in the right frame of mind.

(Jhally 56)

Jhally uses these considerations to show that “advertising’s importance to the cultural realm...has to do with advertisers’ revenues setting the context within which popular culture production takes place” (56). Brummett also makes note of the “corporate links to television” (Mander qtd in Brummett 13) and writes that “Television programming is a commodity consisting of time that is sold to advertisers in units” (Antin qtd in Brummett 13). Because of the commodification of television programming and the stakes that accompany it, one could argue that cultural inclusiveness and/or accurate representations of ethnic minority Americans might not be a high priority for those producers and advertisers looking to earn the highest revenue for their shows (a notion that becomes contested in Chapter 3).

Acknowledging that revenues from advertising or box office receipts are privileged within a capitalist paradigm helps to better understand how the entertainment industry makes their decisions regarding programming. In Adorno and Horkheimer’s theory of “the economic mechanism of selection,” they write that “there is the agreement...of all executive authorities not to produce or sanction anything that in any way differs from their own rules, their own ideas about consumers, or above all themselves” (407). That is, in deciding where to devote their production budgets or their precious air time, the executive authorities in the entertainment

industry wield the authority to allow or disallow certain representations in mass media which in turn becomes a media logic or media determinism and a normalization of their worldviews. A particularly vivid example of such thinking is reported in a 2015 account of a discussion about the possible launch of an American-based K-pop sitcom: “After the producer’s presentation, during the Q&A, I mustered up the courage to ask “Will there be an Asian guy in it”? In a joking manner, the producer said “Nope! Never! Asian guys in my show, not gonna happen!” (Randall).

The producer’s reply prompted the author of the article to lament that “We see these messages, the unattractive and emasculated images, and the omission of Asian men, repeated time and time again in the media...” (Randall). Listener Pablo Torre described the emotional consequences of such attitudes in Morris and Wortham’s previously mentioned podcast “Asian-Americans Talk About Racism, and We Listen — Part 1:”

Like one of the weird things about being Asian-American is to hear people do *the* things that are the most offensive in any textbook way towards Asian-Americans. It is doing the slanty eyes thing. It is doing the ching-chong voice thing. All of these things that to us are the clear signals that you are not one of us, that you will never be one of us, that we do not respect you enough to know that this makes you feel like you're not one of us.

(Torre 0:01 - 0:31).

However, as we will see in the following chapters, the exigency is tended to through the phenomenon of digital technologies. As professor of communication studies James Jasinski might say, this exigency is one where discourse is required to alleviate the problems of Secondspace and its influences on Firstspace.

Digital Rhetorics & Digital Thirdspace, Part I

Edward Said's 1994 epigraph from the Introduction of his seminal monograph *Orientalism* at the beginning of this chapter no doubt addressed the technologies that were associated with Secondspace, an entertainment industry system that included or excluded various kinds of plots and actors based on a gatekeeping mechanism consciously or subconsciously expressing the preferences, interests, or biases of executive authorities in Hollywood. Hollywood was then a weighty influence on popular culture, and Brummett, in his monograph *Rhetorical Dimensions of Popular Culture*, even references the rhetorical significance of how a mysterious "Oriental guy" gives a gremlin to an American family in the 1984 film *Gremlins*. But Said's assessment of the communication methods he listed, television, films, other resources, etc. did not include the Internet, a new space in which a variety of voices could be heard, a space as it were, for America's misrepresented inhabitants in popular culture.

This project refers to this new space as a Digital Thirdspace, borrowed from Edward Soja's 1996 influential theory of Thirdspace, a space where he posits "everything comes together... subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history" (Soja 57). The phenomenal growth of the different online spaces and the many functions of the Internet are aligned with some of the conditions of Soja's theory of Thirdspace, and the role of the Internet as a steward of popular culture is no exception.

Soja calls "Thirdspace" a "creative recombination and extension, one that builds on a Firstspace perspective that is focused on the "real" material world and a Secondspace

perspective that interprets this reality through “imagined” representations of spatiality (6). Put another way and vastly oversimplified, Firstspace is the “real” world of everyday human experience, Secondspace is the imagined world of traditionally moderated and generally commercially based media such as TV and film, and Digital Thirdspace is a world beyond – a mixture of elements from Firstspace and Secondspace with less of the strictures of both.

Seen in the context of Asian American representations (and indeed the representations of all minority groups), while inaccuracies nurtured in Secondspace influenced lives and attitudes in Firstspace, both spaces were altered in the sense that each were in a cycle where the entertainment industry was skewing perceptions of Asian Americans which then affected real lives which then provided fertile soil for further Secondspace misrepresentations. However, the advent of a Digital Thirdspace for “everyman” meant that anyone with an Internet connection could not only access new media⁷⁷ content but could also produce, create, and share their works (videos and/or texts) in Digital Thirdspace for everyone (with an Internet connection) to see. Though users of the Internet needed certain hardware and software, etc., the power of the Secondspace gatekeepers was compromised.

As such, the Internet has become a Digital Thirdspace for (or has acted as an agent of the promotion of) more positive representations of Koreans and Korean Americans in relation to the former contested black/white binary of Secondspace and Firstspace. This dissertation argues that the “othered” Asian American can and does exist in a space that Soja characterized as one “of extraordinary openness...a space where issues of race, class, and gender can be addressed simultaneously without privileging one over the other...” (Soja 5).⁷⁸ By existing comfortably in such a Digital Thirdspace “where issues of race, class, and gender can be

⁷⁷ New media is a central term that I’ll be defining through the works of Cynthia Selfe.

⁷⁸ *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. Blackwell, 1996.

addressed simultaneously without privileging one over the other,” the Asian American in Digital Thirdspace need not necessarily be othered. Furthermore, if the parameters of the previously mentioned Digital Thirdspace remain steady, the free atmosphere of Digital Thirdspace enables new and atypical representations of Asian Americans (such as the hard-partying Asian Americans in the reality show *K-Town*) which can counter the traditional stereotypes held by Said’s postmodern world.

Because this project addresses the exigency of the traditional, negative, stereotypical roles frequently assigned Asians and Asian Americans in popular culture, the application of Homi Bhabha’s hybridity theory to a new space can also be pertinent. Scholar Andrea Mattos highlights how Bhabha “also discusses hybrid and radical, which for him is the space of political resistance of oppressed minorities, in opposition to dominant cultural practices” (Bhabha 2000)(qtd in Mattos).⁷⁹ The Internet has been a fertile garden for the cultivation of media texts – in the words of digital media scholar Cynthia Selfe, “texts created primarily in digital environments, composed in multiple media (e.g., film, video, audio, among others), and designed for presentation and exchange in digital venues” (43).⁸⁰ As we will see later in the case studies of this project with Kpop musicians, YouTube show producers, and vloggers, Digital Thirdspace has indeed provided new spaces where “new forms of action and interpretation are being developed,” and within these spaces, new media texts and narratives are no longer confined by the rules of the traditional Hollywood or Madison Avenue media gatekeepers.

In fact, digital texts are a subcategory of new media texts, as defined by Selfe, much as bulldogs are subcategories of canines. Moreover, as digital rhetorician Douglas Eyman writes in

⁷⁹ Mattos, Andréa Machado de Almeida. “Third Space: Narratives and the clash of identities in Disney’s *Brother Bear*.” *Journal of Intercultural Communication*, 39 (November 2015): n. pag. Web. 16 June 2016.

⁸⁰ *Writing New Media: Theory and Applications for Expanding the Teaching of Composition*.

his book, *Digital Rhetoric: Theory, Method, Practice*, digital texts can be influential in social change. He writes: “Texts have rhetorical features, originate in and propel social action, and are designed material objects; these qualities provide the primary means of relationship between text and rhetoric-as-use” (Eyman 23). If we view the “digital text” or “new media text” as artifacts that have rhetorical features that originated in and propelled social action, we can revisit Brummett’s definition of rhetoric “as the ways in which signs influence people” to show that the new media text is a sign that can influence people. We can also agree that any new media text influence then corroborates Brummett’s idea that new media texts in “popular culture [are] rhetorical in...that way” since “influencing other people is a way of securing power” (“Rhetoric in Popular” 39).

If new media texts and/or digital texts are associated with social action, then these texts address the concerns of Mao and Young since these digital texts fall under “those strategies or discursive forms that have newly emerged and that are in direct response to the rhetorical exigency of our own time” (Mao and Young, “Afterword” 323). Eyman defines digital rhetoric as the “application of rhetorical theory (as analytic method or heuristic for production) to digital texts and performances” (Eyman 44). In his articulation of a deeper function of digital rhetorics, Eyman references 2005 James Zappen’s essay, “Digital Rhetoric: Toward an Integrated Theory” and parses out the piece’s introduction to list what Zappen (a digital rhetorician) “sees contributing to the establishment of digital rhetoric as an integrated theory” (29):

1. [T]he use of rhetorical strategies in production and analysis of digital text
2. [I]dentifying characteristics, affordances, constraints of new media
3. [F]ormation of digital identities
4. [P]otential for building social communities (Zappen 319)

Each of the case studies in this dissertation has the characteristics set forth in Zappen's list, thereby denoting each as rhetorical acts that address an exigency. Chapter Three sees Secondspace video clips transferred to YouTube channels on Digital Thirdspace, the transfer requiring the use of rhetorical strategies in producing the digital text replete with analyses in the form of viewer comments. These comments, also work to build social communities (as we will see with fans of Steven Yeun and/or Johnny Yune), and the digital identities of users/commenters work to support the new digital identity of the subject of the videos. And the comments also include compliments, complaints, gratitude, and requests, all of which are consistent with Zappen's identification of characteristics, affordances, and constraints of new media. Chapter Four employs a similar approach with Kpop music videos that are created, shared, and commented on; Chapter Five, with the K-Town reality show; and Chapter Six, with Asian American YouTube vloggers. Each of these case studies demonstrate how new media texts modify a popular perception of Asians and Asian Americans through the participatory culture of Digital Thirdspace. Because this dissertation centers on representations of Asians and Asian Americans in American popular culture, Eyman's point that "Digital rhetoricians are also concerned with the ways in which race is constructed, marked, or elided in online communities" (79) is particularly relevant given the intersections of digital rhetorics, Asian American rhetoric, and the rhetoric of popular culture.

Digital Rhetorics & Digital Thirdspace, Part II

As mentioned in the opening chapter, the recent scholarly literature regarding Soja's Thirdspace theory is mostly related to classrooms and learning spaces, yet the participatory culture of new media in this Internet space, or here, Digital Thirdspace, allows not only for the erasing of some prejudices among the majority population but also for community building, solidarity, and learning among Asian Americans. The Digital Thirdspace is the digital environment named here, and the oft-mentioned participatory culture can be better understood when one considers English scholar Gregory Ulmer's concept of electracy, which he defines as "the kind of skills and facility necessary to exploit the full communicative potential of new electronic media" (Konan 2568). Mere literacy – the ability to read and write – is inadequate in a digital age. One needs also the electracy, the ability to navigate the digital universe and engage in participatory culture. The term participatory culture, already mentioned a number of times, is simply Digital Thirdspace's facility to allow online users to "[e]mbed. Share. Comment. Like. Subscribe. Upload. Check in" (Arroyo 1). The rhetorical significance of this Digital Thirdspace is highlighted by Arroyo who writes "[v]ideo and participatory cultures provide new ways of eliciting participation, encouraging remix, and writing the punctum: welcoming the disruptions instead of systematically excluding them" (60). These new participatory cultures allow for anyone with access to Digital Thirdspace to be a part of the digital culture, so to speak. Now when one watches a video or reads a news article online, that individual can start a comment thread or join a discussion already in place, either to support or criticize said new media text.

Arroyo's employment of the term "punctum" is derived from her explication of literary theorist Roland Barthes's and Ulmer's "work on the punctum of recognition" (50), which is

better understood by summarizing Barthes' definition and use of *studium* and *punctum*. In her book *Participatory Composition: Video Culture, Writing, and Electracy*, Arroyo highlights the premise of the online participatory experience beginning with Barthes's participatory experiences with images. She writes that "the photograph reaches and animates [Barthes] just as he animates the photograph" (60), concluding that this is the same participatory "experience we undergo when interacting with images and video online" (60). For Arroyo and Barthes, the experiences of the interactions are based on two Latin terms, *studium* and *punctum* (Arroyo 60). The *studium* is the reaction based off of the aspects of the photo (or site of analysis), or to quote Arroyo, "predictable, inert responses that stand still, frozen in stasis" (60). Norwegian blogger Knut Skjærven summarizes Barthes notion of the *studium* as a "matter of grasping the [photographer's] intention, of entering into harmony with them, of [approving] or [disapproving] of them[...but] also to try to understand them" (Skjærven),⁸¹ the suggestion here leaning towards an understanding of authorial intent.

Barthes writes that the *punctum* is "a wound: I see, I feel, hence I notice, I observe, and I think" (Barthes qtd in Arroyo 56). Arroyo writes that this wound is made by a detail from the photograph but that "the detail is usually not present because of the photographer's intentions; the person looking at the photograph feels the detail and is overcome by it" (56-57). Arroyo uses Barthes's recognition of a dirt road in a photo as an example of his experiencing a punctum -- the "'wound,' the texture of the road, gives him the 'certainty' of being in central Europe...[he] recognizes with his 'whole body,' the straggling villages' he passed through in Hungary and Rumania [sic] long ago" (Barthes qtd in Arroyo 57).

Using the context of Ulmer's notion of electracy, "the kind of skills and facility necessary to exploit the full communicative potential of new electronic media," Arroyo writes

⁸¹ <https://barebonescommunication.wordpress.com/2008/12/05/barthes-on-studium-and-punctum/>

of Ulmer's "rereading of... 'Barthes's Body of Knowledge'" for a better understanding of definition and electracy:

Ulmer understands the punctum experience as a moment for connection, for conduction to occur, rather than a moment for mourning. Ulmer explains that the punctum "represents an alternative to the conception of knowledge that underlies normal academic writing....the primary quality of Barthes's approach is its renunciation of the notion of knowledge as a mastery over the object known." (Arroyo 57)

The basis of this idea is the foundation on which Arroyo writes that she is able to "extend Barthes and Ulmer's important work by involving it with the participatory realm" (58). Arroyo writes that moving "the discussion from static images to moving images" allows scholars and rhetoricians to recognize not only "a sharing of relations" but also "*feel* the making of meaning" ((emphasis Arroyo's) 58). Arroyo reinforces this notion by emphasizing the participatory aspect of Digital Thirdspace, a point noted in the scholarship of Jean Burgess and Joshua Green, authors of *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture*. Burgess and Green maintain that the participation of users on YouTube allows it to be an open system (Burgess and Green 66), and Arroyo believes that the openness of YouTube's system or architecture perpetually promotes or demands sharing and repurposing (Arroyo 58).

The YouTube video or new media text, then, can reach and animate a viewer just as the viewer animates the new media text with the punctum acting as the variable and catalyst for meaning making and feedback. One example can be seen in a short scene⁸² from the 1999 film *American Pie*. The participatory culture of Digital Thirdspace not only enabled someone to upload this clip to YouTube but also allowed other online viewers to watch, comment on, and like or dislike the video clip itself. Four high school boys at a house party are admiring a photo

⁸² https://youtu.be/iBN_SUfW2OM

portrait of Steve Stifler's mother, and while doing so, one labels her a MILF, the crude acronym for the words "mom I'd like to fuck." For the average viewer, the shenanigans of these teenage boys can be attributed to the machismo and libido of male high schoolers, but because John Cho, the actor who defines the term MILF for his pals, is the lone Asian American in the scene, certain ethnic American viewers who also attended high schools that were predominantly Caucasian may recognize a punctum of recognition, or the scene's unintended perception of being the assimilated outsider (or in some cases, just the outsider). If one also considers Brummett's notion of the underlying purpose of rhetoric, which is to manage shared meaning (xiv),⁸³ and combines this with Arroyo's assertion that engaging with all aspects of the YouTube video through a rhetorical lens can help one "feel the making of meaning," one can consider the new media text a viable rhetorical site of participatory culture in Digital Thirdspace and representations. Such participation includes the ability for fans and listeners to use the contents of this Digital Thirdspace to embed and/or share K-pop videos on social networking sites, write positive or negative comments under vloggers' videos posted on YouTube channels, click on the thumbs up icon to like (or the thumbs down icon to dislike) for a particular user created content video or comment, and subscribe to a YouTube channel to receive notifications about new uploads. Though these participatory acts may come across as fairly mundane, tech savvy individuals or what Ulmer refers to as individuals with a keen sense of electracy (instead of literacy), know that the number of times these actions take place, and the accumulated tallies that result, function to increase the popularity of the video and the creator behind it. The concept of electracy and its associated competencies have effectively altered the landscape of popular culture since anyone with an Internet connection now has the ability to create a vlog or show and upload it to Digital Thirdspace, not only allowing viewers

⁸³ *Rhetorical Dimensions of Popular Culture.*

an awesome array of entertainment options to choose from but also enabling them to provide instantaneous feedback on the videos with which they choose to engage.

With a computer or a smartphone, today's lay person wishing to become an entertainer can now do so on Digital Thirdspace. For example, Chapter Five highlights the YouTube phenomenon of the vlog, a "[video] of people sitting alone in front of their webcams and just talking to anybody and everybody who care to click on their video" (Welsch 21). Some vlog creators, also known as vloggers, have become celebrities in their own right, with legions of fans that uphold their fame. Moreover, the Digital Thirdspace has also provided an arena where these fans can communicate with each other and in many cases the vloggers and key players in the vlogs. Given that such arenas did not exist prior to the appearance of the Internet, the parallels between the newness of Digital Thirdspace and the idea of the "public sphere" are unavoidable. This newfound capacity has allowed Asians and Asian Americans to serve as entertainers in North America in addition to allowing netizens of all ethnic backgrounds to create and add to discourse in the public sphere of Digital Thirdspace to support and/or criticize these seemingly new faces in popular culture.

In his book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a category of Bourgeois Society*, German theorist and philosopher Jürgen Habermas "defined the public sphere as a virtual or imaginary community which does not necessarily exist in any identifiable space" (Soules). In its ideal form, the public sphere is "made up of private people gathered together as a public and articulating the needs of society with the state" (Habermas 176 qtd by Soules). Though Habermas' view of the public sphere originated almost 60 years ago, one can make the claim that today's netizens who are well-versed in electronics and immersed in the participatory culture of Digital Thirdspace are part of the community of the

Internet's public sphere. While the appropriation of Habermas's public sphere may be questioned by purists who argue that his (public sphere) was designed more for those wishing to assemble against the state, it is difficult to deny the parallels between the basic tenets of the Habermasian public sphere and the areas in Digital Thirdspace that allow citizens from all walks of life to gather and articulate their needs of society with others on the Internet. The comments of support and solidarity by English speakers/writers of all backgrounds on the YouTube video titled "Actor Constance Wu Is Tired of Hollywood's 'Lazy Excuses' For Racism"⁸⁴ demonstrate this. YouTube user TheWannamodel90210 wrote "I loved this. All cultures should be able to get roles and opportunities," a comment from two years ago that was also liked 373 times, and GirloftheX's comment "As a black woman I know what it's like to want to see yourself on tv and such. So I am very aware of the lack of other minority's [sic] on tv. I support Constance in what's she trying to achieve" received 152 likes. While these were just two examples, this particular YouTube video had 591 comments overall.

In a later iteration of Habermas' conception, modern rhetoric scholar Gerard Hauser offers his concept of the "reticulate public sphere" as "a discursive space in which individuals and groups associate to discuss matters of mutual interest and, where possible, to reach a common judgment about them. It is the locus of emergence for rhetorically salient meanings" (Hauser 61). Hauser's reticulate public sphere can be seen in the actions of the online journalists, YouTube video creators, and netizens who are part of Digital Thirdspace's participatory culture, people countering the misrepresentations of Asian Americans in Secondspace. In fact, the assertions that "publics do not exist as entities but as processes; their collective reasoning is not defined by abstract reflection but by practical judgment; their awareness of issues is not philosophical but eventful" (64) suggest that Hauser's reticulate

⁸⁴ <https://youtu.be/G7VQmGmy-jM>

public sphere comes into formation when those with the electracies to support and approve of new media texts in comments to the creators and actors do so by using rhetorical appeals to challenge uninformed or intolerant beliefs (and counter stereotypical tropes, including those of Asian Americans). The shared implicit goal of the new media texts and reticulate public spheres (covered in this project) aims to mitigate the exigence of the perception of popular stereotypes.

If, however, one is reminded of the status of Asian Americans as subalterns in the American cultural realms, a complement to Hauser's definition of the public sphere can be found in Nancy Fraser's critique of Habermas' public sphere. In her essay "Rethinking the Public Sphere," Fraser challenges the idea that a single public sphere could provide "members of subordinated groups" the proper venue "to undertake communicative processes" since to do so would be "under the supervision of dominant groups" (66). As a solution to this, Fraser proposes an alternative public called a "subaltern counterpublic" offering "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (67). Asian American media activist Lori Kido Lopez writes that the Internet communities of Asian American stars function as subaltern counterpublics (149). Digital Thirdspace has provided the space Asian Americans and their supporters needed to help create and circulate new media counterdiscourses to the traditional narratives invented by the hegemonic power structure within which it resides.

Digital Thirdspace and its users' abilities to circumvent Secondspace gatekeepers (which is illustrated in detail in Chapters Four, Five, and Six) connect with what postmodernist philosopher Michel Foucault wrote about the understandings of power. Foucault's notions that power pervades every aspect of society and that power is related to knowledge serve as the

basis of how popular media power structures have operated. The relationship between power and knowledge in society “develops Foucault’s basic insight that changes in thought are not due to thought itself, suggesting that when thoughts change, the causes are the social forces that control the behavior of individuals” (Gutting 50). Here I remind readers of the assertion that rhetoric is epistemic, or, that rhetoric creates knowledge. Considering this Foucauldian idea within the framework of the rhetoric of popular culture and Asian American rhetorics, Hamamoto writes in the introduction to his book *Monitored Peril: Asian Americans and the Politics of TV Representation*:

Since Foucault, it has been commonly accepted that knowledge and power inhere in discursive formations through which social roles are assigned and enforced. Popular cultural forms such as network television programs are especially effective vehicles for the transmission of a racialized discourse that confers legitimacy to white supremacist social institutions and power arrangements. The following pages will lay bare core ideological assumptions of select TV programs with an eye on destabilizing their taken-for-granted status. Once the fissures of liberal thought as embodied in dominant TV forms have been exposed, it remains for independent Asian American media artists (practicing a Foucauldian inspired counterhegemonic "discourse politics") to drive a wedge into the cracks of the edifice. (xi)

Here, Hamamoto acknowledges the power imbalance dialectic of the Hollywood industry of an inherently conservative Secondspace and its aspiring – even revolutionary -- Asian American media artists, media artists who, Hamamoto hoped might be instruments of significant change. However, no one in the early 1990s, including Hamamoto, could have foreseen how the arrival

of the Digital Thirdspace would be able to do so much to disrupt the Foucauldian power arrangement that dominated American popular culture.

The unprecedented disruptions and shifts to what one could refer to as the traditional power structures that dictated the content and dissemination of American popular culture can be attributed to the electracies of the participants of the many new media subaltern counterpublics, including of course Asian Americans. The creators and viewer/participants of the new media counterdiscourses would be part of what Sarah Arroyo calls the rhetoric of empowerment:

The idea of subjects-in-control who can change beliefs and actions based on critical reflection and act in their own best interests changes drastically in video culture, since the ideas of sharing and reciprocity...drive action and cannot be separated from the subjects and the content themselves. (Arroyo 30)

Because the subaltern counterpublic that has been given voice by these new media texts in Digital Thirdspace serves as a text (as defined by Eyman), and because the new media texts are designed for production and consumption in video culture, both are elements of the rhetoric of empowerment for various hitherto marginalized groups such as Asian Americans. To recap, Eyman writes that “Texts have rhetorical features, originate in and propel social action, and are designed material objects; these qualities provide the primary means of relationship between text and rhetoric-as-use” (23). The new media text and the texts of the subaltern counterpublic assist each other to affect change since both require “subjects-in-control” who are invested in the movement, intentionally or inadvertently, of trying to change the culture of representations of their minority group (including of course Asian Americans) in popular culture.

A good illustration of the convergence of exigence, the rhetoric of empowerment, the subaltern counterpublic, and the dialectic of the Digital Thirdspace can be found in the new

media text “Are They Dating? (ft. Anna Akana, Philip Wang).”⁸⁵ Produced by Linda Dong, founder of the LeendaDProductions YouTube channel, the nearly 4 minute long film clip features an all Asian American cast and centers on a set of male and female co-workers surmising aloud on whether or not another set of co-workers are dating. The office setting of this short film is rather nondescript as the curious co-workers use various social media sites of the suspected couple to try to find clues to their relationship status. The narrative ends after another Asian American male co-worker, after asking the sleuths what they are up to, simply asks the unsuspecting couple whether or not they are dating. Nothing may seem remarkable about this YouTube video, but viewed through a rhetorical lens, the fact that young, attractive, Asian American characters who are simply portrayed as Americans who are inquisitive and/or in a relationship is symbolic since the video short presents a visual counterdiscourse to what Secondspaces usually present to the viewing public. The exigence addressed here comes the sentiment expressed via *Rookie Magazine* writer Victoria Chiu: “I didn’t see Asian people featured in what I watched before YouTube.” Moving beyond the absence of Asian Americans on Secondspace, viewers could now choose to watch popular culture new media texts on Digital Thirdspace. By the same token, Asian and Asian American actors often foiled in their attempts to gain access through the gatekeeping apparatus of Secondspace could now empower themselves by creating and producing new media texts for Digital Thirdspace: “Like many performers who find success on YouTube, [Linda Dong] was tired of waiting for auditions, so she decided for write roles for herself” (Ada Tseng).

Digital Thirdspace’s new media text “Are They Dating? (ft. Anna Akana, Philip Wang)” also provides a vehicle for sharing the reactions of a subaltern counterpublic. Of the responses

⁸⁵ <https://youtu.be/3XNswvyQlvA>

listed under the YouTube video, one by a viewer screen-named “historydan” shares an epistolary comment:

Hi Leenda. I want to nominate you as the Top Asian American female award for showcasing Asian men in a different and positive light as opposed to what we normally see in Western society.

You are a complete breath of fresh air.

You have done far more good than a lot of Asian American women in history and you deserve to be in the hall of fame and remembered in Asian American history as a strong, intelligent, proud Asian women who defended her brothers and men in a racist, anti Asian male society. (historydan)

The apparent sense of relief and gratitude expressed by “historydan” (who, based on his expressions of gratitude, we can reasonably infer is male and probably Asian) in his comment to Linda Dong demonstrates that the Asian male is part of a subordinated social group, a subaltern, in the realm of popular culture of Western society. It is also evident that Dong’s video also functions as a counterdiscourse to the dominant discourse of Secondspace since the young actors in the film and the narrative they present are an oppositional interpretation of the Asian trope Hollywood has generally developed and promoted. This counterdiscourse, due to the participatory culture of Digital Thirdspace, is then designed to be “liked,” shared, circulated, and commented upon.

Asian and Asian American Digital Rhetorics

The intersections of the rhetorical practices discussed in this chapter serve as a foundation for the theoretical framework for this dissertation, and that framework can help us more richly understand what might otherwise be dismissed as mere entertainment in addition to recognizing the Asian American-related issues implied by traditional practice in Secondspace. The outlook for Asian American representations in popular culture on the Internet is bright and the opportunities are real. In her monograph, *Asian American Media Activism: Fighting for Cultural Citizenship*, Lisa Lopez nicely summarizes the prospects of a new media dispensation :

Although the potential for emancipation can be limited by barriers to access -- and the Internet is certainly not accessible to all Asian Americans -- the existence of these participatory cultures provides opportunities for conversation, skills training, and identity development precisely because they are not connected to mainstream media. In this arena, Asian Americans are able to articulate their own perspectives and participate in the formation of new interpretive frames, regardless of whether or not this kind of content appeals to a wider audience” (149-150).

That the Digital Thirdspace provides special opportunities to Asian Americans and that they are particularly proactive in exploiting the resources of this medium should not be surprising, given the statistics regarding Internet users. Since 2001,⁸⁶ Asian Americans have ranked first among all Americans in Internet use with a 2016 Pew analysis poll revealing that 95% of all English-speaking Asian Americans use the Internet (only 87% of Euro Americans use the Internet).⁸⁷

This chapter evaluated the mechanisms of gatekeepers who were able to use media determinism, the public sphere, media logics, and popular culture to promote negative

⁸⁶ <http://www.pewinternet.org/2001/12/12/asian-americans-and-the-internet/>

⁸⁷ <https://asamnews.com/2016/03/01/asian-americans-rank-first-in-internet-use/>

perceptions of Asian Americans in narratives residing in popular culture for past generations. But this chapter also recognizes that today's digital technologies have the capabilities to mediate such perceptions by dispelling stereotypes of Asians that have become ingrained for consumers of American popular culture. The next few chapters uses various case study analyses of the new media productions that exist on the Internet to show how a Digital Thirdspace has provided a vehicle for the image of Asian Americans to move beyond the stereotypes of Firstspace (reality) and Secondspace (Hollywood and Madison Avenue), a liberation, of sorts, that Hamamoto called for/predicted. In the next chapter, I will show how a Digital Thirdspace and its participatory culture promoted and empowered not only the few Asian Americans who are active players in Secondspace but also the Asian American community and its allies.

CHAPTER THREE: ASIAN AMERICAN BREAKTHROUGHS IN SECONDSPACE: THE EMERGENCE OF KOREAN AMERICAN MALE FIGURES IN SECONDSPACE AND THEIR DIGITAL THIRDSPEACE AFTERLIVES

*That's all there was, Bradley. That's all there was! But you don't think I wouldn't have wanted to play a better role than that bucktoothed, groveling waiter? I would have killed for a better role where I could have played an honest-to-god human being with real emotions. I would have killed for it. You seem to assume "Asian Americans" always existed. That there were always roles for you. You didn't exist back then buster. Back then there was no Asian American consciousness, no Asian American actor, and no Asian American theaters. Just a handful of "orientals" who for some god forsaken reason wanted to perform. Act. And we did. At church bazaars, community talent night, and on the Chop Suey Circuit playing Chinatowns and Little Tokyos around the country as hoofers, jugglers, acrobats, strippers – anything we could for anyone who would watch. You, you with that holier than thou look, trying to make me feel ashamed. You wouldn't be here if it weren't for all the crap we had put up with. We built something. We built something. We built the mountain, as small as it may be, that you stand on so proudly looking down at me. Sure, it's a mountain of Charley Chop Suey's and slipper-toting geishas. But it is also filled with forgotten moments of extraordinary wonder, artistic achievement. - Vincent in Philip Gotanda's play, *Yankee Dawg You Die**

I need to say that representation matters. I think a show like Kim's Convenience is proof that representation matters. Because when communities and people see themselves reflected up on the screens it is an inspiring thing and a very powerful moment for them. Because it means they've moved from the margins into the forefront. And it gives them a voice. And it gives them hope. And hope is a very empowering thing because it inspires people and when you give people a voice other people start listening. And when people start listening, things start to change. And we need change. We need to affect change. - Paul Sun-Hyung Lee's acceptance speech from the 2018 Canadian Screen Awards (Best Lead Actor, Comedy)

Though much of this project has highlighted the liberating nature of a digital Thirdspace for Asian American representations in popular culture on the Internet, this is not to say that there had been a total absence of Asian American entertainers on screens large and small. Asian American actors, since the late 2000s, have been able to serve in various acting roles that have been equitable and that have helped them gain more visibility in spite of Hollywood's gatekeeping mechanism, a development that could be attributed largely to the participatory

culture of the Digital Thirdspace. But even prior to that, there were a number of Asian American male entertainers in Secondspace, individuals who paved the way for the current Asian American players in Secondspace. As early as the 1950s, Hollywood audiences saw James Shigeta, who enjoyed brief fame in his lead role in the film *The Crimson Kimono*, extraordinary for an Asian American actor. But his career was as nearly fleeting as that of Johnny Yune, the first, and perhaps at that time, the only, Asian American stand up comedian to perform regularly on network television. As early as the early 1980s, Yune had 30 appearances on *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson*, but his popularity was a short lived fate. We will revisit these Asian American early arrivals of Secondspace later in this chapter as we see how languishing reputations can be revived in a Benjaminian afterlife,⁸⁸ thanks to Digital Thirdspace.

As was discussed in the opening chapter of this project, the increasing awareness of the dearth of actors of color in the entertainment industry resulted in the creation and spread of the hashtag #OscarsSoWhite, a movement that was began with a Tweet⁸⁹ on January 15, 2015 by BroadwayBlack.com managing editor April Reign⁹⁰ in response to the absence of nominees of color for the top acting categories. This online rhetorical act of participatory culture in Digital Thirdspace enabled change after two years, for the more ethnically diverse 2017 list of nominees did not warrant another resurrection of the hashtag #OscarsSoWhite.

In another instance, the 2017 casting of Ed Skrein for the role of a Japanese American in the new *Hellboy* reboot followed the Hollywood tactic described in Chapter 4, “whitewashing,” the term used to “[call] out Hollywood for taking Asian roles and stories and filling them with

⁸⁸ The idea from Walter Benjamin’s translation theory that characterizes the translation of a text as an afterlife or a continuance from the original source material.

⁸⁹ https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/april-reign-oscarssowhite_us_56d21088e4b03260bf771018

⁹⁰ <https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/movies/2016/02/02/oscars-academy-award-nominations-diversity/79645542/>

white actors” (Hess).⁹¹ But this announcement, which followed the complaints of whitewashing roles that benefited Scarlett Johansson (*Ghost in the Shell*)⁹² and Tilda Swinton (*Dr. Strange*),⁹³ created enough online criticism through netizen activism -- another instance of rhetorical actions of participatory culture in Digital Thirdspace -- to prompt Skrein to voluntarily step down from that role.⁹⁴ The influence of online rhetorical actions of participatory culture in Digital Thirdspaces clearly affects entertainment industry executives as they respond to media and netizen reactions. Industry insiders agree that this is the new order for Hollywood. When Academy Award winning filmmaker Steven Okazaki in a lecture given in Honolulu in 2016 was asked about the increase in positive ethnic representations (or the lack thereof) in Hollywood, he acknowledged that changes were afoot largely because “movie studios are influenced by social media.”⁹⁵

The positive effect of social movements as reflected in social media and the corresponding evolution of portrayals of Asian Americans in mainstream media are seen in the roles won by Asian American actors in the late 2000s and the 2010s. For example, Korean American Ken Jeong’s supporting role as Mr. Chang, an eccentric Spanish language professor at a community college in the sitcom *Community* (2009-2015) was followed by his lead as a physician father in the Asian American sitcom *Dr. Ken* (2015-2017) which also starred Japanese American Suzy Nakamura as the Jeong’s physician wife and mother to Asian American actors Krista Marie Yu and Albert Tsai. Korean American John Cho had the lead male role in the short lived sitcom *Selfie* in 2014, and he reprised his role as Sulu in the movie

⁹¹Hess, Amanda. “Asian-American Actors Are Fighting for Visibility. They Will Not Be Ignored.” 25 May 2016. New York Times Movies Section.

⁹²<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/hollywood-has-whitewashed-asian-stories-decades-year-they-couldn-t-n830241>

⁹³<https://variety.com/2016/film/news/doctor-strange-whitewashing-ancient-one-tilda-swinton-manaa-1201908555/>

⁹⁴<https://www.cinemablend.com/news/2426381/ed-skrein-opens-up-about-quitting-hellboy-amid-whitewashing-controversy>

⁹⁵Lecture given at Sullivan Center, Iolani School, Honolulu, Hawaii, on November 4, 2016.

Star Trek Beyond in 2016. Korean Americans Grace Park and Daniel Dae Kim starred in the reboot of *Hawaii Five-0* from 2010 through 2017, and Korean American Steven Yeun played a major role (until his character's death in 2016) in the AMC's hugely popular zombie show *The Walking Dead*. Korean American Randall Park and Taiwanese American Constance Wu enjoyed lead roles as television parents to Asian American child actors Hudson Yang, Forrest Wheeler, and Ian Cheng in the 2015 to currently running ABC sitcom *Fresh Off the Boat*. The success of these actors is surely attributable in part to their talent. But their popularity was surely enhanced by their appearances as guests on talk shows and other entertainment news programs. The mainstream media contributed significantly to the emergence of these Asian American actors. But, in addition and more importantly, the various opportunities afforded by Digital Thirdspace have also allowed these celebrities to enjoy greater visibility due to the fact that their video clips could be accessed at any time by any one with an Internet connection or a smartphone. It bears noting that the salutary effect of these developments is not limited to Asian American actors and/or celebrities. The openness, availability, and accessibility of video clips in this Digital Thirdspace have made it easier for consumers of popular culture to get a better sense of the individual behind the characters of actors from vastly different backgrounds – whether they be African-American, disabled, gay, etc. – and to help many consumers of popular culture to see beyond the negative stereotypes normally associated with Asian Americans. Asian American filmmaker Daniel Park articulates this notion when asked about the importance of Asian American talent visibility in a 2018 interview with the Center for Asian American Media:

“Our current representation in the media is pretty non-existent. In the past our representations were not controlled by us and mostly based off of stereotypes. It's

important that we can feel familiar and our true identities explored...When we're normalized, the rest of America can get a sense that we truly are American" (Park).⁹⁶

The challenge associated by the Asian American community is reflected in Park's sobering statement, as late as 2018 (and prior to the release of the film *Crazy Rich Asians*), that "Our current representation in the media is pretty non-existent." Nonetheless, it is difficult to doubt the correlation between the increased, varied representations of Asian Americans that have taken place on Digital Thirdspaces, and the growth in nuanced, varied representations of Asian American entertainers in mainstream media Secondspaces.

For clarification, and at the risk of being redundant, I wish to revisit some of the terms I articulated in Chapter Two. I classify the term "Firstspace" to refer to the real world, and that the lives that we all lead take place in Firstspace. For the purposes of this project, then, I use the term "Secondspace" to refer to the worlds created by Hollywood and conveyed on screens big and small. It should be understood here that the actors and key players (directors, producers, staff) who are part of "Secondspace" are the ones who gained entry to the industry through the media gatekeeping, a gatekeeping mechanism that is predicated on the advertising and/or box office revenue which in turn shapes Hollywood perceptions of the standards of what an audience is ready for. Though I will discuss this in further detail in Chapter Four, I would like to point out here that partnership between corporate America and popular culture dictates the content of programming:

First, the program has to be able to attract large numbers of people to watch it. It cannot therefore appeal to too narrow of a minority. Second, the program has to attract the right kinds of people. Not all parts of the audience are of equal value to the networks. The

⁹⁶<https://caamedia.org/blog/2018/06/06/qa-with-daniel-park-ktown-cowboys-director-and-transparent-agency-creative-director/>

programming will have to attract those parts of the audience that advertisers wish to reach...Third, the programs not only have to deliver large numbers of the correct type of people to advertisers, but they also have to deliver them in the right frame of mind.

(Jhally 56)

Because online rhetorical acts of participatory culture in Digital Thirdspace enabled change in Hollywood of 2017, and because Hollywood's gatekeeping mechanism continues to function on the basis of what corporate America dictates as popular culture for the content of programming, it is interesting to note that "a [2017] study released by the Creative Artists Agency (CAA) [revealed] that diverse films [tended] to draw diverse audiences while also outperforming less-diverse films at the box office" (Gandhi).⁹⁷ The Internet's ability to collate Secondspace videos, viewer comments/feedback, netizen activism, participatory journalism, and Internet-based news programs (both mainstream and non-mainstream), has not only helped provide staunch ethos-building for current Secondspace (and Digital Thirdspace) Asian American celebrities but has also allowed for a Walter Benjaminian after-life for past Asian American celebrities whose careers were seemingly anachronistically cut short due to the economic and racial mores of the entertainment industry.

⁹⁷<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/diverse-casting-results-box-office-success-says-new-study-n775136?cid=related>

Glenn Rhee's Fame and Empowerment through Killing Zombies, Getting through Adornian/Horkheimian Gatekeepers, and Showing Up on Digital Thirdspace

In 2010, the cable station AMC (American Movie Classics) broadcast the first episode of the weekly drama *The Walking Dead*, a show adapted from the comic book of the same title. The show portrayed the trials and tribulations of the human survivors of a zombie apocalypse in the state of Georgia. At the end of the pilot episode, viewers heard the voice of a sassy, nameless character who said he could assist the trapped protagonist Rick Grimes (played by actor Andrew Lincoln). The next episode reveals that this voice belonged to Glenn Rhee, (played by actor Steven Yeun), a prominent character from the comic book who is a Korean American male. Clearly, the heroic Glenn Rhee character in the series deviates considerably from the stereotypical tropes traditionally assigned to Asian American actors in Secondspace. By the middle of the second season, viewers of the show see Glenn engaged in an interracial romance, dating Maggie Greene (played by actor Lauren Cohan), a romance that includes scenes that in some instances strongly suggest they are about to make love and in other cases clearly show that they have already made love.

The popularity of *The Walking Dead* and Glenn Rhee was especially notable as it effectively challenged and showed the weak foundation of years of media assumptions and media determinism in Secondspace. The viewing public was clearly not put off by a show that had a verile Asian American male character, a point made evident by statistics used to measure the viewership for *The Walking Dead*:

...the season 2 premiere of *Walking Dead* snagged 7.3 million viewers, with an estimated 11 million viewers if you count the encore presentation. No telling what the number will be if/when more DVR recordings are factored in. Those numbers – which

are virtually unheard of for a basic cable TV series – are a nearly 40% boost on the Season 1 premiere ratings from Halloween of last year, and a slight increase on the 6 million viewers who tuned in for the season 1 finale. (Outlaw)

It should be noted that “*The Walking Dead* [wasn’t considered] just one of the biggest shows on cable — it’s one of the biggest on all of television. For the 2012 to 2013 television season, *The Walking Dead* [was] second only to Sunday Night Football as the highest-rated show in the all-important 18 to 49 demographic” (Warren). That an Asian American male actor would have a lead role in a popular television show in 2010 may seem remarkable, but *The Walking Dead*, a Secondspace show, was an immensely popular show notwithstanding its apparent disregard of Hollywood’s implicit traditional economic argument that assumed viewers could not accept a prominent Asian American male character in a show, especially one with a Caucasian love interest.

But in fact, there was some precedent for granting such a leading role to an Asian American actor -- and this in a film that was released even before the civil rights era. The 1959 movie, *The Crimson Kimono*, starring James Shigeta as detective Joe Kojaku (the male lead), followed a storyline that included his romantic pairing with Christine Downs (played by Victoria Shaw), the white female character. Charlie Bancroft (played by Glenn Corbett), the white lead actor, is very much interested in Downs as a love interest, but in the end, Downs “chooses” Kojaku. Astonishingly, one of the movie’s promotional posters showcases the locked lips of Shigeta with Downs. The exotic essence of this scene is emblazoned with the caption “YES, this is a beautiful American girl in the arms of a Japanese boy!” on the top of the poster, and in smaller print to the middle right side of the poster is the query “What was his strange appeal for American girls?” (Figure 3).



Figure 3

Scholar Calvin McMillin writes that *The Crimson Kimono*'s merits include "...its stereotype-defying portrayal of a dashing, self-assured Asian American romantic lead" (McMillin 19). And to his credit, actor James Shigeta won a Golden Globe Award for the category of Best Promising Newcomer - Male.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0052713/awards?ref_=tt_awd

But what is perhaps most remarkable is that this Golden Globe award winning actor was unable to find a sustained series of Secondspace vehicles in which to build on his debut success. In a couple of years, this Asian American actor had apparently overstayed his welcome in Second Space. Commentator Joe Baltake observes:

For a brief, shining moment, the talented and very handsome James Shigeta was poised to be a major Hollywood leading man. In the space of two years, Shigeta was auspiciously showcased in no fewer than five films of impressive diversity - Sam Fuller's "The Crimson Kimono" (1959), his debut film; James Clavell's "Walk Like a Dragon" (1960); George Marshall's "Cry for Happy" (1961); Etienne Périer's "A Bridge to the Sun"/"Pont vers le soleil" (1961), and Henry Koster's film of the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical, "Flower Drum Song" (1961). (Baltake)

Baltake rationalizes through Shigeta's initial rise to fame by writing "With a line-up like that, Shigeta should have had it made. He was the definition of a matinee idol. But it was to be only temporary...What happened? For the life of me, I can't understand why Hollywood - so good at exploiting people - let Jim Shigeta be so criminally neglected. Am I wrong to think there was a whiff of racism was at play here?" (Baltake). In spite of the Golden Globe Award and positive reviews, Shigeta offers anecdotal evidence that proved Hollywood would judge him more by his race than his talents: "I was brought in by Joe Pasternak who did most of the MGM musicals then and he turned to me and said, you know, he said, if you were a white, you'd be helluva big star" (The Slanted Screen).

Some 55 years separate Shigeta's meteoric rise and fall and Steven Yeun's role as Glenn Rhee in *The Walking Dead* as an Asian-American character replete with a "beautiful American girl" as a love interest. There is clearly precedent for the occasional emergence of an Asian

American character in a central role Second Space. But the complexity of Glenn's character on the show makes him real, something that had generally eluded earlier caricatures of Asian or Asian American men in film and television. Jennifer Fang writes that "there's almost nothing inherently stereotypical about Glenn and his presence in *The Walking Dead*." The typicality of Glenn's character – the fact that his race is nearly incidental in the development of the story – is explained by the creator of the show, Robert Kirkman, who said

My oldest friend is from Atlanta and is Korean, so I thought of him when I was choosing Glenn's ethnicity. It's important to me to try and accurately portray the world as it is, i.e., not all white, like some comics do. That said, I wanted Glenn to be resourceful and strong, a character Rick (played by Andrew Lincoln) could lean on when he needed to ... not 'the Asian guy. (Saria)

The popularity of both Glenn Rhee and Steven Yeun, (the actor who plays Glenn), can be attributed to the authenticity of his character on a hit show, but it was also substantially aided by the Digital Thirdspace's capacity to bring together the shared collective thoughts and ideas of fans, mostly through participatory journalism and accessible Secondspace videos residing on Thirdspace, videos featuring Rhee/Yeun. In a 2015 interview, Shereen Meraji of National Public Radio's Morning Edition describes Glenn as "a zombie-slaying leading man...[who's] not only one of the longest-surviving (and popular) characters on a hit drama, but a sex symbol to teenagers as well as grown women who swoon over him on social media" (Meraji).^[10]

To better understand the significance of the character of Glenn, here I will try to explain why he is such a phenomenal shift (in terms of tropes) to American audiences, especially Asian American male audiences. If Hollywood as a Secondspace repeatedly under-represents, misrepresents, or whitewashes Asian Americans from screens big and small, the content of a

culture will be dictated by the inevitable domination of a medium of communication, and scholar Barry Brummett describes this phenomenon as “media determinism” (Brummett, “Rhetorical Dimensions” 5). Brummett also writes that “texts may put together signs that are *not ordinarily found together*. The match-up of those signs startles or jars us; it is from the potential conflict of signs that the unexpected pairing (and thus, pairing of the unexpected meanings) gains rhetorical strength” (“Rhetoric in Popular” 123). Moreover, David Altheide and Robert Snow’s definition of media logic, (further discussed in Chapter Four), “logics [that] become profoundly influential in a culture...and strongly influence how people think about issues and problems” (Altheide and Snow qtd in Brummett, “Rhetorical Dimensions” 10) is not only relevant in this instance with Glenn Rhee but also supports Altheide’s claims that “dominant media and culture are interactive, each producing and produced by the other” (Altheide qtd in Brummett, “Rhetorical Dimensions” 14). Altheide also asserts that “some of the most basic organizing principles and procedures for social activity are influenced by the mass media” (Altheide qtd in Brummett, “Rhetorical Dimensions” 10).

Phillip Chung’s online essay on Glenn addresses the media determinism and media logic of the Asian American trope in his essay “Why Glenn on the Walking Dead Is the Most Interesting Asian Male Character on American Television:”

And if it’s rare to see an Asian male engaged in anything romantic or sex-related on American television, it’s even rarer to see him in a nuanced relationship that develops over time. Yes, it’s cool to see [an Asian American male] getting to knock boots with a hot white chick, but what’s even cooler is to see that coupling grow into the romantic heart of the series.” (Chung)

Media determinism and media logic prompt Chung to conclude that “Glenn was an all-American boy and not the foreigner that we’ve often come to expect in these situations” (Chung).

Other participatory journalists focus on how the Glenn Rhee character disestablishes the traditional Secondspace media deterministic narratives and media logics. In her essay titled “Resisting the Asian Stereotype on ‘The Walking Dead,’” Sarah Florini writes,

The Walking Dead’s Glenn...not only gets the girl, he and his partner Maggie manage to maintain an impressively active sex life for an apocalypse. Though, most of their love life has occurred off camera, the most recent season gives us a full sex scene between Glenn and Maggie. During which the camera pans Glenn’s chest and back, using the visual language of the scene to reinforce the desirability of Glenn’s body, something rarely seen in representations of Asian masculinity...for Asian American men, it is uncommon to see them portrayed as either desirous or desirable, making *The Walking Dead’s* treatment of Glenn’s character a notable departure from the status quo. So, bravo, *The Walking Dead*. (Florini)

Florini’s focus on Glenn’s Asian American male sexuality and how it breaks the norms of what have been traditional representations for Asian American in the mass media is also articulated by Theresa Celebran Jones, a contributor to the blog associated with *Hyphen*.⁹⁹ Jones opines in an essay titled “Hot Asian American Guys Are Taking Over My TV (Finally)” that she’s

“pretty sure this is the first time a hot, rugged Korean dude got to be a hero on a wildly popular drama (last week's season finale actually broke records). And aside from the

⁹⁹ (from the website hyphenmagazine.com): “Founded in 2002, Hyphen is a nonprofit news and culture magazine that tells the stories of Asian America with substance, style and sass.”

Governor hooking up with Andrea, Glenn is also the only guy who got any action this season” (Jones).¹⁰⁰

While Florini and Jones acknowledge Glenn’s masculinity, Jennifer Fang offers a deeper analysis of Glenn’s role in the history and context of American popular culture:

In a genre that has long cast the Asian American as the villain, the foreigner, and the Other, Glenn stands in stark contrast. He is Asian-American, but his race does not define his membership in the cast. Glenn is an Asian American character, but he’s also an individual — capable of incredible heroism (like when he faced down a walker while tied to a chair, and emerged the victor) and profound emotional ugliness (like the rage he felt that Maggie, but not he, participated in the preliminary assault on Woodbury). He is a leader in the survivor group, assuming the role in Rick and Daryl’s absence, and his romantic relationship with Maggie is a thumbed nose to the stereotype of the desexualized Asian American male. (Fang)¹⁰¹

Decades of mainstream popular culture had imbued North American audiences with the idea that a romantic pairing between an Asian American male and a white female was something highly unlikely, extremely uncommon, or very deviant. Putting aside its possible thematic use in hard core pornography (an area well beyond the scope of this dissertation!), it thus merited little representation in Secondspace productions. The effects of studied neglect or incessant misrepresentations can take a conscious or subconscious psychological toll on those who feel ignored or victimized. As previously cited in Chapter Two, Mok writes of American popular culture’s propensity to provide little or no positive representations of Asians/Asian Americans and how that has affected perceptions of Asian Americans by society and by Asian

¹⁰⁰ <https://hyphenmagazine.com/blog/2013/4/10/hot-asian-american-guys-are-taking-over-my-tv-finally>

¹⁰¹ <https://thenerdsofcolor.org/2013/10/11/glenn-of-the-walking-dead-is-the-best-response-to-anti-asian-stereotyping-on-television/>

Americans themselves (Mok 1). Chapter Two also cited the research of Okazaki that showed how such media roles create negative self-perceptions for Asian Americans, which in turn affected dating and marriage patterns (46). The complex, then, that is constructed for Asian American males who grew up with this sort of media determinism and media logics manifests itself in statements such as the ones made by Huynh, a fan of Steven Yeun, (the actor who plays Glenn):

During a lively Q&A with Yeun hosted by social news site *Reddit*...Viet Huynh, a 30-year-old manufacturing engineer...sparked an interesting exchange with the following tongue-in-cheek comment: “Your relationship with Maggie gives me hope that I, an Asian male, can also land a white princess!” Yeun smartly ducked the topic, and in the ensuing conversation, Huynh received some words of encouragement from his fellow redditors, which he relayed later to *KoreAm*. “I was surprised by all the white chicks responding that they love Asian guys,” Huynh said. “I left very very hopeful.” (Saria)

For Asian American males like Huynh, the portrayal of a character like Glenn Rhee provides hope and a sense of normalcy. Nonetheless, because of the years of what Okazaki would call the “potentially damaging effects” of media representations to Huynh's self-concept, the thought that white women might be attracted to Asian males is still a challenge.

One of the common threads running through most (if not all) of the analyses of the character Glenn touches on the fact that an Asian American male character on television is seen in an active sexual relationship with a woman, and not just any woman, but an attractive white woman. The commentaries contend that the lack of robust portrayals of Asian American male sexuality on the big and small screens of American show business was an incontrovertible fact, contrary to the reality of the lived lives of Asian American men, and consequential for those

whose views were at least in part fashioned by those images. A better understanding of the terms *studium* and *punctum* used by John Barthes and further explicated by Sarah Arroyo can be helpful in the analyses of what is being processed by viewers when watching these new media texts. Though Barthes' use of *studium* and *punctum* refer to still images, one can follow Arroyo's lead to appropriate the ideas to the participatory journalistic experiences that compelled the written reactions to the media texts of Asian American males who adhered to the stereotypical tropes and then to the media texts of Glenn Rhee. If we simplify the notion of the *studium* as a sort of reconciliation with or of authorial intent, then we can see that most (if not all) of the participatory journalists in Digital Thirdspace established their position and understanding that Asian American males do not own heteronormative masculine roles in Secondspace (e.g. "...the Asian-American guy [...] rarely gets the girl because he's the tech-geek sidekick — if he's on TV at all" (Meraji)).¹⁰² This assumption has become an expectation and leads into the *punctum* or "wound" since Barthes asserts that this prompts the viewer to see, feel, notice, observe, and think (Barthes qtd in Arroyo 56), in this case, the "thinking" equivalency here being "writing." To reiterate what was explained in Chapter 5, Arroyo writes that the *punctum* is made by a detail from the photograph but that "the detail is usually not present because of the photographer's intentions; the person looking at the photograph feels the detail and is overcome by it" (56-57). It is safe to assume that *The Walking Dead* as a show was not created for the sole purpose of flaunting the fact that a Korean American male was a sexual being having sexual relations with a white woman. I posit that this is the detail that is not present because of the show's creators' intentions, but in fact, the viewers who are affected feel this detail and are overcome by it, inducing some to write about this or participate in some way

¹⁰²<https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2015/02/05/383897456/steven-yeuns-glenn-slaying-zombies-and-getting-the-girl>

about this. And although Glenn Rhee and *The Walking Dead* are distinct artifacts of Secondspace, the reactions on Digital Thirdspace are the result of “...participatory cultures [that provided] new ways of eliciting participation...” (Arroyo 60) including those responses that directly addressed the subversion of the media determinism and media logics traditionally associated with Asian American male tropes in popular culture.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ The traditional conceptions of masculinity implied in many of the Digital Thirdspace comments and critiques mentioned in this chapter are not meant to privilege or celebrate a variant of toxic hypermasculinity. Chapter Four centers on the unprecedented success of the Kpop group BTS, a boy band comprised of seven members. The members can be considered fashionistas and are lithe dancers who wear makeup and are known to joke about being attracted to each other and dating each other in various new media text clips that reside on YouTube. Viewing YouTube clips of other Kpop members demonstrate other examples of the members nonsexually touching or kissing each other in a joking manner, usually on interview shows or “behind the scenes” clips. These utterances and acts do not follow what might be considered or marked as heteronormative behavior in North America, but Digital Thirdspace has brought to light the ways in which a popular Kpop group such as BTS are clearly performing different kinds of masculinity to considerable acclaim.

The Digital Thirdspace As an Enabler for Reputational Afterlife

The popularity of Secondspace celebrities is usually supplemented and enhanced with more positive publicity, usually in the form of being interviewed as a guest on various daytime and late night talk shows or being profiled in a mainstream periodical or newspaper. In the not-so-distant past, the only way to watch these interviews was to make the time and effort to watch the said show at its scheduled time, or perhaps have the show recorded on a Video Home System (VHS) tape. Likewise, reading these interviews in the magazines, journals, and newspapers required some sort of access to them before they were recycled. However, with the emergence of the participatory culture of Digital Thirdspace, such publicity materials are archived and are easily accessed 24/7, allowing not only for viewing or reading at will but also permitting fans (and foes) to comment and/or share the said items on social media. The career of actor Steven Yeun in his role as Glenn Rhee in *The Walking Dead* benefited a great deal from the participatory cultural nature of Digital Thirdspace, and this participatory culture has granted an “afterlife” not only to Yeun’s many video clips and news stories but also to other Secondspace Asian Americans whose careers could have been a mere afterthought years after those careers ended.

The existence of the video clips of celebrities on a Digital Thirdspace, while always having been beneficial to Anglo American celebrities who are already established in Secondspace, is arguably more beneficial to ethnic celebrities who may be underrepresented in Hollywood. Incessant portrayals of the dominant culture of Anglo American life in Hollywood productions have created media determinism and media logics that have created an alternate reality of American society in Secondspaces. As we shall explore in some detail in Chapter Five, the persistent typecastings of non-Anglo Americans occurring in Secondspace have

resulted in a generation of children who expected to see African Americans and Latino Americans cast as maids or janitors and didn't expect to see Asian Americans cast at all (*The Slanted Screen* 30:27 -30:51). But now that some Asian Americans have been cast in more favorable roles in Secondspace, the video clips and/or news articles that exist in Thirdspace have not only allowed for these characters to "live on" in a Walter Benjaminian notion-like "afterlife," but thanks to the emergence of social media in Thirdspace, Secondspace fans are also "offered...forums for self-expression and new modes of interacting with others [in] welcoming places where invitational discourse becomes truly inviting" (82 - 86 Warnick qtd in Zappen 320).

An examination of the ways in which Digital Thirdspace has provided a venue for the continued attention to some Asian American pioneers in Secondspace confirms one aspect of Walter Benjamin's translation theory which sees an original work enjoying a continuing life and/or survival in what Weidner describes as an afterlife: a video clip of an "original" presentation that appeared in Secondspace and that would likely have disappeared from general consciousness can enjoy an afterlife on a Digital Thirdspace. As we shall see, the show *All American Girl*, which briefly appeared in the mid-1990s, took on a new life in the 21st century, (connecting theory with practice). The closed system mechanism of Secondspace allowed gatekeepers to decide what productions would be disseminated in popular culture, and those decisions were in most cases economically motivated and based on assumptions about the public's appetite for /tolerance of diversity. With a Wiedner-like afterlife in Digital Thirdspace, the powers of gatekeepers have been considerably reduced, and the opportunities for diversity have been greatly enhanced.

A case in point is seen in Margaret Cho's sitcom, the above-mentioned *All American Girl*, a show that is largely credited as preparing the way for *Fresh Off the Boat*, currently the second (and only) Asian American sitcom on prime-time television. With an all-Asian cast portraying a Korean American family, *All American Girl* only lasted for a single season (1994-1995), mostly due the forces at play as described by NPR contributor Kat Chow:

“...this was the first Asian-American show. It came under so much critique and criticism. Like, it was a total pile on. And I have to say, you know, if this was a so-so show from the '90s or even, like, a bad one about a white family, it really wouldn't have gotten anywhere near this level of scrutiny and vitriol. Like, people wouldn't care about it as much. But because this was Margaret Cho and because this was an Asian-American cast, it was held up to this impossibly high standard, especially by other Asian-Americans.” (Chow)

That a show might be unpopular enough to be cancelled is understandable and expected, given the nature of the business in Secondspace. After all, it is difficult to refute Sut Jhally's assertion that non-cable “broadcasting (television and radio) derive 100 percent of their revenues for advertisers” (Jhally 54). If a show in commercially-oriented Secondspace is not popular, it cannot get viewers, and if a show cannot get viewers, it cannot earn much advertising revenue. That said, *All American Girl* was cancelled because of low viewer ratings, never to be seen again until the show was released on DVD in 2006.¹⁰⁴ Thus, for more than a decade, most people interested in viewing “the first prime-time American series to focus on an Asian-American family” (Rizzo III) would be unable to do so until the DVD release. However, due to the participatory nature of the Digital Thirdspace, a number of full episodes of *All American Girl* are now on YouTube, replete with viewer comments. The existence of the episodes on

¹⁰⁴ <https://www.dvdtalk.com/reviews/19150/all-american-girl-the-complete-series/>

YouTube gives the show an “afterlife” of the original. In many ways, access to the show in Digital Thirdspace made it far more accessible than DVDs would, since one did not have to obtain the discs, etc. For one thing, the episodes do indeed “live on” for those who may be interested and for those who have internet access but may not have the means to order or purchase or view the DVD set. Moreover, the originally Secondspace-based *All American Girl* now resides in a participatory culture of Thirdspace influencing and managing meaning for fans and foes alike. The pilot episode, uploaded in two parts by a user named “tennis89insomniac” on April 4, 2011, resulted in 304 comments for part I and 10 comments for part II. Though many of the comments for part I are dismissive, there are some that point to the trailblazing nature of the show: “20 years later... we have Fresh off the boat” (itsThatTime, 3 years ago) and “Wow, can't believe this show exists. I thought Fresh off the Boat was the first, but this show is ahead of its time” (anythingnew, 3 years ago). Participatory Thirdspace provides a vehicle not only for the expression of largely unmoderated opinions and reactions but also for the sharing of information important to the understanding of the program. Central to this development was YouTube, the online freely accessible video sharing site which also provides opportunity for viewer comments and expressions of likes and dislikes. The evolution/development and importance of YouTube will be discussed more fully in Chapter Six.

In a comment on YouTube a person who claimed to work in the industry and whose insights seemed to support his assertion provided the following background regarding the creation of the show:

I worked at the firm that managed Cho at the time she made this TV series. The sad thing is that in its own way, this show WAS trail-blazing - it was the FIRST Asian-American sitcom two decades before "Fresh Off the Boat" - but the primary reason why

the show didn't work is that the network watered-down/homogenized/neutered Cho's edgy, non-PC standup act in attempt to appeal to a mainstream audience - the show became a Korean version of "Happy Days," losing Cho's authentic voice (re: humor/comedy/laughs) in the process - then, ABC could makes excuses / point fingers and play the blame game, "See, Asian sitcoms don't work!" Catch-22. Still, Amy Hill is a scene stealer, even if she's forced to mine laughs from a broad caricature. Cho deserved much better treatment. That was then, this now. (Dozer LA, 10 months ago)

As rhetorical acts, these comments do much to validate Margaret Cho's vision in spite of the show's short tenure. Part II of the pilot episode on YouTube is merely the 48 seconds that presumably could not fit in the Part I upload, but the 10 comments that follow are all positive (see Appendix C). The top comment by "LeeAnne in Japan" reads "I have never heard of this until [*Fresh off the Boat*] aired. No wonder since the show only lasted 6 months. But based off of this episode, I love it already. I want to see more!" (3 years ago). Evidenced here is Barry Brummett's idea that "people need to see their engagement with popular culture as participation in rhetorical struggles over who they are" ("Rhetorical Dimensions" xxi). Many of the commenters for *All American Girl* are also engaging in rhetorical acts within this Digital Thirdspace.

Electrates,¹⁰⁵ or digital citizens who possess digital literacy competencies, help shows that may have had equitable representations of Asian Americans in Secondspace but were eventually cancelled; electrates do so by uploading these shows to Digital Thirdspace which prevents their total elimination from popular culture and provides these shows with an afterlife.

¹⁰⁵ Electracy is term that is used to define the kind of skills and facility necessary to exploit the full communicative potential of new electronic media (Sarah Arroyo); "electrate" is to electracy as "literate" is to literacy.

The 1972 children's cartoon, *The Amazing Chan & The Chan Clan*,¹⁰⁶ on dailymotion.com serves as another good example. Similar in many ways to the original Scooby Doo cartoons of the 1970s and 80s, *The Amazing Chan & The Chan Clan* was unique due to its innovations such as the transformation of the van, but one of the most significant details lies within the casting of Keye Luke as the voice of Charlie Chan, the first time an Asian American would play Charlie Chan in American popular culture.¹⁰⁷ In his essay "Rediscovering *The Amazing Chan & The Chan Clan*," Philip Chung writes that "it was a watershed moment for American TV. For the first time on a regular network cartoon, we were seeing an Asian family that shared more in common with *Scooby Doo* or *The Archies* than the stereotypical Charlie Chans we knew from the past" (Chung).¹⁰⁸ While YouTube only hosts clips and fragments of *The Amazing Chan & The Chan Clan*, dailymotion.com hosts full episodes for free, and Amazon.com offers the complete series on DVDs for sale. Although the show first came out in 1972 and was then cancelled after its only season, the 40 year lapse it took for the show to be released on DVD seems incredible in spite of what might be deemed as a low demand title. Prior to this release, however, there were queries about this title. In a 2010 forum thread on the "toonzone.net" site, (one of the many reticulate public spheres in Digital Thirdspace), "Brandon the man" wrote: "you know one of my favorite old cartoon shows is the Amazing Clan and the Chan Clan that sometimes comes on Boomerang once in a while it Didit catch on and many people said it was another Rip off of Scooby doo but I still thought it was Cool."¹⁰⁹ In another example of electrates using participatory culture, other posters in the thread jump in to agree and disagree. But toonzone forum user "magicdog" opined in his post on the thread:

¹⁰⁶ <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x4203w4>

¹⁰⁷ Description from Amazon

¹⁰⁸ <https://www.yomyomf.com/rediscovering-the-amazing-chan-and-the-chan-clan/>

¹⁰⁹ <https://www.toonzone.net/forums/threads/amazing-chan-clan.5046241/>

I remember watching the series back in the day and liked it. I was amazed at how well each Chan kid stood out with their distinct personalities...I never remembered any stereotypes from the series (in the films, it would be the characterization of Birmingham Brown the family chauffer) and even in the films Chan was always seen as equal if not superior to everyone else. The original show for all of its flaws showed a family that worked together and loved one another despite their differences (and played rock in roll when off duty!) and that can be done by any ethnicity.¹¹⁰

Prior to the release of the *The Amazing Chan & The Chan Clan* DVD set on Amazon.com, “magicdog’s” line that “[*The Amazing Chan & The Chan Clan*]...showed a family that worked together and loved one another despite their differences (and played rock in roll when off duty!) and that can be done by any ethnicity” demonstrates that the show normalized Asian Americans in Secondspace, creating a media logic for Asian Americans that wasn’t apparent in popular culture during the decades that followed. That such a show existed during the early 1970s only to be “rediscovered” later restates the exigency noted in this dissertation. And because of the absence of such representations in Secondspace only seems to be being addressed in the late 2010s, more varied representations of Asian Americans in Digital Thirdspace is filling a void while at the same time influencing Secondspace to do the same.

Though the Asian American sitcom *Dr. Ken* was cancelled by the American Broadcasting Company (ABC) in 2017, the company website, abc.com, no longer houses any of the episodes of the show for interested viewers. Some *Dr. Ken* clips and trailers exist on the “ABC Television Network” YouTube channel, but they are fairly short. Full streaming episodes are available for purchase through Amazon.com, but for those interested in watching without the means to buy them, those with electracies can locate available streams of the show for free

¹¹⁰ <https://www.toonzone.net/forums/threads/amazing-chan-clan.5046241/>

on legal, free streaming sites such as *Sony Crackle* and also on sites that are less savory. To be clear, I am not condoning any sort of illegal activity, but the significance of a show like *Dr. Ken* was articulated in a 2016 (when the show was not cancelled yet) interview with Krista Marie Yu, the actor who played *Dr. Ken*'s daughter on the show:

What was the best feedback you've gotten from someone who's watched the show [Dr. Ken]? "It's so wonderful to receive such tremendous support from the Asian-American community. The best feedback I've gotten is when an older man told me Ken [Jeong] is his hero. He said that Ken doesn't make him feel ashamed to be an Asian man, as he reflects a leading man, whereas many times in the entertainment industry, Asian men have been reflected in a emasculating way, making them feel embarrassed." - Krista Marie Yu, NBC Interview, September 21, 2016¹¹¹

Though *Dr. Ken* was cancelled due to ratings issues, its content and existence on network television clearly addressed the exigence of misrepresentations of Asian American men in Secondspace as stated by the older man in Krista Marie Yu's interview. But when Secondspace makes it more difficult for individuals to get access to shows that have a Korean American male such as Ken Jeong in a leading role, the emancipated nature of Digital Thirdspace provides access to free streams of the television episodes.

It is difficult to escape the conclusion that the Thirdspace "afterlife" of Steven Yeun video clips from Secondspace along with the community building through rhetorical actions by fans helped to sustain Yeun's reputation. A search for the terms "glenn rhee" on YouTube brings up "About 52,600 results,"¹¹² and scrolling down the videos listed on the first page shows that many are video collages of appearances of *The Walking Dead* character put together

¹¹¹ <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/asian-america/actress-krista-marie-yu-comes-age-dr-ken-n650711>

¹¹² https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=glenn+rhee

by admiring fans. The first video that is listed from the search, “The Transformation of Glenn Rhee,” is a poignant collection of various video clips highlighting Steven Yeun’s acting from *The Walking Dead*. The creator, “Infinitify,” has created a series of these video collages for a number of the main characters from the show, but what follows in the thread of the comments for “The Transformation of Glenn Rhee” is the evidence that representation matters. Several comments attest to the enthusiasm for this Asian American character and grief over his elimination from the show after seven years. YouTube user “SwaanieRaan” says “Honestly never been more upset by a character's death. The show will never be as good” (6 months ago) and XenoBunny56 commented “we were with Glenn for 7 years. Damn” and “Hurricane Tortilla” responded, “crazy right, it's almost like literally losing someone you know and love even though it's a tv show.”¹¹³ We cannot know the ethnicity of other details about “SwannieRaan” or “XenoBunny56” or “Hurricane Tortilla” (though it is difficult to imagine that Hurricane Tortilla is Asian American). Nonetheless, their enthusiasm/invested feelings validate Daniel Park’s assertion that “[i]t’s important that [Asian Americans] can feel familiar and our true identities explored...When we’re normalized, the rest of America can get a sense that we truly are American” (Park). The fact that someone took the trouble to make the comment and make the video collage, it’s more than just a feeling, it’s a feeling one wants to share. The comments listed under “The Transformation of Glenn Rhee” video here are notable since Digital Thirdspace gave fans-turned-users a vehicle to perform rhetorical acts. YouTube, which resides within Digital Thirdspace, provides a vehicle for these electrates¹¹⁴ to reach and persuade audiences beyond their circle of friends, and the fact that they take the time to make these video collages instead of just watching video snippets makes the participatory culture of

¹¹³ <https://youtu.be/9N8dLgm-2oo>

¹¹⁴ Electracy is term that is used to define the kind of skills and facility necessary to exploit the full communicative potential of new electronic media (Sarah Arroyo); “electrate” is to electracy as “literate” is to literacy.

Digital Thirdspace apparent. These comments of support, camaraderie, and grief function as rhetorical acts in Digital Thirdspace, just as Infinitify's video collage serves as a rhetorical act in Digital Thirdspace. Though the writers of *The Walking Dead* created a nuanced Korean American character in the Secondspace show, thereby "normalizing" him, "The Transformation of Glenn Rhee" video on YouTube condenses the essence of the character, allowing fans to practice their electracies in the participatory culture of the Digital Thirdspace and reinforcing the normalization initiated in Secondspace.

But the Thirdspace "afterlife" is not just limited to video clips of Glenn Rhee. The numerous appearances Steven Yeun has had on morning and evening talk shows in Secondspace also enjoy an "afterlife" thanks to Digital Thirdspace, and the afterlife of these clips achieve the same rhetorical ends as the aforementioned do. What were once largely archived artifacts accessible to only a few are now widely and freely available – renewing interest in and the reputation of actors. These interview clips with Steven Yeun can be seen as going further in normalizing the Korean American male since audiences can see that there is another side to Yeun than that of a serious, zombie-killing human, and the participatory culture of the Digital Thirdspace allows for the community building and shared fan experiences that we will see throughout Thirdspace, as social media sites evolve.

A number of video clips of Yeun's guest appearances on the *Conan O'Brien Show* have been abridged and hosted on "Team Coco," the *Conan O'Brien Show's* YouTube channel, all of which exhibit Yeun's sense of humor and down-to-earth nature. Some of the titles encapsulate the comedic gist of the clips (e.g. the one titled "Steven Yeun: Conan's Been Mispronouncing My Name For Years - CONAN on TBS"¹¹⁵ sees O'Brien playfully confront Yeun for not having corrected him earlier) while others require viewers to watch to fully access the comedic

¹¹⁵ <https://youtu.be/xtc-1WbF9PE>

nature of the video short (e.g. the one titled “Conan & Steven Yeun Enjoy A Traditional Korean Meal”¹¹⁶ reveals Yeun’s comedic lack of knowledge of Korean dishes). O’Brien and Yeun eat a traditional Korean meal together in Seoul with Yeun ostensibly serving as the expert in Korean culture. But Yeun is unable to identify the dishes by name when asked, causing O’Brien to question Steve’s Korean-ness.

But in recalling Daniel Park’s notion of how non-stereotypical representations in popular culture can help the American public “get a sense that [Asian Americans] truly are American,” one can appreciate some of the participatory comments posted under Team Coco’s video clip titled “Steven Yeun Is Ashamed Of His Tiny Nipples.”¹¹⁷ The five-minute clip humorously covers Yeun’s own issues and complex of the size of his nipples (self-described as “half dime” sized) and how his parents reacted to his love scenes on *The Walking Dead* (Yeun tells O’Brien that after one episode, his dad left him the following voicemail: “Steve. You [are a] man now”). User “KatieAegi” wrote the top comment with the following: “When you’re so attractive the only flaw you can find in yourself is the size of your nipples” (3 years ago), a comment that received 3.1 thousand “likes.” The strength of Yeun’s character as Glenn along with his Firstspace persona is also complimented by user “Sgt Pepper” who wrote “my favorite character in the show, i didn’t want to ruin him by seeing him out of character, kind of like when you see a voice actor for an awesome character and realise h’s [*sic*] just some guy, but damn, Steve is very charismatic” (3 years ago) which garnered a response from user “Pinkrevenge101” who wrote “True shit” (3 years ago). The efficacy of the participatory culture of Digital Thirdspace for Secondspace entertainers is captured in the comment written by user “maya summers:”

¹¹⁶ <https://youtu.be/tsTZ2iFRSmw>

¹¹⁷ <https://youtu.be/R76fyWvZAFo>

I'm not into the Walking Dead series at all. Haven't seen not one episode. But I've heard that Glen is a very likable/lovable character. I have no clue how his character is like, but the man that plays him, Steve, is so cool. I think I can see why everyone is so in awe of him (1 year ago).

It is clear that the comments highlighted here represent a shift in thinking for at least some North American audience consumers of entertainment, given the traditional Secondspace condition of under representation and misrepresentations of Asian Americans in popular culture. blogger Eugene Hung¹¹⁸ wrote of the effect on a young Asian-American growing up:

...the times as a teen that I was attracted to white girls were always sad experiences for me. It's not that they broke my heart, but that I never even tried to ask them out. Some of that grew out of my own insecurity and teenage awkwardness. But some of it, I truly believe, was influenced by portrayals of Asian American men I'd grown up seeing on TV and in movies.

Asian American dudes were universally depicted as nerds – obsessive about good grades, brainiacs with computers, and just not very cool. They were always, if not the butt of jokes, relegated to being the sidekicks of the cool white protagonists – think Sulu on Star Trek and Quincy's assistant on Quincy, M.E. (See, I can't even remember his name.) And they never got the girl, much less one who was white. (Hung)

Steven Yeun's on-screen romance with his acting counterpart, Lauren Cohan, is one instance in Secondspace that offers a bracing exception to the narrative that Hung writes about. As mentioned previously in this chapter, the partnering of the two actors in *The Walking Dead* was given much Secondspace media attention; "Larry King Now"¹¹⁹ and "PanelsOnPages.com"¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ <https://feministasiandad.com/>

¹¹⁹ https://youtu.be/i6S_t_pBxpM

were just two of the many channels that devoted a show to highlight this relationship. Again, the participatory culture of the Digital Thirdspace also allowed fans to provide feedback, much of which was wistful speculation about Yeun and Cohan. “Kim Bin,” the commenter with the most likes under the “Larry King Now” clip, wrote “Dying inside a little because he's already taken and she's single. They make a very cute couple” (2 years ago), and user “Caitlin McCabe” simply wrote “The way she looks at him” (2 years ago), a comment that earned 150 likes, only second to “Kim Bin’s” 177 likes. But the follow-up comments in response to “Caitlin McCabe’s” include agreement and more postulating:

Da Ying [1 year ago](#): Didn't notice at first, but holy moly

Alexandra S [1 year ago](#): I really think Lauren is attracted to Steven, however he is married to another woman, so a real romance between them is not possible :(

Arun Benny [1 year ago \(edited\)](#): glad i'm not the only person who thought she actually seems to like him more than a friend ... it's weird but its like you can almost read her mind by the look in her eyes and her reactions... especially after the questions that make her think about him in a more romantic way. It seemed like she was having a hard time thinking especially after that one question at [22:34](#). She seemed to have even more trouble thinking about the answer to the next question because of it, and it was almost like she was saying in her head "shit think of something to say or else they'll know its taking me too long to think"... lol she looks absolutely mortified after answering that question, like she was feeling guilty she wasn't able to answer questions properly anymore after that point

¹²⁰ <https://youtu.be/zUI8vKIYQds>

Star [1 year ago](#): I really do think she wants to be with him but he is married so. Yeah. But I think she likes him and would be romantically interested if given the chance. She did say that she would date him out of all her other castmates because he's funny.

Whether or not the speculations of these commentators have any basis is perhaps less important than the fact that the sexuality of an Asian American male is a topic for conversation. It is clear that the “afterlives” of these Secondspace video clips on Digital Thirdspace have strengthened and humanized entertainers such as Steven Yeun, and the participatory culture of YouTube (and other video sharing sites such as Vimeo, etc.) make it possible for these videos to be liked, commented on, and shared through the different avenues of social media. The feedback and comments, each feeding off of other similar feedback and comments, have served to legitimize and bolster the more varied perceptions of Asian American males in mainstream popular culture, something that has apparently helped normalize Asian Americans in Firstspace.

Afterlives for Secondspace Artifacts

For those who grew up watching 1980s television sitcoms in Secondspace, today's Digital Thirdspace can be viewed and utilized as a repository from which these shows can be revisited either in short clip forms or in their entirety. The ability to watch the afterlife versions of the show depends on the availability of the uploads in question; i.e. if a netizen involved in the participatory culture of the Digital Thirdspace takes the time to upload a video clip YouTube, not only do viewers have the opportunity to "like" and "comment" on the particular clip, but they also have the ability to share this content through social networking sites. For example, the 1980s sitcom *It's a Living* was very popular in syndication in the 1980s. However, someone today who wanted to see the show would be hard pressed – if at all able – to find have access to videos or DVDs of the show. However, a YouTube user "Robert Montgomery" apparently had access to at least 1 episode (the twelfth episode of the first season) and in March 2017 posted that episode on YouTube, allowing that episode – and in some ways, the sitcom itself – to survive and enjoy and afterlife.¹²¹ User "sheri p's" comments on this episode, "Love this show from my childhood, thanks for uploading, it's so hard to find" (8 months ago). The helpfulness for this Digital Thirdspace platform is pronounced when one recognizes that copies of *It's a Living*, either digital streams or DVDs, do not exist for purchase. And while this may be flustering to some North American viewers of Secondspace's mainstream popular culture, it is no exaggeration to state that there are arguably hundreds of other Secondspace available shows where Anglo Americans are similarly cast, thereby offering a wide variety of positive, normalized representations of Anglo Americans on screens large and small.

But for Asian Americanists like Victoria Chiu (author of the epigraph that begins Chapter Six) or even people who may merely be interested in Asian Americans (but are in

¹²¹ <https://youtu.be/i7fSE2Kf5ys>

locales where few to none exist), the “afterlife” of any Secondspace shows with normalized representations of Asian Americans on a Digital Thirdspace may be especially welcome, given the general paucity of such shows. A good example of this is seen in Johnny Yune, the first Korean American Secondspace celebrity who got his start on *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson* (Sloan).¹²² Although he might be best remembered for his lead role in the forgettable 1982 comedy film *They Call Me Bruce*, his skills as a stand-up comedian enabled him to appear on *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson* “30 times in the 1970s and 1980s.”¹²³ A YouTube user, “Timothy Sepulveda,” uploaded “The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson: 02/14/1979...Johnny Yune,”¹²⁴ a clip of one of his guest appearances. Most of the 29 comments for this particular video are positive (see Appendix D), but the one that shares the same sentiment as “sheri p’s” comment on *It’s a Living* is the following: “He was one if [*sic*] the most frequent guests in Carson but somehow it’s hard to find videos of him on the show... Needs more!” (Eve Nam, 1 year ago). Given the fact that Yune was the first generally popular Korean stand-up comedian and that he frequently appeared on *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson*, it is surprising (and to many disappointing) that there are very few video clips of his appearances available on conventional Secondspace media. However, the participatory culture of Digital Thirdspace has made it possible to view uploads that feature Yune and his stand-up competencies, these videos generating comments and remarks from YouTube users that praise, criticize, or annotate. The YouTube “Dick Clark Production” channel¹²⁵ and “thetelethonchannel” channel¹²⁶ provide uploads of stand-up sets Yune performed in the past. What’s more, rather than merely offer access to videos of the

¹²² <http://lwlies.com/articles/johnny-yune-hollywood-asian-star-bruce-lee/>

¹²³ https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0950932/bio?ref_=nm_ov_bio_sm

¹²⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ATPBAdnBByA&t=894s>

¹²⁵ <https://youtu.be/6fx3i4Stx98>

¹²⁶ <https://youtu.be/kUv57oisqDM>

performances themselves, both channels give visitors to their respective videos some background information on Yune and the context of videos. One clip of Yune appears on the telethon channel channel on YouTube. As one might infer, the clip came from a telethon in which Yune appeared. But the commentary attached to that clip provides context and background that would hardly be obvious from the clip itself. The custodian of the “thetelethonchannel” channel writes the following as an introduction/explanation of the video clip of Yune:

“Watching an episode of season five of M*A*S*H last night including the first of several appearances by comedian/actor Johnny Yune (credited as as Jon Yune) reminded me this is in TheTelethonChannel video archives! (Here with host Pat Boone and co-host Donna Mills, Joe Guercio and his Orchestra). (thetelethonchannel, Jul 3, 2014)

The “Dick Clark Production” channel gives a more objective synopsis:

Dick Clark introduces Johnny Yune on Dick Clark's Live Wednesday Show. Johnny Yune performs a comedy act where he talks about various topics. Some topics include, politics, women, sex, and his Korean heritage. (AwardsShowNetwork, Jun 13, 2013)

The comments for each video clip exemplify and illustrate the capabilities of Digital Thirdspace as a tool to provide an “afterlife” for Secondspace works that would otherwise have been inaccessible to the general public. Of the comments listed for the video uploaded by “thetelethonchannel” (see Appendix E), the one written by “gotwa229” encapsulates Yune’s influence in Secondspace:

“I love his un-pc oneliners that wouldn't make it past the censors today. Even though he was a walking cliché, he was really the first of his kind back in the day. Other than Pat

Morita, there were NO Asian Americans representing anywhere, let alone Koreans, let alone stand-up comedians on the Johnny Carson Show...We don't know how much longer he'll have but he certainly will be remembered by an entire generation of Koreans and other Asian Americans who grew up in the U.S. in the 1970s and '80s. (5 months ago)

The Dick Clark Live special included adulatory comments (see Appendix F) as well:

Dallas Smith - "Johnny Yune is the funniest comedian ever!" (4 years ago)

Frank M - "He should definitely make a come back!!" (2 months ago)

Sang Chun - "He was one of the best performer of that era." (5 months ago)

These video clips do show Yune to be a stand-up comedian in his own right. Though some of his material comes across as a tad bit un-politically correct (or "un-pc" as mentioned by "gotwa229"), some of his material is funny: "And we were poor. We were very poor, as a matter of fact. We were so poor, one time a burglar broke into our house. We robbed him." (4:34 - 4:41). Yune's self-deprecation here does not play on a stereotype of Asians, and much of the material from his stand-up routines do not depend upon on the tropes usually associated with Asian American males. The sharing of the videos of Johnny Yune constitutes a rhetorical act, intentional or not; these videos do not showcase stereotypical Asian-American males but instead give a performance like this (and others) an afterlife and give netizens free and easy access to watch a pioneering Korean American stand-up comic decades after his performance. Likewise, the capacity to share the videos exemplifies the benefits of participatory culture in Digital Thirdspace, especially since, as of this writing, there are no known copies of Johnny Yune stand up comedy videos available for purchase.

Johnny Yune may have been the first Korean American male to have graced Secondspace, and Steven Yeun may have been the most popular Korean American actor of the 2010s in Secondspace. But the legacy reputations of both benefit from their presence on Digital Thirdspace. The audiovisual artifacts that highlight the talents of both Yune and Yeun, respectively, have created not only an “afterlife” for their onscreen flair, but the videos on Digital Thirdspace along with the comments (see Appendices A, B, C, and D) that were generated by viewers also serve to prove that such videos can help “normalize” perceptions of Korean American males for North American audiences.

Moreover, it is fairly clear that the achievements and gains of Digital Thirdspace have influenced Secondspace as well. On June 22, 2018, Variety magazine reported that a movie is currently in the works for “Silk,” a Korean American female character from the Marvel comic Spiderman (McNary).¹²⁷ Though Steven Yeun is no longer part of the cast of *The Walking Dead*, a quick search on *Google* and YouTube shows that he is acting in Korean films and making appearances on Korean television shows. Searching for Johnny Yune videos resulted in some clips of “The Johnny Yune Show,”¹²⁸ a Los Angeles based talk show he hosted in the 1990s. The entertaining clips show Johnny Yune interviewing prominent Koreans in the Korean language in addition to Yune’s interviews with prominent American celebrities in English. Sadly, searching for Johnny Yune on Google also revealed that Yune is, as of this writing, in a sanatorium in Los Angeles with advanced dementia.¹²⁹ But electrates have utilized Digital Thirdspace to “make,” upload, and share videos of past performers like Yune and current performers such as Yeun to create paths to such videos for today’s viewers of popular culture

¹²⁷ <https://variety.com/2018/film/news/spider-man-silk-movie-korean-american-superhero-1202855335/>

¹²⁸ <https://youtu.be/HogluznV29U>

¹²⁹ http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2017/12/22/2017122201424.html?related_all

on the Internet. Access to such new media texts can be found for free not only on legal sites but also on sites that stream copyrighted content for free, a circumstance that allows for programs in popular culture to be made available for a greater audience outreach in spite of the legality of this situation.

CHAPTER FOUR: KOREAN POPULAR CULTURE AS RHETORIC

Everyone I see on the street is tall and good-looking. That, first of all, intimidates me, embarrasses me. Sometimes I see an unusually short man, but he is still two inches taller than I am, as I compare his height with mine when we pass each other. Then I see a dwarf coming, a man with an unpleasant complexion -- and he happens to be my own reflection in the shop window. I don't know how many times I have laughed at my own ugly appearance right in front of myself. Sometimes, I even watched my reflection that laughed as I laughed. And every time that happened, I was impressed by the appropriateness of the term 'yellow race.' - Natsume Soseki, from his London diaries, circa 1902

I had been taught that whites were superior and Asians inferior, that whites were beautiful and Asians ugly, that whites were strong and Asians weak. Even worse, I had allowed myself to be convinced that these ideas were true. - Harry Duh, Asian American Stanford undergraduate student, 1992

In January of 2004, viewers of the popular television show *American Idol* were introduced to Asian American William Hung¹³⁰ who auditioned his a capella rendition of Ricky Martin's hit single from 2000, "She Bangs." Described by journalist Emil Guillermo as "an accented Asian American with bad hair, bad teeth, bad moves and a bad accent" (Guillermo), Hung did not get past the preliminary round as judge Simon Cowell skewered Hung with a candid yet insulting assessment of his performance. His performance was by any measure unsatisfactory, and it is a puzzle that he was even included on the program. In spite of his failure on Secondspace's *American Idol*, Hung became a sensation due to the participatory culture of Thirdspace. Karen Meizel writes

“...soon after the January 27 broadcast a fan website was established, attracting four million hits in its first week. An online petition, encouraging American Idol's producers to bring him to the show in Hollywood, accumulated nearly 117,000

¹³⁰ Born in Hong Kong, Hung was, at the time of his audition, an engineering student at the University of California at Berkeley.

signatures...[Hung] rose to an ambiguous position that could be described either as international fame or international infamy.” (Meizel 88)

Hung was able to parlay his *American Idol* experience into guest appearances on various talk shows and advertisements along with recording deals that enabled his first album, *Inspiration*, to reach #1 in the Independent Albums category on Billboard.¹³¹ In spite of what seemed to be an aggressive agent arranging all of this, the underlying premise of Hung’s popularity was criticized by a number of Asian American journalists. In March of 2004, David Ng wrote “I don’t joke when I say that William Hung is the most famous Asian American in the world right now” (Ng) and in May of that same year, Sharon Mizota wrote “The strange and disarming combination of Hung’s nerdy, F.O.B.¹³² appearance, stilted performance and humble fortitude - ‘I already gave my best. I have no regrets’ - has placed him at the center of a Gordian knot of race, sex, performance and pop” (Mizota). Beginning in 2004, the most famous Asian American in popular culture was “a racist image of the ineffectual Asian-American male...an infantilized, incompetent and impotent male image (Guillermo). Even in 2007, a *New York Times* article titled “Missing: Asian American Pop Stars” remarked on the lasting effects of Hung’s star power:

“Asked to name the most recognizable Asian-American pop solo singer today, older people might say the Hawaiian singer Don Ho, but younger Asian-American artists agreed on one person: William Hung, the ‘American Idol’ castoff who became an overnight sensation in 2004 for his off-key rendition of Ricky Martin's ‘She Bangs.’” (Navarro).

¹³¹ <http://www.billboard.com/artist/431396/william+hung/chart?f=326>

¹³² F.O.B. is the acronym for the expression “fresh off the boat”

That the most famous Asian American pop star in the United States was William Hung inspired some and befuddled others. Asian American writer Bao Phi wrote that he was

“absolutely sure that many people who are fascinated with William Hung, really did admire his positivity, his courage, and his pursuit of a dream. Just as I am absolutely sure that many relished in the ability to make fun of William because he represented the image of the nerdy, FOB-by, non-threatening Asian man that goes back to Long Duk Dong in *Sixteen Candles* and beyond.”¹³³

For thirteen years, the most prominent face for Asian American music was William Hung, but during that time period, the popular music industry in Korea was slowly and gradually making its presence known in Asian, South American, and European markets.

On May 21, 2017, the K-pop boy band, BTS, also known as the Bangtan Boys,¹³⁴ won the Top Social Artist Award at the 2017 Billboard Music Awards, beating out American superstar artists Justin Bieber, Selena Gomez, Ariana Grande, and Shawn Mendes,¹³⁵ ¹³⁶ and in the following year, BTS also repeated as the winner of the Top Social Artist Award at the 2018 Billboard Music Awards.¹³⁷ The victories for the seven member K-pop boy band was determined by fan votes, and the 2017 distinction represented the first time ever that a K-pop group won a Billboard Music Award of any kind. Given the nature of their victories, it becomes clear that the impetus of BTS’s global popularity comes from its online presence and online followers, both of which were referred to in interviews that preceded and followed the 2017 Billboard awards ceremony. At the red carpet interview with *Good Morning America*, the

¹³³ <http://www.startribune.com/props-william-hung/94898849/>

¹³⁴ In Korean, BTS stands for “*bangtan sonyeondan*” which translates to “Bulletproof Boy Scouts.” Managed by Big Hit Entertainment, the seven members Jin, Suga, J-Hope, RM (formerly known as Rap Monster), Jimin, V, and Jungkook debuted in 2013.

¹³⁵ <http://www.billboard.com/articles/news/bbma/7801216/bts-video-top-social-artist-win-billboard-music-awards-2017>

¹³⁶ <http://www.cnn.com/2017/05/22/entertainment/k-pop-bts-billboard-music-awards/index.html>

¹³⁷ <https://www.billboard.com/articles/news/bbma/8456936/bts-wins-top-social-artist-2018-billboard-music-awards>

interviewer admits tells them that he's "been learning about you guys all day, and I hear that you all are just social media monsters, if you will. How do you all do that? You all have an online and social media following that is unbelievable" (BTS Being BTS 0:17 - 0:33). In his interview with BTS, Liam McEwan of *J-14*, the #1 teen entertainment magazine, tells the group members that he's "seen you all over social media, which is amazing" (*J-14 Magazine* 0:57 - 1:00). In the weeks leading up to the ceremonies, Kevin Kenny of *Billboard News* announced in a YouTube video that BTS was "officially attending the Billboard Music Awards" and added that BTS had "become a powerhouse when it comes to social media, amassing hundreds of millions of views for their music videos on YouTube boasting over 4.3 million fans on Facebook and tweeting me to send the band to the B.B.M.A.s on an hourly basis" (*Billboard News* 0:16 - 0:30). These same fans assisted in the sharing of BTS/*Billboard Music Award*-related videos go viral after they won, the award and online media buzz helping BTS become more popular than they were before.

The participatory culture of the Internet as a Thirdspace assisted in helping William Hung, a student at Berkeley studying civil engineering and a bad singer, gain celebrity status, but it can also be argued that another factor to consider is that he became a sensation due to the fact that he fit a particular stereotype - that of the bucktoothed, emasculated, nerd. Thirteen years after William Hung's rise to fame, however, a more mature participatory culture of the Internet as a Thirdspace has not only allowed K-pop music to become more popular through the Internet by bypassing the gatekeeping methods used by the U.S. recording industry but also by helping shatter the stereotypes and tropes of Asians used in popular culture. K-pop artists are young, attractive, and vibrant, all part of a careful marketing and image branding plan that has helped it gain audiences and followers from almost every region of the world. This chapter

addresses how K-pop, through the Internet as a Thirdspace, has enabled American and other audiences to see that Asians and representations of Asians on screens can be more than the stereotype of the nerd.

Rhetorical Dimensions of American Popular Music

Though the assessments and judgements of musicians by audiences are both subjective and relative, it stands to reason that American popular music, prior to the 1980s, traditionally focused on the auralty of the artists involved, with the visual appeal being relevant but clearly secondary. In most cases, the strength of a voice or the lyrics of a song might have spurred sales of an album. The songs sung by Barbra Streisand were primarily popularized by being aired on the radio, though audiences could get a glimpse of her on television from time to time. Likewise, the music of Bob Dylan and his evocative song lyrics were also popularized through the airwaves which led to sales of his albums as well. In other cases, the musical dexterity of musicians added to the ethos of a band or musician, which led to his/her popular and economic success. The virtuosic display of a musician like Ray Charles, for example, was predominantly heard on the radio by most listeners in addition to being viewed on the small screen from time to time, and witnessed at live concerts by the ones lucky enough to have the freedoms and resources to attend.

But even back in the day, the visual impact of the pop musician for American audiences of popular culture could not be dismissed as wholly irrelevant even in the 1950s and 1960s. Elvis Presley's appearances on *The Milton Berle*, *The Steve Allen*, and *The Ed Sullivan Shows*¹³⁸ in the 1950s allowed a concurrence of notoriety and popularity in raising his stock value as a popular entertainer. The introduction of The Beatles on *The Ed Sullivan Show* in 1964 was viewed by "73 million viewers...three-fourths of the total adult audience in the United States."¹³⁹ ¹⁴⁰ Presumably, the fact that they commanded such a huge audience suggested that their fame and popularity was established through the radio, this significance of the radio totally

¹³⁸ <http://www.edsullivan.com/artists/elvis-presley>

¹³⁹ <http://www.edsullivan.com/the-beatles-american-debut-on-the-ed-sullivan-show-1964-2/>

¹⁴⁰ According to public data, the population of the United States in 1964 was 191.9 million.

unambiguous when it came to popular music. “The music industry has had a higher level of dependence on the radio industry than the radio industry has had on the music industry” (G. Lee 52). In his memoir, *So You Want to Be a Rock & Roll Star*, Jacob Slichter writes that there is “no better guarantor of a band’s success than a high single on the radio luring listeners into record stores to buy the album” (76). Scholar John Lie gives the traditional formula to popular music success by writing that “In the post–World War II decades, the classic route to pop-music success in the United States or Japan was performing at local venues and seeking airplay on local radio stations, thus generating record sales” (Lie 204). The hugely popular “Top 40” format for music-oriented radio stations further reinforced the gatekeeping function of the disk jockeys and program directors: a handful of songs were admitted to the “Top 40” and received broad exposure, while other songs and groups languished without a venue for exposure.

With the start of the cable television station MTV, an abbreviation for “music television,” in 1981,¹⁴¹ the traditional focus on the aural component of popular music evolved to include the value of the visual component as well. Journalist Steve Peake writes that MTV was “Created to showcase music videos featuring primarily new wave artists just coming out as well as older, established rock acts...allowing audiences the opportunity to commune with their music heroes in a different way than ever before” (Peake). MTV gave way to this new method of popularizing music for the masses, as it also acted as “a definite arbiter of musical taste, style and fashion” (Peake). MTV’s legendary ad campaign featuring rock stars yelling “I want my MTV!” combined with Michael Jackson’s music video *Thriller* popularized the new station,¹⁴² but author of the 2011 book *I Want My MTV: The Uncensored Story of the Music Video Revolution* Rob Tannenbaum writes that “One of the signature things that happened in 1992

¹⁴¹ <https://www.thoughtco.com/history-80s-cable-network-mtv-9994>

¹⁴² <https://www.npr.org/2011/11/06/141991877/the-golden-age-of-mtv-and-yes-there-was-one>

was that Bill Clinton was a constant presence on MTV in 1990-91, and he was elected president” (499 Tannenbaum). NPR’s *All Things Considered* also marked 1992 as significant for MTV since:

That year also marked the debut of the first reality show, *The Real World*, which had a huge impact on the television industry. "It's very easy to trace the line from *The Real World* to Snooki," Tannenbaum says. "It's an alcoholic, crooked line all the way there, but MTV quickly realized and learned that narrative television, even reality TV, rated better than music videos."¹⁴³

Throughout this history of contemporary American popular music up through the late 2000s, only the aforementioned Hawaiian Grammy award winning Don Ho, whose popularity peaked in the 1960s and 70s, served as a visible positive representation of an Asian or Asian American singer/songwriter. How could this be? A confluence of factors contributed to this dearth of Asians in the American popular music industry.

Though written over 70 years ago, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,” the seminal essay of Horkheimer and Adorno, asserts that “Culture...is infecting everything with sameness” (94) and that “Films and radio no longer need to present themselves as art. The truth that they are nothing but business is used as an ideology to legitimize the trash they intentionally produce” (95). Lie writes

Theodor Adorno famously wrote that popular music is inevitably doomed to standardization, to the mechanical reproduction of certain memes and the hapless quest for pseudo-individualization—doomed, that is, to be passively consumed, to be at once distracting and indistinctive, to be mere white noise. In other words, popular music, for

¹⁴³ <https://www.npr.org/2011/11/06/141991877/the-golden-age-of-mtv-and-yes-there-was-one>

Adorno, is a sedative, an opiate to help the masses cope with the unpleasant realities of capitalist modernity. (Lie 352)

The relevance of these claims holds true with the popular culture industry in the United States, as many scholars feel that the corporate influences shape decisions that allow who can be and who cannot be part of the American popular culture landscape. As I mentioned in Chapters Two and Three, Jhally's essay "The Political Economy of Culture" notes that "advertising's importance to the cultural realm...has to do with advertisers' revenues setting the context within which popular culture production takes place" (56). Burgess and Green refer to "the gate-keeping mechanism of old media -- the recording contract" (24) in writing about new media musicians. But even with MTV, which gave new ways of popularizing music, gatekeepers were still at work governing popular media, now including visual as well as aural media. And Asian musicians continued to find themselves on the far side of the media gates.

Representations of Asians on screens big and small have long been few and, when present, often uncomplimentary. As mentioned in Chapter Two, Ling-hsuan writes that "the under-representation and stereotypes of minorities on television have misled the viewing public to form inaccurate perception on minority groups based on mostly distorted or insignificant portrayals they see on a daily-basis" (87). Summarizing the scholarship of others, Asian American scholars Derek Kenji Iwamoto and William Ming Liu elaborate on popular culture's representations of the Asian American male:

For over 200 years, the masculinity of Asian American men has been subjected to ridicule and feminization in American popular culture and society (Pierson, 2004). Asian Americans have been demonized, caricatured as foreign-born buffoons (Chan 2000), the Yellow Peril invaders, an enemy's Fifth Column (Chua & Fujino 1999), and

asexualized or impotent (Chan 2000). These forms of marginalization and invisibility further the stereotypic and distorted notions of Asian American masculinity (Chan 2000). These forms of marginalization and invisibility further the stereotypic and distorted notion of Asian American masculinity (Chan 2000). (Iwamoto and Liu 211)

Likewise, the recurring stereotypes of the submissive, exotic Asian female or the instrument-playing bespectacled nerdling also follows the idea of media determinism and how such representations in media have a determining effect upon culture (McLuhan). To understand the rhetorical role of popular culture is to understand that rhetoric is a tool that can be used to manipulate the masses. Occasionally that manipulation was not intended and is inadvertent; however, the effects are the same. Negative visual representations of Asians in the media continued to persist, and talented Asian singer/songwriters were still being unsigned. Yet, "[t]here are very talented Asian-Americans [singers] out there," said Michael Hong, founder and chief executive of ImaginAsian Entertainment, a multimedia company that features Asian-American artists. "The only problem is nobody is signing them" (Navarro). Though "nobody" is signing "them," the gatekeepers of the American music industry signed William Hung, who for a time, became the face of the popular Asian American singer and whose popularity was in part a function of the reality that he was little more than a caricature of prevailing stereotypes.

Thirdspace, K-pop, & Participatory Culture

The advent of YouTube in 2005, Facebook in 2006,¹⁴⁴ and Twitter in 2006¹⁴⁵ may not have initially meant much to Korean singers and songwriters, but these social networking sites (SNS), or social media, would alter the traditional landscape of global popular culture by serving as the main vehicles by which K-pop was popularized. Social networking sites function within the Digital Thirdspace that is the Internet, and such sites allow individuals to connect with others -- almost entirely free from traditional gatekeepers -- so that they may create content or share content that has already been created. The extent of the reach of the user created or shared content from one's social networking site can vary depending on the number of "connections" one might have. For example, a YouTube channel may have a large number of subscribers or followers, which may result in a higher number of views for a particular YouTube video, making it a popular or trending item on the Internet. However, a small number of connections does not preclude popularity. One example can be seen in the form of a tweet, or a published message on Twitter of 140 characters or less, on a Twitter account with a few "friends" or connections. If this tweet is noteworthy enough to be retweeted, or "shared," on another's Twitter account, the number of retweets or shares become dependent on the number of friends and connections of each subsequent "Tweeter"¹⁴⁶ and their willingness to share. Whereas the era of gatekeeping by moguls governing Secondspace media resembled an autocracy, the advent of the Internet and Digital Thirdspace ushered in an era of media democracy. As in political democracies, previously under-represented groups gained visibility.

Of course, Korean media predated the Internet and the availability of a Digital Thirdspace. Prior to the development of these social networking sites, other forms of Korean

¹⁴⁴ <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2007/jul/25/media.newmedia>

¹⁴⁵ https://blog.twitter.com/official/en_us/a/2012/twitter-turns-six.html

¹⁴⁶ An active user of Twitter

popular culture were enjoying a steady growth of audiences and viewerships outside of Korea. Described as “Korean Wave 1.0,” the scholar Kwang Woo Noh writes that during this era, the popularity of Korean film and TV dramas was spreading throughout Asian countries via newly adopted cable and satellite TV technologies in the late 1990s and early 2000s (30). Noh suggests that these Korean TV shows “awakened [the] Asian audience’s desire and expectation,” preparing the ground for popularization of K-pop (30). And K-pop itself was not a pure invention. Lie notes that “[a]lmost everyone agrees that K-pop is a conceptual invention that substituted a ‘K’ for the ‘J’ in the term ‘J-pop,’¹⁴⁷ which in turn was coined in 1998 to identify a new style of music” of Japanese origin (173). Paradoxically, the evolution of K-pop owes much of its development to J-pop and *its* predecessors, much of which (along with other Japanese cultural products), in a remarkable example of gatekeeping (in this case political), were banned from South Korea from the early 1960s through the late 1980s (G. Lee 60). The reasons for the ban on Japanese culture ranged from fears of the Japanization of Korea (Appadurai 32) to “the pretext that the ban was a response to Japan’s erstwhile colonization of Korea” (Hong 151). Because of the ban in the mid-1990s and because “Japanese music was not officially allowed in the Korean music market[,]” “...many [Korean] producers and musicians thought that only they [and not the Korean public] knew the latest information about Japanese music, which was a big miscalculation” (G. Lee 74), and 22 instances of Korean popular musicians plagiarizing Japanese trends in dance music took place from 1995-1996 (G. Lee 73-75). These “growing pains” allowed for the emergence of K-pop as we know it today.

A number of Korean popular culture scholars place the beginnings of modern K-pop between the very late 1990s to the turn of the century (G. Lee 79; Lie 178; Hong 155), and the

¹⁴⁷ Japanese popular music

term “K-pop” only refers to “specific genres created and circulated after the mid 1990s” (G. Lee 84). Korean scholar Gyu Tak Lee writes

“It seems that K-Pop began to be widely accepted as an official name of a specific genre only after 2008, the year when some K-Pop musicians such as Rain, BoA, Wonder Girls and Se7en began introducing their music to international audience [sic] other than East Asian, especially US and other Western audience [sic]. This means that Korean media and fans did not either actively create or use the term, but have followed the usage of the term by media and audiences outside Korea. In other words, the label ‘K-Pop’ only emerged once the music itself began to find audiences outside of its domestic market.” (G. Lee 81-82)

The specific genres created in K-pop were the result of the new emphasis and importance placed on the visual aspects of music performances in the age of the music video (Lie 187). In his description of the appearance of today’s K-pop stars, Lie notes that “[t]he new look is urban and cosmopolitan: a slim face with large eyes, high cheekbones, and a straight nose, with a tall, trim body and long legs. And viewers actually get to see the abs and the legs” (188). Korean American journalist and author Euny Hong describes the appearance of Rain, the first K-pop star to break out internationally in the early 200s, as “a chiseled, sensuous R & B singer” whose music videos were highly artistic, “stylized sets...and ingeniously choreographed” (Hong 155-6). Rain’s appearance and the pivotal role it played as the new archetype of the male K-pop star is described by Lie: “This muscular, masculine aesthetic was new to South Korea when it was pioneered just after the turn of the twenty-first century by Rain[...], who was over six feet tall and well built” (188). The K-pop star was not an Asian stereotype, but instead:

“...something new: good singing and great dancing...by cool, physically attractive, sexy stars. These South Korean performers radiated the excitement and edginess of American and other Western performers. With fewer tattoos and piercings, however, and with less explicit references to sex and drugs, they were easier on the eye and the ear, but with no sacrifice of sex appeal.” (Lie 190)

Though K-pop performances were not being aired on American network or cable channels, K-pop fans and audiences were watching attractive, young Koreans singing and dancing on small screens throughout different parts of the world, with the probability that it was no accident that the explosion of Korean popular music coincided with the explosion of South Korea as a global industrial force in the world. And while some of the screens were television sets showing the increasingly popular music videos, the emergence of the image of the “cute or sexy” girl groups and the “masculine and muscled” boy groups (Lie 188) was in fact greatly facilitated by the presence on Internet-connected computer monitors of content democratically posted in Digital Thirdspaces unfettered by the preferences of gatekeepers.

If the aforementioned “Korean Wave 1.0” was facilitated by the growth of cable and satellite TV, K-pop’s popularity proliferated through social networking sites and YouTube as “Korean Wave 2.0” (Noh 30). In his scholarship on the globalization of K-pop, Lee writes:

“YouTube music videos are one of the important ways almost all [Kpop] musicians (and their recording companies) release new singles and albums. YouTube has already replaced MTV as the source for music videos and is even playing the role of the radio. On YouTube site [sic], listeners choose videos, make playlists, and play them on smartphones that can connect to the internet wherever they are.” (G. T. Lee 176)

But as Arroyo points out, [v]ideo and participatory cultures provide new ways of eliciting participation (60). Such participation includes the ability for fans and listeners to use the contents of this Thirdspace to embed and/or share K-pop videos on social networking sites, write positive or negative comments under the videos posted on YouTube channels, click on the thumbs up icon to like (or the thumbs down icon to dislike) a particular video or comment, and subscribe to a YouTube channel to receive notifications about new uploads. Though these participatory acts may seem fairly insignificant (like the casting of one among millions of ballots in a government election), it is in fact the case that the repeated number of times these actions take place and the accumulated tallies function to increase the popularity of the video and the artist(s). Ingyu Oh and Hyo-Jung Lee's research on "the business of structure of new media and new popular music" (34) asserts that:

"As long as YouTube and other platforms of new social media allow free uploading of new UCC¹⁴⁸ musical content, global audiences, who can express their preferences and opinions by clicking the "like" button or leaving comments in the message box, are the sole gate keepers in cyberspace." (Oh and Lee 40)

The agency afforded to members of an audience enables them to popularize or denounce new media texts, or in this case, music videos, and this aspect of participatory culture helped propel BTS to winning their Billboard Top Social Artist Award.

It is apparent, then, that the Korean popular music executives who had the foresight and understood the potential of this Thirdspace, as it were, possessed high-level electracy skills. As I noted in Chapter Two, Ulmer defines electracy as a skill set that enables one to possess an awareness and the ability to fully engage with digital technologies. Ulmer uses the analogy that electracy "is to digital media what literacy is to alphabetic writing: an apparatus, or social

¹⁴⁸ User Created Content

machine, partly technological, partly institutional” (Ulmer, Introduction: “Electracy”). Oh and Lee summarize the electracy of the Korean music industry:

“K-pop producers, who would have no other way of distributing their music to global audiences for profit, actively chose YouTube for its free music distribution, despite the low-profit margins from YouTube royalty fees. J-pop and American pop music distributors, however, avoided YouTube, giving a niche market to K-pop, because the profit margin from YouTube was far lower than from traditional media, such as CDs and iTunes, giving K-pop primary standing in the niche market. (38)

This strategy is best encapsulated in a comment posted under the music video for the 4-member all-girl K-pop group called Blackpink and one of their provocative hit singles, “Boombayah” (2016), on their official YouTube channel:

Sinbad Rotter 3 days ago Almost hit 200[Million]¹⁴⁹ views without any hard promotion. QUEENS ONLY.¹⁵⁰

The implicit pride expressed by the poster of this comment also bolsters the idea that the spread of K-pop with very limited use of traditional marketing and publicity initiatives is as unusual as it is remarkable. This participatory culture has not only popularized K-pop, but it has also help assign rhetorical dimensions to K-pop music videos and clips by the dialectics produced by the electrate fans and opponents in Thirdspace.

¹⁴⁹ As of July 17, 2017, “Boombayah” had 183,790,130 views on Blackpink’s Official YouTube channel.

¹⁵⁰ <https://youtu.be/bwmSjveL3Lc>

K-pop as Rhetoric

William Hung, the *American Idol* contestant who did not get past the preliminary audition nonetheless gained fame and, to some degree, fortune in the United States. His embrace by the “gate keepers” of the recording industry as a mainstream music performer delighted some and distressed others. Though Hung was largely a creature of the older, Secondspace media, his stardom was in fact assisted by an online petition and an online website in 2004. Hung’s unlikely success speaks to the power of the Internet as a Digital Thirdspace despite the absence then of major social network sites. While social network sites such as Friendster and MySpace did exist in the early 2000s, their capabilities to make quick connections for a larger, broader audiences were limited and rudimentary compared to the efficacies of the social media sites of today, sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and/or Snapchat. But the heated online controversies surrounding the culture industry’s push to popularize William Hung bespeak the incontrovertible facts that he did not have the talent nor the appearance one would expect of a popular “*American Idol*” in the 2000s. This improbable Berkeley engineering student was put forth by the media moguls less as a promising new talent than as an object for laughter and ridicule -- a Tiny Tim for the new century. In a 2016 piece titled “William Hung Returned to *American Idol* for One Last Kick in the Teeth to Asian America,”¹⁵¹ journalist E. Alex Jung offers a scathing critique of the situation that created Hung:

...on the cusp before social media, Hung’s audition became a viral sensation, and he made the rounds on talk shows and returned for a midseason special entitled *Uncut, Uncensored and Untalented*. Over a decade later, William Hung’s reappearance makes it feel as though nothing has changed — that over a decade of race, gender, and

¹⁵¹ <http://www.vulture.com/2016/04/william-hung-returned-for-american-idol-finale.html>

sexuality 101 conversations on the Internet have done little to sway the indomitable middle of America. Remember William Hung? What a joke. (Jung)

Jung, an Asian American, wrote in an act of collective solidarity when he penned the lines:

But for myself — and I suspect many Asian Americans — he makes me deeply sad.

William Hung calls back to a not-so-distant past when it seemed that the only way for an Asian American male could be famous was through martial arts or buffoonery. He epitomized how we feared white America saw us: intrinsically foreign, deeply unsexy.

Even our recapper Dave Holmes joked this season, “For reasons I don’t fully comprehend, we also learn that William Hung is married now! There is a lid for every pot, folks, and don’t you forget it. (Jung)

William Hung’s audition, shown repeatedly online and on television, and the epistemic function of his subsequent performances in the mainstream realm of the recording industry served as a means to crystallize a stereotype of the Asian male. Viewed through the rhetorical lens of popular culture, one can refer to McLuhan’s 1967 assertion (noted in Chapter Two) that “All media work us over completely. They are so pervasive in their personal, political, economic, aesthetic, psychological, moral, ethical, and social consequences that they leave no part of us untouched, unaffected, unaltered” (26).¹⁵² More to the point, in 1982, “James Curran [argued] that media legitimate the social institutions they portray simply by portraying them (220); people may think that ‘if it’s on TV, it must be real’” (Brummett, “Rhetorical Dimensions” 11). Though these theories are dated, they are not outdated as the 1992 epigraph of Harry Duh (at the beginning of this chapter) and E. Alex Jung’s 2016 critique and analysis of William Hung legitimizes them. But Hung’s performances of *She Bangs* (and other tunes) also served as an exigence. Rhetorically speaking, (and previously mentioned in Chapter Two), Bitzer marks the

¹⁵² Marshall McLuhan *The Medium Is the Message*

exigence “an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be” (6).

As a broad, and perhaps inadvertent, counter to Hung and the archetype of the Asian nerd in American popular culture, K-pop artists perform a visual rhetoric that subverts this narrative’s stereotype. As Hung’s popularity peaked and waned in the mid-2000s, the K-pop industry grew and developed together with the social networking sites that began in the mid-2000s. Lie writes that “The explosive growth of YouTube, social media, and smart-phone use between 2005 and 2010 was especially important in making K-pop a pan-Asian and, indeed, global phenomenon.” (Lie 204-5). Moreover, the K-pop product and its image of the Asians resembled nothing close to anything William Hung represented. In fact, it was an implicit repudiation of the stereotype. Lie offers the following anecdote that cements this point:

“...there is the story about a middle-aged Japanese woman who was baffled by her friend’s raving about Toho Shinki...The woman, completely unacquainted with the group, acquiesced to her friend’s plea to view Toho Shinki’s music video: “I cannot forget how moved I was that night. Toho Shinki. The intense dancing by five men over six feet tall. . . . The waist movement that suggests—can only suggest—sex. . . . I was overwhelmed by the marvelous bodies of Toho Shinki.” (171)

In her monograph *The Birth of Korean Cool*, Hong assesses K-pop by writing “The songs and videos focus on the singers and not on the musicians; there are no instrumental solos...The girls always smile; the boys never do, instead bearing warrior expressions. Everyone is brutally attractive” (Hong 157).

The participatory culture of YouTube enables discourse, in the form of comments and replies to said comments, that acts as rhetoric since Brummett defines “rhetoric as the social

function that influences and manages meanings” (“Rhetorical Dimensions” xiv). Finding an easily accessible platform to share their perspectives, K-pop fans commit rhetorical acts when commenting under music videos and/or video clips from reality or variety shows of the artists involved. The function of these comments is more effective than one might imagine. In the past, the American cable music video stations MTV and VH1 showed videos to American audiences, and profits were made through ad revenues and/or subscription fees paid to the media providers by the cable companies. However, the rhetorical act of the cultural product of that time, rock music videos, was unidirectional in that the cable stations showed the videos and the consumers/viewers watched. The strength of the music video may have contributed to the purchase of an album (LP, cassette tape, or CD) during that time period, but due to the one-way direction of the message, in this case, the music video, there was no participatory culture integrally connected to the media presented. As previously implied, rhetorical acts in Digital Thirdspace do not function unidirectionally and in fact may move across multiple sites or even realms (from Digital Thirdspace to Secondspace to Firstspace). BTS’s music video for their hit single “Blood Sweat & Tears”¹⁵³ features all the elements of a successful K-pop production: handsome young men dancing perfectly in sync with each other as members take turns rapping and singing to a upbeat melodies and rhythms (with stylistic hints of Rhythm and Blues) in what appears to be a western museum replete with ancient sculptures, paintings, and artifacts. As of this writing, it is BTS’s most popular music video on YouTube with 158,778,607 views. But the fluidity of participatory culture between Digital Thirdspace, Secondspace, and Firstspace is exemplified in the following comment:

¹⁵³ <https://youtu.be/hmE9f-TEutc>

Klara Komljenović 3 days ago So, there is going to be a project on August 1st for Jin. It's going to be a selca¹⁵⁴ day where you need to make a heart and write "We love Seokjin" on it. We'll call it #HeartsForJinDay. Because he deserves it, he gives us hearts so we'll give him some. Love our Worldwide handsome third guy from left (also cardoor guy). share this to everyone so that it can happen!!! [heart emojis]

Klara, the poster of this comment, is engaged with the participatory culture of Thirdspace by commenting on the music video she has just viewed. But her comment is also an organizational announcement, a call to arms, so to speak, for other fans of Jin (Seokjin), arguably one of the most handsome members of BTS, to create and give selfies in a heart with the message “We love Seokjin” on it. The intended recipients here are BTS fans who own the cultural codes to know that the Korean-English (or Konglish) word “selca” (a portmanteau of truncated versions of the words “self” + “camera”) in addition to the references to “third guy from left” and “cardoor guy.” “Third guy from left” is a reference to the deluge of inquiry tweets from curious tweeters who saw BTS’s magenta carpet photo after their Billboard Music award.¹⁵⁵ The moniker “Cardoor guy” is derived from a similar situation, but based on a photo of “Jin” stepping out of a car for an awards ceremony in Milan, Italy.¹⁵⁶ The star power of BTS and Jin situates them in a secondspace in terms of celebrity status, but the real life efforts of the fans who may (or may not) engage in the invitation to gift their “selcas” to Jin occurs in a Firstspace realm.

The solidarity and loyalty of fans to K-pop is remarkable considering the presumably pluralistic demographics that follow this trend. But in an interview with Shin Hyung-kwan, the

¹⁵⁴ Korean-English, a.k.a. Konglish, for the English word “selfie”

¹⁵⁵ <https://youtu.be/CJ0HD8Lrq4U>

¹⁵⁶ *ibid*

corporate head of “MNET, South Korean’s most important music video channel” (152), Hong writes that

Shin was entirely confident that K-pop could continue to break the language and culture barrier and become a huge global influence. “Music is very direct,” he said. “Even if you don’t know the lyrics, the sound goes into your inner ear and vibrates. The sound of a bass line moves your body; everyone reacts the same to this. Nationality and language can be overcome, because it’s so directly felt. “You can make instant friends with someone if you like the same music, even if you don’t speak the same language. K-pop is beyond your imagination. (Hong 160)

It can be argued that the fluidity of and capability to assemble millions of viewers on Thirdspace are enablers for these collective feelings. As we saw above, though we know nothing about Klara Komljenović, the poster of the comment asking everyone to take selfies for BTS’s Jin, her surname, if real, suggests she may be Russian or Eastern European, an indicator of Kpop’s global reach through Digital Thirdspace. Zappen writes about the scholarship of communications academic Barbara Warnick and how she “notes the success of Web-based alternatives to mainstream media....which offered a variety of forums for self-expression and new modes of interacting with others - ‘welcoming places where invitational discourse becomes truly inviting’” (82 - 86 Warnick qtd in Zappen 320). A *New York Times* video essay titled “Crossing Cultures: Black K-pop Fans in America,”¹⁵⁷ sees staff editor Nicole Fineman meeting and speaking with black fans of BTS in an attempt to determine how it was BTS was able to sell out two concerts in Newark, New Jersey (Fineman). In one exchange prior to the start of the concert, a black female fan answers Fineman’s inquiry “What do I love about K-pop? I can be myself and let my craziness out” (0:55 - 1:00). Jeff Benjamin of the *New York Times* also

¹⁵⁷ <https://nyti.ms/2nHgeBK>

explores K-pop's appeal in his article from May 4, 2017 titled "What Does It Take for a K-Pop Band to Blow Up in South America?" He follows with the tagline: "South Korea's music craze has taken most of the world by storm, but Chile represents a somewhat unlikely conquest."¹⁵⁸ J. Benjamin cited BTS's popularity in Chile the result of Kpop "[sneaking] in via the Internet," and cited the money metric: "ticket sales from BTS's two-day concert series 'exceeded the \$2 million mark'" and the audience screaming metric:

Perhaps the most impressive metric, though, is also the most alarming one. Owners of the Movistar Arena told Garcia that the audience screams alone during the BTS concerts this year — that is, at moments when the band was not even performing — reached an earsplitting 127 decibels, well past the noise level at which permanent hearing loss becomes a serious concern. The promoter proudly reports it as the loudest ever recorded at the arena. "Audience screams alone," Garcia repeats, a note of awe creeping into his voice. "It was madness." (J. Benjamin)

Perhaps the most intriguing article regarding K-pop fans is the one titled "K-pop Fans in North Korea? EXO Tweets Emerge from Hermit Kingdom"¹⁵⁹ considering that getting caught with South Korean popular culture in North Korea can sometimes result in a death sentence.

Though today's hottest K-pop artists may not have been or may not be aware of William Hung, their presence and success in Thirdspace have worked to complicate the trope of the nerdy Asian by proving that a much more vital image of the Asian can and does exist. The rhetorical act of Hung's audition resulted in an act of counter-rhetoric by Paul Kim, Korean American contestant on Season 9 of American Idol in 2010. Prior to *his* preliminary audition, Kim states that:

¹⁵⁸<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/04/magazine/what-does-it-take-for-a-k-pop-band-to-blow-up-in-south-america.html>

¹⁵⁹http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2017/07/103_232942.html

It kind of bothers me when people think about an Asian singer, you think “William Hung.” And I’m not hating on William Hung, but, I mean, come on. There are many talented Asian people out there -- you just don’t see them, I mean, they don’t get an opportunity in the entertainment industry at all, so, this is my shot (annyong11 0:09 - 0:27).¹⁶⁰

Though Kim was only able to make it to the top 24 before being eliminated, he is reported to have “looked into the cameras and declared that he was the ‘anti-William Hung’” (Ernie 2012).¹⁶¹

Lie writes that “Beauty and cool may seem to lie beyond the pale of sober analysis, but the attractiveness of K-pop cannot be understood without them” (171). In a similar analysis, MNET’s Shin Hyung-kwan tells Hong that K-pop music videos have “‘two immediate attention grabs. The visual and the hook, you get them both at the same time.’ The biggest and most obvious difference, said Shin, is the quality of the dancing. ‘In the United States, with the popular bands, the choreography is very different.’ And by different he means bad” (Hong 156). Hong offers the following analysis:

Dancing well isn’t enough. K-pop band members must dance in perfect sync, like clockwork. If you’ve ever seen a K-pop video, you’ll notice that while no one is Baryshnikov, they do have split-second precision. And in order to achieve that, you have to put the band together while they’re still young and hold off their debut until they’ve learned to act as one. (Hong 156-7)

The aesthetic and artistic appeals of these K-pop stars have created a community of fans so tight knit in their shared collective adoration of their favorite musicians that many K-pop fan

¹⁶⁰https://youtu.be/_sauyOPbdU

¹⁶¹<http://www.8asians.com/2012/02/29/heejun-han-and-the-top-8-most-influential-american-idols-who-are-asian-american/>

groups have their own names. For examples of two of the K-pop groups given in this chapter, fans of Black Pink are affectionately know as BLINK,¹⁶² and the BTS fans are known as A.R.M.Y. which is an acronym for “Adorable Representative M.C for Youth.”¹⁶³ A dialogue in the form of a comment that appeared under the aforementioned hit “Boombayah” of Blackpink reflects the ways in which K-pop can find new followers who can effortlessly access performances on Digital Thirdspace and demonstrate the ways in which the new fans can share their enthusiasm globally:

Senpapied 1 day ago

7 hours ago~

friend: listen to k-pop its something you won't regret

me: ew k-pop

friend: -.-

me: I won't listen to k-pop bro

friend: |:<

me: fine

friend: :3 ok let's watch Bts first

me: ok only a few minutes

3 hours later~~

me: wow...they are amazing

friend: blackpink next

me: ._ k but this time promise me that this won't take long

4 hours later

¹⁶² <http://www.allkpop.com/article/2017/01/jennie-confirms-black-pinks-official-fandom-name-with-a-message-full-of-love>

¹⁶³ <http://www.sbs.com.au/popasia/blog/2016/05/25/10-k-pop-fandom-names-and-their-meanings>

me: Bruh we litterally watched 7 hours of kpop..

friend: sorry..wanna watch more?

me: |:<....duhhh of course

Having received 38 “likes,” YouTube user and new K-pop fan “Senpapied” used the comment space to relate his/her “testament” or “testimony” to the other “believers,” reminiscent of “having found” religion, in this case, the religion being K-pop. The community that exists within the participatory culture of Third Space and the shared commonality here, their affinity for K-pop, follows the previously mentioned work of Warnick and her claim of these spaces serving as “welcoming places where invitational discourse becomes truly inviting” (Warnick 82 - 86).

The electrated K-pop fan can and does move from one participatory culture on Digital Thirdspace to another rather easily. In one instance, a Japanese American (and formerly local Hawaiian) YouTube vlogger by the name of Ryan Higa (see Chapter Six) did an episode on January 27, 2017 that addressed a joke about Asian men not being attractive on a talk show. In the original clip, the African American host, Steve Harvey, showed his audience a book titled “How to Date a White Woman: A Practical Guide for Asian Men,” and to the laughter of his live studio audience, he provided an the following monologue to more laughs:

Harvey: “That’s one page too!”

Harvey in a different voice: “Excuse me, do you like Asian men?”

Harvey: “No.”

Harvey in a different voice: “Thank you!” (sky le 0:00 - 0:27)¹⁶⁴

Ryan Higa’s vlog that addresses this incident is titled “Can Asian Men Be Sexy?”¹⁶⁵ and Higa’s episode expounds on the underlying racism in the United States and the American

¹⁶⁴ https://youtu.be/gA_OYE1CFsQ

entertainment industry that enables this sort of attitude. But many of the comments under this particular vlog episode show the wide impact of K-pop had by January of 2017 in presenting a less stereotyped and more positive image of Asians:

[Heyy Itz a potato](#) [3 weeks ago](#) Nuso Mysfea A.R.M.Y

[Rei Kobayashi](#) [3 weeks ago](#) KPOP

[freedom fighter](#) [2 weeks ago](#) Army ㅇ|ㅁ|¹⁶⁶ hi¹⁶⁷

[Awkward Fox](#) [1 month ago](#) (562 likes) "asian men are not attractive."

"...may I introduce you to Kpop?"

[Thảo Kumamon](#) [1 month ago](#) (533 likes!) ARMY..... put your hand up!!!!

[여름이](#)¹⁶⁸ [1 month ago](#) Heard of

Exo¹⁶⁹

Got7¹⁷⁰

Bts

Big bang¹⁷¹

Nct¹⁷²

Astro¹⁷³

And lots more!!!! Asians are hot af!!¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁵ <https://youtu.be/dCPoOhgl1RQ>

¹⁶⁶ "Army"

¹⁶⁷ All the translated works in this project are mine unless otherwise noted.

¹⁶⁸ "Summer" (as a screen name)

¹⁶⁹ 9-member K-pop Korean-Chinese boy band

¹⁷⁰ 7-member K-pop boy band

¹⁷¹ 5-member K-pop boy band

¹⁷² Acronym for "Neo Culture Technology"; Kpop boy band with an unlimited number of members

¹⁷³ 6-member Kpop boy band

[Pink Suga](#) 1 month ago Dear Steve Harvey,

Search up BTS.

[Hannah Hartman](#) 1 week ago OMG I LOVE BTS AND KIM TAEHYUNG IS SOOOO SEXY AND ALL OF BTS.. IM A SERIOUS FAN
OMG!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

[Annelise Nguyen](#) 2 months ago (edited) K-pop guys..... lol

Finally likes that I didn't do

[SRUDIPS](#) 1 month ago BTS, a KOREAN group, broke Justin Bieber's 6 year streak of winning Top Social Artist award at the BBMAs, which is voted by fans. I'm pretty sure Asians can be attractive.

[Sugakookie's Are the best](#) 1 month ago Asians can't be sexy???? exo hip-trusts

[Janice The Gymnast](#) 1 month ago Asians are hot cus of kpop

[Baozi](#) 1 month ago *Sees title*

BITCH HAVE YOU SEEN BTS?

[2ne1 Pilots](#) 1 month ago steve: "asian men aren't attractive"

me: * looks at picture of monsta x * HAHAAHAHAHAHAHAHA

[wow! its me](#) 1 month ago i came here for the triggered kpop fans

[BTS ChimChim](#) 1 month ago Me: Ummmm? BTS? Hello?

Clearly, many electrates “visiting” Ryan Higa’s vlog episode here not only demonstrate knowledge of K-pop groups, probably through Digital Thirdspace, but also, through their comments and responses, form a community of solidarity that affirms and reaffirms their knowledge of the appearances of Asians -- that they are all not nerds. Among the comment

¹⁷⁴ “af” = colloquial superlative abbreviation for the words “as fuck”

exchanges are signals that imply common fandoms among posters (“ARMY” comments), as others attempt to use rhetoric as a counter to Steve Harvey’s claim (“BTS, a KOREAN group, broke Justin Bieber's 6 year streak of winning Top Social Artist award at the BBMAs, which is voted by fans. I'm pretty sure Asians can be attractive”).

Just as Brummett writes that “people need to see their engagement with popular culture as participation in rhetorical struggles over who they are” (“Rhetorical Dimensions” xxi), many of the commenters are indeed engaged in the rhetoric of popular culture in this Digital Thirdspace. Largely due to Digital Thirdspace with its ease of access, its nearly total lack of gatekeeping, and its participatory culture, and the international assembly of fans from which it was formed, K-pop enjoys global success today. When the Buggles’ “Video Killed the Radio Star”¹⁷⁵ aired as the first music video ever on MTV, some may have wondered about the predictive value or accuracy of the song’s title. And it is likely that many music groups or musicians who did not embrace the music video as a means of popularization did probably end up with shorter careers. But it is clear that in Digital Thirdspace, “video bettered the K-pop star.” Speaking of the time before the development of video sharing on the Internet, Hong writes that

“Previously, however, K-pop had no international distribution channels. In order to spread music, you have to have about twenty people pounding the pavement and visiting American radio stations with vinyl records. The Korean music industry had no way of doing that. Only with the advent of the Internet and YouTube was Korea able to break the distribution barrier.” (Hong 240)

The rise of K-pop has also coincided with the rise of Asian American musicians on YouTube. Asian American artists and musicians have benefited and continue to benefit a great deal from

¹⁷⁵ The Buggles

the openness and flexible nature of the Internet. AJ Rafael, an Asian American Singer/Songwriter, talks about the benefits of not having to go through Secondspace gatekeeping mechanisms to practice his craft: “When I first started YouTube, I didn’t really think much of it, but then when I had like a 100 videos out, I was thinking, like, literally every second of the day, somebody, it’s really really possible that somebody is watching you right now” (2:21 - 2:33 uploadedTAAM).¹⁷⁶

K-pop’s ability to earn artistic and aesthetic recognition and distinction while providing positive representations of Asians in various global mass media markets has made it a real force to be reckoned with. And if K-pop’s popularity and audiences continue to grow and evolve in Thirdspace, and if BTS’s 2017 and 2018 Top Social Artist Awards at the Billboard Music Awards are any indication, the gate to Secondspace for K-pop stars may become more porous in the near or distant future.

¹⁷⁶ <https://youtu.be/uCaLKMaMyIk>

CHAPTER FIVE: KOREAN AMERICAN REALITY SHOW AS AN ASIAN AMERICAN RHETORIC

Why has there never been an Asian male on MTV's "Real World"? Do they not exist in the Real world? In close to all 27 seasons, there have always been Asian females but never any Asian males on the show... Why is that? I refuse to believe that Asian men have not tried out for this show or that they don't exist in the Real world... Question asked on the question/answer site Quora in 2012

*If the Asian-American image in mainstream media is boiled to its opposites: The shy, academic IT nerd/the martial arts master/the Long Duk Dongs/the William Hungs versus the stylish, free-spirited, no-nonsense, hard-partying, sexually liberated Asian — which is negative, which is positive? Some have said all of what I just listed off is negative and some have said the former is an established negative media image that needs to be shattered and the only way to do that is to establish the later. Others have said we need to aim for somewhere in the middle. But often we can't find the middle without first seeing the two separated points of extreme. - Mike Le,¹⁷⁷ one of the executive producers and directors of the reality show *K-Town**

For Generation Xers, the beginnings of reality television can be traced to MTV's inaugural season of *The Real World* which first aired from the late spring of 1992 throughout the summer. The premise of the show had a number of twenty-something-year-olds living together as cameras recorded almost every aspect their lives. The footage was then edited to ostensibly present a semblance of an entertaining unscripted narrative to an audience. Though the first season was filmed in a condominium in New York City, subsequent seasons took place in condominiums or homes in other major cities in the U.S. and abroad.

The popularity and staying power of *The Real World* is evidenced by its 32 seasons (as of 2017) aired over the past 25 years on MTV.¹⁷⁸ Additionally, many of today's American reality entertainment shows can arguably be attributed to this reality show model, programs predicated on scriptless uncertainties and emotions. The composition of the cast, the stars of the shows, also

¹⁷⁷ <http://www.8asians.com/2010/10/25/no-time-for-love-dr-jones-or-how-i-learned-to-stop-worrying-and-produced-a-reality-show/>

¹⁷⁸ <http://ew.com/tv/the-real-world-seasons-ranked/32-season-32-bad-blood-seattle-2016-2017/>

plays a role. In his book, *The Peep Diaries*, cultural critic Hal Niedzviecki writes that the attractive features of the reality show genre include the feelings that such shows “can...feel true. And what feels most true is that the participants are regular people, just like us, and therefore any one of us could be the next one plucked from normalcy to appear on the big world of the little screen” (98).¹⁷⁹ For most Americans, Niedzviecki’s claim holds true, as over the years, *The Real World’s* cast of young Americans included almost all races, religions, and sexual orientations.¹⁸⁰ But for the past 32 seasons, there has never been an Asian American male as one of the cast members.¹⁸¹ The continuous absence of an Asian male in the cast of the *The Real World*, television’s flagship reality show, so to speak, along with scant (if any) representations of Asian males in other reality shows such as *The Bachelorette* and *The Bachelor*, is consistent with and confirms the previously cited (in earlier chapters) “economic mechanism of selection” of Adorno and Horkheimer, the media industry’s idea that “there is the agreement...of all executive authorities not to produce or sanction anything that in any way differs from their own rules, their own ideas about consumers, or above all, themselves” (407).¹⁸²

But in 2009, MTV aired *Jersey Shore*, an “ethnic reality show” that followed the lives of a houseful of twenty-something-year-old Italian Americans. MTV and the United States’ viewing audience had another popular reality show under their belts, as the fourth episode of the third season had 8.8 million viewers tune in, the most-watched series episode in MTV history (Levine).¹⁸³ The rise of *Jersey Shore*, a show that centered alcohol-fueled drama (and hook-ups) and testosterone-fueled altercations, saw an assortment of simulacra as other “ethnic reality

¹⁷⁹ *The Peep Diaries: How We're Learning to Love Watching Ourselves and Our Neighbors*. City Lights Publishers, 2009.

¹⁸⁰ <https://www.quora.com/Why-has-there-never-been-an-Asian-male-on-MTVs-Real-World-Do-they-not-exist-in-the-Real-world>

¹⁸¹ <http://ew.com/tv/the-real-world-seasons-ranked/32-season-32-bad-blood-seattle-2016-2017/>

¹⁸² “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception.”

¹⁸³ <http://variety.com/2012/tv/news/mtv-to-end-jersey-shore-1118058453/>

show” began to appear in households across the nation -- cable television network Lifetime aired the now defunct *Russian Dolls*, a reality show about Russian Americans in Brooklyn;¹⁸⁴ TLC (The Learning Channel) ran one season of *All-American Muslim* before it was cancelled;¹⁸⁵ Bravo, a cable channel, airs the *Shahs of Sunset*, a reality show about Iranian Americans in Beverly Hills;¹⁸⁶ and *Geordie Shore*, “MTV UK’s best show in history...follows ‘Geordies,’ or people who live on the Tyneside region of Northeast England” (Dai).¹⁸⁷ Around this time, there were many hopeful discussions in both the mainstream and online media regarding MTV’s pilot of *K-Town*, an Asian American version of *Jersey Shore*, a reality show situated in the Korean district of Los Angeles with the same name as the show, and websites such as salon.com and tmz.com highlighted the cast reel for the newest, and for some circles, “hottest” ethnic reality show.^{188 189} However, two years after the initial buzz of this seemingly breakout reality show for Asian Americans, much of the news regarding *K-Town* centered on the fact that it was not picked up by any networks or cable channels and would be distributed via YouTube on the WatchLoud channel. On July 11, 2012, the Internet’s enabling feature as a Digital Thirdspace allowed anyone with access to YouTube to watch the first episode of the first season of the first ever Asian American reality show, *K-Town*.

¹⁸⁴ <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/11/arts/television/russian-dolls-on-lifetime-shows-immigrant-glam-review.html>

¹⁸⁵ <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/11/arts/television/all-american-muslim-on-tlc-review.html>

¹⁸⁶ <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/10/arts/television/shahs-of-sunset-on-bravo-about-iranian-americans.html>

¹⁸⁷ <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2011/08/uk-version-of-jersey-shore-is-realer-sadder-than-the-original/243157/>

¹⁸⁸ <http://www.tmz.com/2010/07/18/jersey-shore-asians-k-town-reality-show/>

¹⁸⁹ http://www.salon.com/2010/07/20/mtv_k_town_cast_reel/

Rhetoric of Popular Television

The decision to broadcast *K-Town* online was, in fact, less a voluntary choice than a response to the realities faced by the creators of the show. In the arts blog of *The Wall Street Journal*, *K-Town*'s executive producer Mike Le talks of “a bidding war between two networks” and then how “things didn’t work out” after the victorious network refused “to let the producers make the show they’d had in mind...” (Yang).¹⁹⁰ This incident, like the checkered history of *K-Town*, demonstrates the validity of Adorno and Horkheimer’s theory of “the economic mechanism of selection” as it does the position of Asian American scholars Mimi Thu Nguyen and Thuy Linh Nguyen’s *Alien Encounters: Popular Culture in Asian America*: “...Asian Americans are not ‘outside’ of popular culture -- whether or not we are imagined by it -- and that popular culture is important to the ways in which Asian Americans move (or are not allowed to move) through the world” (3). While *K-Town* was not allowed to gain entry to the major cable networks for distribution, the show was able to find a home in the participatory Digital Thirdspace of YouTube. The absence of an all-Asian American reality show on television, the absence of an Asian American male on *The Real World*, the absence of desirable or positive Asian American males on the traditional “small screen” -- these have all become media logics of popular culture through the Secondspace of television.

Another common Hollywood tactic that exemplifies media logic is “whitewashing” -- a term used to “[call] out Hollywood for taking Asian roles and stories and filling them with white actors” (Hess).¹⁹¹ Media logic is also defined by Aziz Ansari, creator/actor of the Netflix show *Master of None*, who said in a 2016 interview: “The mainstream Hollywood thinking still seems to be that movies and stories about straight white people are universal, and that anyone else is

¹⁹⁰ <https://blogs.wsj.com/speakeasy/2012/07/17/tough-times-for-tiger-moms-as-asian-america-meets-jersey-shore/>

¹⁹¹ Hess, Amanda. “Asian-American Actors Are Fighting for Visibility. They Will Not Be Ignored.” 25 May 2016. New York Times Movies Section.

more niche. It's just not true. I've been watching characters with middle-age white-guy problems since I was a small Indian boy" (Hess).¹⁹²

In Barry Brummett's monograph *Rhetorical Dimensions of Popular Culture*, Brummett introduces David Altheide and Robert Snow's notion of media logic, "logics [that] become profoundly influential in a culture...and strongly influence how people think about issues and problems" (Altheide and Snow qtd in Brummett 10). Altheide argues that "dominant media and culture are interactive, each producing and produced by the other" (Altheide qtd in Brummett 14) and that "some of the most basic organizing principles and procedures for social activity are influenced by the mass media" (Altheide qtd in Brummett 10). Brummett makes note of how categories of media logic work to "[induce] visual ways of apprehending reality" (Altheide qtd in Brummett 14) and also work to "put the audience... 'in the faces' of people whose experiences are intense and passionate...[making] the audience intimate with those characters" (Porter & Newcomb qtd in Brummett 15). This effect on children is evidenced in the 2006 documentary *The Slanted Screen* when Lois Salisbury, the former director of Children NOW,¹⁹³ states "Kids told us, that they pretty clearly expected to see white people cast in roles that generally would have positive attributes. Either wealth, well-educated, leadership roles; the boss, the doctor. Whereas they expected to see, particularly African-Americans and Latinos cast in much more limited roles. For example as the maid or the janitor. They didn't expect to see Asians cast at all" (*The Slanted Screen* 30:27 - 30:51).

The rhetorical efficacy of popular culture, corroborated by Barry Brummett's academic definitions of rhetoric and culture seen in Chapter Two, makes Lois Salisbury's observations all the more stalwart. When, in fact, Asians and Asian Americans are removed from Secondspace,

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ National, state, and local research, policy and advocacy to improve the lives of kids.

media logics then allows for others in American society to conflate art and life, Secondspace and Firstspace. But as I pointed out in previous chapters, the conflation of art and life doesn't always indicate "erasure," given the stereotypical tropes that have been portrayed in Secondspace. When these Secondspace tropes of the "yellow peril" are realized, they demonstrate the "deviance frame" media theory articulated by Pamela Shoemaker and Stephen Reese in their book, *Mediating the Message in the 21st Century: A Media Sociology Perspective*. The deviance frame media theory allows us to see how *K-Town* acts as a counter to the following problem: "Studies of ethnicity have generally found that media practitioners use a deviance frame, us versus them...Stereotyping people according to their physical characteristics is dysfunctional, leading to cultural stereotyping and prejudices that define who has power in society and who is powerless" (Shoemaker and Reese 47).¹⁹⁴ Because *K-Town* as a reality show challenges the yellow peril tropes in their young, hip cast, the cultural stereotyping and prejudices are nearly absent. The participatory culture of Digital Thirdspace also allows the cast of *K-Town* to directly address the stereotypes and expectations expressed by viewers, something that is described later in this chapter.

Walter Ong's notion of 'secondary orality' helps one understand the rhetorical value of *K-Town*. Because Ong "theorized that what our interactions with media actually change is our relationship to knowledge" (Herbig, Herrmann, Tyma, xv),¹⁹⁵ it becomes fairly obvious that the existence of the show *K-Town* functions as a rhetorical act, i.e. *K-Town* works rhetorically as a secondary orality because the show helps viewers change their relationship to knowledge about Korean Americans (which we will see in the analyses of the viewer comments later in this chapter). The reality show Secondspace vacuum in which *K-Town* exists makes its presence in

¹⁹⁴ *Mediating the Message in the 21st Century: A Media Sociology Perspective*. 3rd Ed. Routledge, 2014.

¹⁹⁵ *Beyond New Media: Discourse and Critique in a Polymediated Age*. Lexington Books, 2015.

Digital Thirdspace more significant since this particular new media text and its participatory culture allow for the certain formation of a subaltern counterpublic (defined in Chapter 2), which in turn helps solidarity and community building.

Not allowing Asians (or any nonwhite races) to be represented positively or to be represented at all in popular culture renders it difficult for an audience to become ‘intimate’ with such characters and constructs a televisual reality which becomes a narrative in American culture, a conclusion that speaks to Altheide’s earlier assertion, that “dominant media and culture are interactive, each producing and produced by the other.” Scholar Larry Tung Ling-hsuan writes that “the under-representation and stereotypes of minorities on television have misled the viewing public to form inaccurate perception on minority groups based on mostly distorted or insignificant portrayals they see on a daily-basis” (87). While some may argue that industry standards, economic realities, and research-based practices justify and necessitate such omissions -- e.g. the producers of Pokemon eliminating “the squinty eyes of one character because (white) American test audiences felt he looked too Asian” (Nornes 219) -- the long standing invisibility of Asian Americans on screens big and small affected American test audiences and thus follows Brummett’s definition of media determinism: content of a culture is dictated by the inevitable domination of a medium of communication:

“But mostly, Asian-Americans are invisible. Though they make up 5.4 percent of the United States population, more than half of film, television and streaming properties feature zero named or speaking Asian characters, a February report from the Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism at the University of Southern California found. Only 1.4 percent of lead characters in a sample of studio films released in 2014 were Asian.” (Hess)

The idea of reality television represents a departure from the fictional narratives that had traditionally filled the airwaves of network television. As the label “reality” implies, “reality television” was to serve a viewing audience a semblance of life as it existed in the real world, pun intended. But the rhetorical work of reality television is more influential than one might think. Gwendolynne Collins Reid writes that:

“...Reality television has more in common with the narrative programs it replaces than with documentary: its rhetoric is a narrative rhetoric. Whereas documentary most often uses argument as a primary mode within which narration may figure, reality programs operate within a primarily narrative mode. Indeed, through a variety of means, including editing and show design (as opposed to scripting), reality programs use narrative structures to tell dramatic stories about (or using) real people.” (Reid Abstract)

Although reality television shows are often accused of being scripted or influenced by producers and creators, ultimately presenting narratives that are not as authentic as one would think given the term “reality TV,” Niedzviecki also argues for the efficacy of the rhetorical work of reality television by writing “Reality TV teaches us that what happens on TV creates a kind of reality that, because of its permanence and potency, is in many ways more pervasive, more real, than actuality....truth is less important than the appearance of truth” (86-7). It is clear that fictional narrative television and reality television create certain paradigms that act as influences on American perceptions of the othered. But the arrival of *K-Town* was meant to change all that.

The Rhetoric and Participatory Culture of *K-Town*

The city of Los Angeles and the greater area that surrounds it have always housed the largest number of Koreans in the United States outside of Korea. Korean American scholar Stephen Cho Suh writes that “[s]ince its formal municipal designation in 1980, Koreatown has served as the cultural...center for many Los Angeles-area diasporic Koreans” (398). Initially perceived an economically depressed and unsafe area, Koreatown’s reputation took even a deeper dive when it made national headlines during the 1992 riots, also known as *sa-i-gu*.¹⁹⁶ These riots followed the acquittal of police officers in the beating of Rodney King verdict, a consequence that brought to fore the racial tensions between African Americans and the ethnic Koreans of that area. News media outlets showed heavily armed Korean shop owners and associates trying to stave off the rioters and looters. Through personal interactions with Korean Americans in Atlanta and Seoul after *sa-i-gu*, I learned that many Koreans left Los Angeles for Atlanta to rebuild their lives. Some Koreans, however, left the U.S.A. altogether and returned to Seoul.

In spite of its recent troubled history, K-town has enjoyed a renaissance of sorts. Suh writes that

The district’s urban landscape, once populated overwhelmingly by low-cost strip malls, flea markets, and dilapidated low-rise apartment buildings, would become filled with an assortment of renovated or newly constructed luxury condominiums and shopping complexes....it was Koreatown’s destruction during the Uprising that paved the way for the district’s reframing as a desirable consumptive destination. (400)

The hipness of K-town as a destination worth exploring was validated by the late chef and travel documentarian, Anthony Bourdain, in the 2013 Koreatown episode of his show, *Parts Unknown*.

¹⁹⁶ The Korean words for 4-2-9, the numbers representing 4/29, the date on which the riots occurred.

By visiting Koreatown haunts, sampling the Koreatown fare, and interviewing some of the Korean Americans of Koreatown, Bourdain's televisual sojourn came across more as an ethnography rather than an episode about an American locale. But the verdict was in: Koreatown was cool. Why couldn't there be an Asian American reality show based there?

Access to YouTube allows anyone (with the time and inclination) to watch any episodes of the two seasons of *K-Town*. Accompanied to club-like music, the opening credits of the first episode of *K-Town* begin with the visuals of an aerial approach to nighttime views of the Los Angeles skyline and then to a view of the area central to Koreatown. As they dance/party to the opening soundtrack, each cast member is introduced to the viewers with both their original names along with their nicknames. The camera pans out after the intros to show the ensemble dancing together as it becomes clear that the cast members are in a noraebang, the Korean word for "singing room." "The filming of the scene in a noraebang, a popular late-night entertainment destination in Koreatown, also alerts viewers that the cast is indeed composed of 'insiders' who know how to have a good time" (Suh 406). Subsequent episodes in season one begin with dramatic video bits, sometimes of the prior episode, and each episode, including the pilot, ends with a sneak preview of the next episode. Each episode of season one averages around fourteen minutes, ranging from the shortest episode in episode 10, eleven and a half minutes, to the longest episode in episode 6, seventeen and a half minutes.

The first episode of *K-Town*, titled "The Beginning," not only introduces the cast members of the show but also contextualizes the season's theme with a double narrative, a big dance audition for one of the cast members and the team's task of "organizing a large party at the swanky Belasco Theater in Downtown Los Angeles" (Suh 406). Viewers are first introduced to the main female characters, Jasmine Chang, Scarlet Chan, (the only Chinese American and non-

Korean of the cast), and Violet Kim, who arrives on a Suzuki motorcycle. Viewers learn that Jasmine is an award winning hair stylist, that Scarlet is new to K-Town, and that Violet is a single mom. Introductions of the male characters take place in a gym as they are working out. In his brief talking head segment, Joe Cha introduces himself as a gym rat, and this segues to Steve Kim's visual introduction - he is working a heavy bag with MMA-style punches and kicks under the guidance and goading of Joe Cha who admonishes him with the line "Don't punch like a girl. Come on" (K-Town S1E1 1:44 - 1:45). Cast member Young Kim introduces himself immediately after he is questioned about his recent two-week trip to South Korea by both Steve and Joe. Before the audience learns about his aspirations of becoming presumably a K-pop entertainer, Joe needles him about hooking up while in Korea. Jowe Lee is first introduced by Violet as viewers are shown old clips of their past relationship as lovers, though it is now clear that they have broken up (K-Town S1E1 2:49 - 3:17). Jowe Lee's introduction by way of talking head does not occur until the cast meets together for Young's engagement announcement Joe's request for the group to help assist him in setting up the "biggest...best party" that he's ever done for the Belasco, but Jowe's arrival at "Beer Belly," the venue for the group, causes tension for Violet (K-Town S1E1 7:56). The episode concludes as Jowe and Violet have a heart-to-heart talk as the rest of the group decides to leave Beer Belly for another place, ostensibly for drinking and partying. Unbeknownst to Scarlet, the most neophytic member of the *K-Town* cast, an exciting club housed in a nondescript building is their next venue, but because she does not know this, her complaints add to the build up of the cliffhanger ending to the pilot as clips of the cast member's frenetic partying and hijinks at the club are shown.

K-Town's first season's subsequent episodes follow the dual narrative of Young's big dance audition and the group's impending deadline for the party they are to organize, promote,

and hold at the Belasco Theater. The second season of *K-Town* sees the cast members work together for Young's wedding ceremony to be held in the U.S.A. Concurrent to these events are the heightened personal dramas cast members have with outsiders and each other, replete with the customary reality-show-related, alcohol-fueled emotional outbursts, talking head complaints, and unresolved relationship differences due to hurt feelings and misunderstandings. What is missing from this reality show is the stereotyping that usually accompanies Asian Americans on screen -- these K-Townies are not poster children for the model minority and nor are they competing in science olympiads or concerto competitions. The cast and narratives of *K-Town* are meant to say something about Korean Americans; they can be American too. In lieu of providing spoilers and for academic purposes, much of this chapter will focus on the first episode as the site of analysis and case study.

As an act of rhetoric and online video of popular culture, *K-Town's* first episode was able to utilize the participatory nature of YouTube in a number of different ways. In addition to commenting on, liking and/or disliking the episode, viewers have access to learn about some of the code switching that took place during the show. For example, at the 4:35 mark, the 5:06 mark, and the 9:10 mark, blue rectangular speech bubbles appear as Scarlet says “kamsahapnida,”¹⁹⁷ someone says “ju gi yo,”¹⁹⁸ and Joe says “noraebang,”¹⁹⁹ respectively (K-Town S1E1). Clicking on the speech bubbles takes the viewer to a YouTube video titled “K-Town: Korean 101,” a Korean language tutorial taught by Steve Kim and Jasmine Chang, a departure from their partying personas on *K-Town*. Other Korean words in other episodes do the same -- for example, the 5:16 mark in the second episode of *K-Town* titled “The Rounds of Partying” has viewers meet bartender Cammy Chung for the first time even though she is in the

¹⁹⁷ “Thank you.”

¹⁹⁸ “Excuse me.”

¹⁹⁹ “Karaoke.” (Literal translation = singing room)

opening credits but was not seen in the pilot. The 5:18 mark reveals a blue rectangular speech bubble as Cammy calls Joe “oppa.”²⁰⁰ Because *K-Town* resides on the Thirdspace that is the Internet, and because of the participatory function of YouTube, these conditions allowed for the supplemental Korean 101 video. As Jasmine explains at the beginning of the video: “So there’s been a lot of questions about these terms, the Korean terms, so this is Korean class 101” (*K-Town: Korean 101* 0:22 0:27). The participatory access given by *K-Town*’s link to the “Korean 101” YouTube video platform was published on August 29, 2012, the same date episode 8 of season 1 was published and about a month and a half after the pilot was aired. This allowed viewers and “outsiders” the opportunity to learn the Korean vocabulary, customs, and social mores used in the show, a development in entertainment that could only occur in Digital Thirdspace. It would be difficult to imagine this occurring on movie screens or on television.

Rhetorically, the introductions of the first three male cast members in the pilot demonstrated a hypermasculinization of the Korean American male, more than likely a deliberate attempt to counter the trope of the emasculated, invisible Asian male that persists in American popular culture. The gym setting itself did not suggest a hypermasculinized setting, but in the scene that opens with the boxing ring at the 1:27 mark, an off camera voice is heard encouraging Young as he boxes against Joe Cha’s punching mitts: “Come on, Rocky, let’s do it. Come on, Princess. That’s it. Faster” (*K-Town* S1E1). Moments later, Joe encourages Steve to keep his form by coaching him to go “Side to side. Hands up. Push. Don’t punch like a girl” (*K-Town* S1E1 1:42). A little later, viewers watch Joe’s interrogation of and his disbelief at Young’s failure to “hook up” during his two week stay in Korea (*K-Town* S1E1 2:05). Though such chauvinistic discourse can and will be judged harshly by some, others may find it more surprising that a Korean American male could be capable of and crass enough to utter such

²⁰⁰ “Big brother’ (slightly older male) to a younger female.”

things. And compared to other Korean Americans or Asian Americans represented in popular culture, there are no equivalent characters. The point here is that *K-Town* suggests that Korean Americans have the same urges and desires as other human beings more frequently portrayed in the media.

The fact that all of the cast members of *K-Town* break the mold, so to speak, of preconceived notions of Korean Americans is something that was brought up repeatedly not only in the comments on the YouTube site of the first episode but also in the comments sections of various news reports about the reality show. The absence of accurate representations of Asian Americans in popular culture contributed to two recurring threads among the comments: 1. many of the comments expressed surprise at or criticized the fact that cast spoke fluent English, and 2. many commenters, particularly of Korean/Asian descent, expressed some sort of embarrassment and/or shame because of the show's portrayal of Korean Americans. In one comment, "Revit P" writes "It's like they are pretending to be like western people which is ridiculous, It would be more interesting if they show their own cultures." In another similar sentiment, "coolxy2" sarcastically writes "Korean Reality show with people talking American-English ... seems legit." The commenter "dealerOFthings" covers both threads:

"lol ignore these douchebags...these r just Koreans who grew up all their lives in the States...White on the inside, yellow on the outside. I am a Korean myself and i personally find it embarrassing to watch these people...couldnt get past the 3min mark of this vid...These are the types of Koreans that get looked down upon if they come into Korea. I find these people disgraceful. Don't get me wrong i love all Asian Americans. Just hate the White washed ones like these poofers."

Though others commenters wrote the same, and assuming that these commenters were not trolling,²⁰¹ Revit P, coolxy2, and dealerOFthings' conflation of Korean Americans with Korean nationals, a distinction that should have been apparent from the beginning of the first episode, especially since Jasmine introduces herself as an individual who was born and raised in Koreatown, seemingly follows the notion of media determinism. Though there is no way to know the extent of the commenters' knowledge of Korean Americans, one can guess that the opinions expressed by the commenters were based on the knowledge or media logics they acquired through dominant media. In the measured responses to these types of comments, "sprklyfairy" wrote "so, how should an asian-american act then? :/" and "Glamazon Jay" wrote "Can a Korean please explain to me why everyone is mad? Do Koreans not drink and party? And Americanized...are they suppose to still act like they are Korea in a foreign country that does not hold the same values as them?" For "sprklyfairy," "Glamazon Jay," and others with similar views, *K-Town* confirms Brummett's definition of rhetoric since the show acts as a social function that influences meanings in addition to managing meanings for those who are aware of the complexities in attempting to offer a less narrow representation of Korean Americans in a reality show. Asian Americanist Stephen Cho assesses the *K-Town* cast as "mostly Korean American protagonists [who] provide an oppositional narrative to the dominant racialized portrayals of Korea/Asian Americans elsewhere in the media" (404).

But the confusion and conflation expressed in the comments can be attributed to the exclusivity of the cross-cultural nature of the show. Because Koreatown (or almost any immigrant ethnic enclave in an urban center in the United States) functions under a cultural duality (Korean and American), the inhabitants and insiders of that particular environment are

²⁰¹ "posting deliberately inflammatory messages to an internet discussion" (from <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/troll>)

operating within a culturally hybridized (Bhabian) and geographic (Soja-ian) Thirdspace. *K-Town*, then, as a reality show about a geographic and cultural Thirdspace residing on the Internet as a Thirdspace, is a show whose cultural mores might be best understood by those who know the cultural codes of both Los Angeles Koreatown and Seoul. This claim is made as a counter to the arguments in the comments that suggest that real Koreans don't behave in such a manner or that Korean Americans do not consume alcohol or know how to have a good time. Such absolutes are not limited to netizens who watch YouTube -- in his essay "Introducing K-Town: Consumption, Authenticity, and Citizenship in Koreatown's Popular Reimagining," Suh contends that the less expected "salience of consumption," namely, the scenes of "extravagant consumption" associated with "the communal drinking of *soju*"²⁰² in the reality show *K-Town* suggests a reimagining of Korean culture in Koreatown (413). However, according to a 2014 news article reporting that "South Koreans drink 13.7 shots of liquor per week on average, which is the most in the world"²⁰³ it is evident that a robust drinking culture exists in South Korea, thereby calling into question the assumptions that the consumption of copious amounts of alcohol would be out of place in Koreatown. The complexities surrounding the cultural competencies of the hybridized Korean American of Los Angeles' Koreatown validates the rhetorical work, in terms of creating and managing meaning for viewers, of the show.

Another example of the participatory rhetoric as a function that influences and manages meanings is given in one of the comments (and two of its replies) that appeared under Doug Barry's *jezebel.com*'s article "Asian-American Jersey Shore Finally Airs - But Not on TV" offered a different perspective on the discussions surrounding *K-Town*. "AnimeJetV2" wrote: "This show has elicited two types of responses from people i've talked to: 1. Yay, more

²⁰² Korean distilled rice liquor

²⁰³ <https://qz.com/171191/south-koreans-drink-twice-as-much-liquor-as-russians-and-more-than-four-times-as-much-as-americans/>

representation for Asians! We aren't just submissive push over nerds, the media needs to show that! 2. Oh my god, this is so shameful to Asians, stop making us look bad, this is the LAST THING WE NEED. I think I find myself in the first group even though I don't party and I am very much a nerd, but I've had many jersey shore esque friends. I also think saying this show is shameful to us is like saying it's okay to judge an entire group of people on one show, which is the line of thinking by racists, and why would we be kneeling to racists anyway ._.??” (7/18/12 11:22 a.m.). Two further responses demonstrate the ways in which the program helped overcome the invisibility and/or stereotyping of Asian-Americans in popular media: “cny1012’s” “I agree - I think the show's existence is...interesting. I'm not Asian, but am super happy to see more representation of Asians in the media, if even at this seemingly poor level of quality...” (7/18/12 11:29 a.m.) and “MoRextraordinaire’s” “Since the racist thinking is happening already anyway, I'm in camp #1. Sure, some people will replace or supplement one line of racist thinking with another line of racist thinking. Those people are a lost cause, anyway. Other people will start out astonished that Asians engage in the same behavior as everyone else, and then they will incorporate that into a more nuanced and diverse view of Asians. Then maybe next we will get ordinary sitcoms and dramas with ordinary Asians playing a lead role” (7/18/12 11:30 a.m.).

The nature of such comments shows the rhetorical power of *K-Town* as Korean American rhetoric since the show dispels (for some) the media logic driven notion of Korean Americans only being able to speak in accented English and since the show portrays the lives of Korean Americans who don't follow the hackneyed stereotypes that are usually associated with Asian Americans represented in mainstream popular culture. Appropriating the sentiments of Chinese American rhetorician LuMing Mao and using *K-Town* and the critiques against the show and/or cast members, one can suggest that Korean American rhetoric “can never be unique, not only

because there is no internal coherence to speak of, but also because it is always in a state of adjusting and becoming, both in relation to its ‘native’ [Korean] identity and in relation to its ‘adopted’ (American residency). And the process of adjusting and becoming is forever infused with its own tensions, struggles, and vulnerabilities, within the context of each and every borderland speech event” (17).

But the Korean American rhetoric of *K-Town*, the only Asian American reality show as of this writing, *can* be considered unique simply due to its singular hence empowering presence in Thirdspace despite the fact that it can indeed be in a state of “adjusting and becoming.” One consideration in viewing *K-Town* in a state of adjusting and becoming has to do with the temporality of shifting identities, a notion of Asian American rhetoric that was studied extensively by digital rhetorician Jennifer Sano-Franchini. In her scholarship on Asian American rhetoric, Sano-Franchini “refer[s] to how identities move and change across time and space, particularly as they meet, engage, and conflict with other identities” (12). Second generation Asians or Asian adoptees visiting their ancestral nations as young adults usually sees this application of the temporality of shifting identities as one moves from being a minority to being part of the majority and is forced to reconcile a racialized identity with one that is not. If this state of adjusting and becoming is then applied to the rhetorical function of *K-Town*, then perhaps that state of change or adjustment to one’s identity or perceptions related to identity enables one to view or re-watch *K-Town* through a different and enhanced lens. *K-Town*’s residence on YouTube allows for viewers to either revisit or watch for the first time an Asian American reality show, and the more recent comments listed under the episodes suggest that people are doing both.

K-Town, as a show that engages with participatory culture in Digital Thirdspace, enabled viewers to participate by way of providing feedback which doubtless resulted in an evolution of the show. The participatory culture of YouTube allowed viewers the ability to post comments, and the Internet provided a global feedback resource for the creators of the show. “Korean 101,” the language lessons video, was mentioned earlier in this dissertation, but the audience involvement speaks to Gregory Ulmer’s concept of electracy, the kind of skills and facility necessary to exploit the full communicative potential of new electronic media (Arroyo). Though the Korean language lessons video was the constructive result of the electracy of the audience, the electracy of the cast was demonstrated in two YouTube “extras,” the “K-Town Season 1 Bonus Episode by Fan Request” (K-Town) and “K-Town Downtime: Starcraft” (K-Town). Both videos act in a playful and good natured response to the criticism leveled at the show and cast in the comments, and both videos have the same altered introduction that viewers saw in the opening credits of season one.

The “K-Town Season 1 Bonus Episode by Fan Request” begins with the talking head of Steve Kim who thanks everyone for watching *K-Town*, and as he lets everyone know that he has “been keeping up with all the comments, all the requests,” screenshots of comments of how Asians should be “studying hard” and the expectations of *K-Town* to show the cast members doing math homework and similar sentiments emerge. Steve ends his monologue with the lines “What we’re supposed to be really, really good at -- studying, right? Se we want to give you guys what you want. The show that you guys wanted. And here it is” (K-Town Bonus Episode 0:22 - 0:30). The opening credits begin in a familiar fashion, but each cast member’s moniker has changed to something more in line with the Asian stereotypes that serve as familiar, albeit

tired, tropes. Season one's cast with old and new nicknames for the bonus episodes' opening credits are listed in the following chart:

<u>Cast Member</u>	<u>Nickname</u>	<u>New Nickname</u>
Jasmine	The Jokester	The Valedictorian
Young	The Entertainer	The Martial Artist
Scarlet	The Troublemaker	The Submissive One
Steve	The Party Animal	The Pro Gamer
Violet	The Drama Queen	The Tiger Mom
Joe	The Bad-Ass	The Investment Banker
Cammy	The Sweetheart	The Sweetheart
Jowe	The Heartbreaker	The Bad Driver

The rest of the episode shows Jasmine studying, (reading, taking notes, highlighting, sighing, and at one point, building a paper airplane), silently for 6 minutes and ends with Jasmine getting ready to eat a salad only to have two other Asians (non cast members) tell her to wait with their phones ready to take a photo of the food (presumably for food porn) which Jasmine does obligingly so that she, too, can take a photo ostensibly for Instagram since it is what she says to end the video clip.

“K-Town Downtime: Starcraft” begins in the same manner as the “Bonus Episode by Fan Request” with Jasmine’s talking head (instead of Steve’s) letting the viewers know that among the comments “there was [sic] a couple of them that they were referring to StarCraft. Because Koreans only play StarCraft, they say. And this is not real because there’s no StarCraft” (K-Town Downtime: Starcraft 0:11 - 0:21). She ends her introduction by telling the camera “So here’s the show that you guys have been asking for” which then leads into the opening credits

with the modified nicknames. Without showing any gameplay, the video shows Steve silently playing StarCraft on a laptop computer for nearly seven minutes, and it ends with Steve silently but furiously playing a game on a cell phone. Rhetorically, both videos subvert the traditional narratives of the studios and the video gaming Korean Americans with banal silences throughout the videos shown, for any it would be difficult to imagine any YouTube video to enjoy any popularity with such long stretches of inactivity. The participatory culture of YouTube allows viewers, especially those familiar with *K-Town* and with Jasmine and Steve's partying personas, to appreciate the irony and the humor of the "extras" on the WatchLoud channel.

But the fluidity and interconnectivity of this Thirdspace also allows for other YouTube videos related to *K-Town* to be accessible, allowing for a deeper understanding of the show and its rhetorical angle. Though the WatchLoud YouTube channel houses "K-Town Vlogs" of cast members (such as Joe Cha) and "guests" of the show (Janie, a woman who had an altercation with Violet in episode 3), YouTube's algorithm for suggested videos brought up, among others, "Joe Cha's K-Town Reality Shows audition tape" (Joe Cha) and the "Red Carpet Coverage of the premiere of K-Town Reality Show produced by Tyrese Gibson" (PacificRimVideoPress). Bits of these videos provide a deeper understanding of what some of the cast members hoped to achieve as cast members of this show.

Though it was not apparent to many (if any) of the viewers throughout the two seasons of *K-Town*, and due to the reality show's characterization of Joe Cha as a gym rat (or even a meathead), his *K-Town* audition tape on his own channel reveals a more complex individual than one might have expected. Viewers get to see some of his friends support his application for the casting call in addition to learning about the early death of his father. But more telling is his testimony that reveals his cognizance of his potential role as a cast member: "The Asian male

especially has been misrepresented in the media and so I kind of want to be a part of you know kind of just showing the real side of who we are. So basically I just want to be on the show to kind of be a part of this whole movement, um, for showing Asian reality” (0:20 - 0:36), and he reiterates his position towards the end of the video: “...no matter how big or no matter how small, this whole production is going to be, it’s a movement like I said and hopefully my character could portray the positive character for not only a Korean-American but the Asian American” (4:24 -4:37). Joe’s intent to present himself as a positive representation of a Korean American male, in spite of the reality show’s subtly salacious marketing tagline “the reality show no TV network could show you,” worked well as the two seasons showed him to be relatively stable compared to his cast mates. Though he exuded a hypermasculinized persona, as previously mentioned, this can be interpreted to have been a deliberate counter to popular culture’s misrepresentations of the Asian male, something he referenced in his audition video.

No less important were some short portions of the interviews of Young Lee and Steve Kim during The Pacific Rim Video Press’ Red Carpet coverage of the premiere of *K-Town* at the Belasco Theater. When interviewer Angelica Alumia asked Young about how “juicy” the show was, Young playfully answered and then followed up with “...it’s going to break a lot of stereotypes...” (2:33 - 2:34). Though we do not hear Angelica’s lead question for Steve Kim, he does tell the audience that “...the public called us Asian Jersey Shore, so I don’t think anyone of us are really actually, kind of like any one of those characters, we’re uh characters of our own...” (3:51 - 3:59). The other cast members (with the exception of Cammy) are interviewed on the red carpet as well, but none (other than Young and Steve) give answers that could be construed as rhetorical acts. Young’s assertion that *K-Town* will break stereotypes is a rhetorical act that pre-empted the negative participatory feedback that nonetheless resulted in the bonus videos of

Jasmine and Steve studying and playing StarCraft, respectively. Steve's move to distance the *K-Town* cast from *Jersey Shore* makes clear that the *K-Town* cast members -- and the show itself -- are unique and not a knock off of *Jersey Shore* featuring racially distinctive outliers. The program thus contradicts the received wisdom regarding the inevitable triumph of Hollywood values, as described by Aziz Ansari: "The mainstream Hollywood thinking still seems to be that...stories about straight white people are universal, and that anyone else is more niche."²⁰⁴ Before they are even seen in the pilot episode, YouTube videos reveal the rhetorical acts of the first three male cast members *K-Town* viewers will see so that they and their cast mates are not considered merely "more niche."

K-Town demonstrates clearly the role of the Internet and its Digital Thirdspace as a vehicle for the representation of an underrepresented/misrepresented minority, in addition to showing that rhetoric is epistemic. But one might reasonably ask why concerned creators would embrace an online reality show as a vehicle for Korean American representations and not, instead, wait for opportunities in mainstream popular culture outlets. The current economic infrastructure of the American entertainment industry makes the gatekeeping conventions nearly impossible to pass through. As mentioned numerous times earlier in this dissertation, Jhally's essay "The Political Economy of Culture" notes that "in the United States, it is impossible to understand the media and cultural domain without recognizing the role of advertising revenues in the operation of the cultural industries. Broadcasting (television and radio) derive 100 percent of their revenues for advertisers" (54). This partnership between corporate America and popular culture then dictates the content of programming:

First, the program has been able to attract large numbers of people to watch it. It cannot therefore appeal to too narrow of a minority. Second, the program has to attract the right

²⁰⁴ Hess, Amanda. "Asian-American Actors Are Fighting for Visibility. They Will Not Be Ignored."

kinds of people. Not all parts of the audience are of equal value to the networks. The programming will have to attract those parts of the audience that advertisers wish to reach...Third, the programs not only have to deliver large numbers of the correct type of people to advertisers, but they also have to deliver them in the right frame of mind.

(Jhally 56)

Jhally uses these considerations to show that “advertising’s importance to the cultural realm...has to do with advertisers’ revenues setting the context within which popular culture production takes place” (56). Brummett also makes note of the “corporate links to television” (Mander qtd in Brummett, “Rhetorical Dimensions” 13) and writes that “Television programming is a commodity consisting of time that is sold to advertisers in units” (Antin qtd in Brummett, “Rhetorical Dimensions” 13). The Asian American audience for popular media is, of course, small; and the gatekeepers would have little reason to imagine the “majority” audience would have a particular interest in portrayals of the Asian American “minority.” Because of the commodification of television programming and the stakes that accompany it, one can conclude that cultural sensitivities and/or accurate representations of Korean Americans might not be in the best interest for those producers and advertisers looking to earn the highest revenue for their shows.

While traditional entry to American popular culture has always been difficult to achieve for Asian Americans, TED Talks founder Chris Anderson thinks that the Internet offers the kind of medium that can open gates that were previously closed:

“I believe that the arrival of free online video may turn out to be just as significant a media development as the arrival of print. It is creating new global communities, granting their members both the means and the motivation to step up their skills and broaden their

imaginations. It is unleashing an unprecedented wave of innovation in thousands of different disciplines: some trivial, some niche in the extreme, some central to solving humanity's problems. In short, it is boosting the net sum of global talent. It is helping the world get smarter.” - Film School: Why Online Video Is More Powerful than You Think²⁰⁵

The cost effectiveness and flexibility of the Internet as a Thirdspace and its participatory culture are enablers for positive representations that “contest the continued racialization of Korean/Asian Americans as ‘forever foreigners’” (Suh 415). As Niedzviecki writes

“Peep Culture is reality TV, YouTube, Twitter, Flickr, MySpace, and Facebook (1)...[it’s] our twisted answer to the problem of dehumanizing humanity. When we present ourselves to be watched and commented on, we are, ironically enough, attempting to reclaim our individuality on our own terms...It’s our attempt to show...how ordinary and normal and deserving of everyday human action we are.” (27)

In considering Altheide’s assertion that dominant media and culture are truly interactive and the evidence in this dissertation that suggests this, it becomes clear that the reality show *K-Town* and its presence in a participatory culture in Digital Thirdspace influenced and managed meaning for supporters and detractors alike in addition to enriching and providing more around representations of Korean Americans in the media. This was evidenced by many of the comments posted by viewers. And though this chapter focused on a number of negative participatory reactions to *K-Town*, positive comments suggested that the show had the power to entertain as well as empower. SunkenDPr0, owner of the top comment, wrote “this show is the definition of ‘so bad it’s good,’” and samantha wong’s second place top comment was “I miss this show, they should of [sic] made season 3!!!!” Selina Li wrote “how is this a fail show? D: it

²⁰⁵ https://www.wired.com/2010/12/ff_tedvideos/

seems good!” and Thor Carillanes replied “Ikr!?”²⁰⁶ Although it was not carried by any major or cable networks, as of July of 2017, the first episode of *K-Town* had over 1.7 million views and almost 4,800 comments over the past 5 years.²⁰⁷ These statistics, while respectable, do not make *K-Town* a hit show. But the mere online presence and accessibility of its two seasons serve as a viable artifact that can act as a counter to the concerns of Hamamoto, Said, Ling-hsuan, Aoki, and a whole host of others who have already been mentioned in the earlier chapters of this dissertation.

²⁰⁶ Abbreviation for “I know, right!”.

²⁰⁷ *K-Town* S1, Ep. 1 of 10: “The Beginning”

CHAPTER SIX: THE RHETORICAL DIMENSIONS OF ASIAN AMERICAN YOUTUBE CELEBRITIES

Growing up I never saw any Asian faces...I didn't see much color on big and small screens alike as a kid. When I was eleven years old, I stumbled across YouTube -- the then fledgling site that housed videos created by all different types of people. The very first content creator I found was the most-subscribed YouTuber at the time: Ryan Higa, a.k.a. Nigahiga...I was captivated not only by the hilarious content and the comical faux-advertisements, but also by something striking: Ryan was Asian. Japanese, to be exact. And I'd never seen another Asian person featured in something I'd watched before...I didn't see Asian people featured in what I watched before YouTube....I liked seeing someone who I could relate to racially after years and years of attending a primarily white school where my friends were almost all white. I loved knowing that there was someone out there like me who I could see featured in popular content watched by millions of people, just like a white person. - Victoria Chiu, contributor to The Tempest, August 28, 2015

On April 23, 2005, an eighteen second video titled “Me at the zoo” was uploaded to YouTube. In this short and ordinary video clip, “Jawed,” the protagonist and uploader of the title piece, looks into the camera and says:

0:01 All right, so here we are in front of the elephants,

0:04 the cool thing about these guys is that they have really,

0:09 really, really long trunks,

0:12 and that's, that's cool.

0:17 And that's pretty much all there is to say.²⁰⁸

That the first YouTube video ever to be shared online was done so by Jawed Karim, one of the creators of YouTube, should not be surprising fact to anyone. However, Karim's clip “Me at the zoo” is probably unconsciously prescient since it introduces one of YouTube's most prevalent video formats, the vlog. A portmanteau of the terms “video” and “blog,” the term “vlog”²⁰⁹ is defined by cultural anthropologist Michael Wesch as a “[video] of people sitting alone in front of

²⁰⁸ <https://youtu.be/jNQXAC9IVRw>

²⁰⁹ Hal Niedzviecki referred to the genre as the video blog in his 2009 book, *The Peep Diaries*

their webcams and just talking to anybody and everybody who care to click on their video” (Welsch 21). Though they can exist on any site on the Internet as a Thirdspace, the vlogs on YouTube are so popular that the most successful vloggers earn distinction in popular culture and are elevated to the social status of YouTube celebrities, influential stars whose fame and fortune resulted from the work of their vlogs. Burgess and Green credit these new media icons with the ability to have been able to bypass “the gate-keeping mechanism of old media -- the recording contract, the film festival, the television pilot, the advertising deal” (24).²¹⁰ And unlike the “gate-keeping mechanism of old media,” YouTube celebrities include Asians and Asian Americans who do not and do not have to adhere to the stereotypical tropes scripted for them in Hollywood (e.g. the character of Han Lee in CBS’ sitcom *2 Broke Girls*).²¹¹ The visual significance and implications of the “small screen” (as opposed to the big screens of films) in popular culture are not lost on academics. “Television, among all forms of media, tends to provide the most sensational visual images to the viewers and is considered the most powerful medium of communication” (Ling-hsuan 88).

The repeated portrayals of racist stereotypes for Asians and Asian Americans in mainstream media may serve as the exigence to Lloyd Bitzer’s theory of the rhetorical situation. Bitzer marks the exigence “an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be” (6). The rhetorical response, in this case, would be and are performed by the Asian American rhetoricians as performers on the Internet as a Thirdspace for the audience, members of the viewing public who are “capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change” (Bitzer 8). The participatory culture of the most common form of the YouTube vlog enables feedback from this

²¹⁰ *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture*. Polity Press, 2009.

²¹¹ See Priya Elan’s review “*2 Broke Girls*: ‘so racist it’s baffling’ in *The Guardian*: <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/shortcuts/2012/may/02/2-broke-girls-racist-baffling>

audience which the vlogger can then address in different ways, e.g. a subsequent vlog or modifying the video with tags and/or links. In addition to enabling positive representations of Asians and Asian Americans in this realm of popular culture, the rhetorical significance of this Thirdspace is highlighted by Arroyo who wrote “[v]ideo and participatory cultures provide new ways of eliciting participation, encouraging remix, and writing the punctum: welcoming the disruptions instead of systematically excluding them” (60). The participatory cultures also help bolster the knowledge created by the epistemic function of the videos.

Participatory Rhetoric Theory, Agency

Because the vlog and other YouTube videos are situated within the fields of visual and digital rhetorics, I remind the reader of the discussions in Chapter Two of Ulmer's notion of electracy, "the kind of skills and facility necessary to exploit the full communicative potential of new electronic media." Arroyo writes of Ulmer's "rereading of... 'Barthes's Body of Knowledge'" for a better understanding of definition and electracy:

Ulmer understands the punctum experience as a moment for connection, for conduction to occur, rather than a moment for mourning. Ulmer explains that the punctum "represents an alternative to the conception of knowledge that underlies normal academic writing...the primary quality of Barthes's approach is its renunciation of the notion of knowledge as a mastery over the object known." (Arroyo 57)

As mentioned earlier in this dissertation, Arroyo uses the basis of this foundation to "extend Barthes's and Ulmer's important work by involving it with the participatory realm" (58) and to move "the discussion from static images to moving images," allowing scholars and rhetoricians to recognize not only "a sharing of relations" but also "*feel* the making of meaning" ((emphasis Arroyo's) 58):

Jean Burgess and Joshua Green, in *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture*, also attest to the generative nature of video sharing. Indeed, they emphasize that participation is a crucial requirement in the YouTube architecture, an architecture that "has never functioned as a closed system" (66) and thus encourages, and almost demands, sharing and repurposing. (Arroyo 58)

The vlog in the participatory culture of Digital Thirdspace, then, can reach and animate a viewer just as the viewer animates the vlog with the punctum acting as the variable and catalyst for

meaning making and feedback. I once again refer to Brummett's notion of the underlying purpose of rhetoric, which is to manage shared meaning ("Rhetorical Dimensions" xiv), to remind the reader that this can work together with Arroyo's notion that engaging with all aspects of the vlog through a rhetorical lens can help one "feel the making of meaning." It becomes clear, then, that one can consider the vlog a viable rhetorical Digital Thirdspace site of participatory culture and representations. But the epistemic function of the vlog also creates beliefs or beliefs, especially since the vloggers themselves express unscripted, extemporaneous thoughts into the camera lens.

The ubiquity of the content that exists on the Internet (and the media) is referred to as "Peep culture" by the previously cited writer Hal Niedzviecki:

Peep Culture is reality TV, YouTube, Twitter, Flickr, MySpace, and Facebook. It's blogs, chat rooms, amateur porn sites, virally spread movies of a fat kid pretending to be a Jedi Knight, cell phone photos -- posted online -- of your drunk friend making out with her ex-boyfriend and citizen surveillance...It's like the famous line about pornography: you know it when you see it. And you do see it. All the time, every day, everywhere. (1-2)

Niedzviecki wrote this prescient observation in 2009, without the foresight of the technological developments and popularity of the smartphone, which accelerated the proliferation of digital content. Since this content resided on the Internet, the Digital Thirdspace, for the purposes of this dissertation, and since this content was non-traditional in many aspects, many scholars and academics referred to it as new media (see Chapter Two for a detailed discussion of new media texts). I also revisit Eyman and his reference to Zappen's essay, "Digital Rhetoric: Toward an Integrated Theory" to help frame "the establishment of digital rhetoric as an integrated theory" (29):

1. [T]he use of rhetorical strategies in production and analysis of digital text
2. [I]dentifying characteristics, affordances, constraints of new media
3. [F]ormation of digital identities
4. [P]otential for building social communities (Zappen 319)

This chapter has already positioned the vlog as a viable site of rhetorical function and has alluded to points 1, 2, and 4 from Zappen's list. Because this chapter (and dissertation) also centers on representations of Asians and Asian Americans in American popular culture, the third point is addressed via Eyman's assertion that "Digital rhetoricians are also concerned with the ways in which race is constructed, marked, or elided in online communities" (79), (copied and pasted from Chapter Two) and since Eyman also writes that "digital rhetoric functions both as a practice and a field of study," this chapter will view the vloggers as Asian/Asian American rhetoricians in practicing Asian/Asian American rhetoric in a participatory culture of Digital Thirdspace and representation.

Asian American YouTube Celebrities

Victoria Chiu's epigraph that begins this chapter refers to Okinawan American Ryan Higa, the most popular Asian American serial vlogger on YouTube. As of July 2017, the "nigahiga" YouTube channel had 19,835,170 subscribers,²¹² placing him 20th among the Top 25 YouTube Users by Subscribers.²¹³ In Nancy Wang Yuen's book, *Reel Inequality: Hollywood Actors and Racism*, Higa is referred to as a "Japanese American YouTube sensation" whose "16.2 million subscribers" made him "the fourth-most-subscribed YouTuber creating original content as of February 2016" (135). Lopez described Higa as "one of the most consistently successful users in all of YouTube" (145) and cited Higa's channel as having been ranked in the top ten with over 15 million subscribers in 2015 (145),²¹⁴ and Burgess and Green had "nigahiga" the 4th most subscribed channel as of February 2008 (59).

Though the examples given here of Ryan Higa references might suggest that Higa's star power is on the wane due to his falling in the rankings over the years, the fact is that the steadily increasing numbers of YouTube users and channels have made Higa's staying power noteworthy. Among the top channels ranked above Higa (as of this writing) are the following corporate channels: 6 VEVO²¹⁵ artists (Justin Bieber, Rihanna, Katy Perry, Taylor Swift, Eminem, and One Direction), the YouTube Spotlight channel,²¹⁶ the YouTube Movies channel,²¹⁷ and the official YouTube channel of *The Ellen Show*.²¹⁸ Additionally, according to the statistics calculated by the WolframAlpha website as of May 2018, there are 1.5 billion

²¹² <https://www.youtube.com/user/nigahiga/featured>

²¹³ <https://socialblade.com/youtube/>

²¹⁴ Asian American Media Activism: Fighting for Cultural Citizenship

²¹⁵ Vevo.com bills itself with the following: VEVO IS THE WORLD'S LEADING ALL-PREMIUM MUSIC VIDEO AND ENTERTAINMENT PLATFORM

²¹⁶ "The best of Youtube every day" channel

²¹⁷ A Pay-per-view movie channel

²¹⁸ Shown on the ABC network.

visitors per day to YouTube, and the number of daily pageviews was marked at 7.6 billion hits per day.²¹⁹ These numbers along with the subscription numbers mentioned in the previous paragraph are certain to change, but for individuals like Victoria Chiu, (the author of the epigraph that opens the chapter), the Internet as a Thirdspace has the ability to provide YouTube videos that can appeal to the interests of Asian Americans who are looking for relatable representations in popular culture.

Given the popularity of the nighiga YouTube channel, this section of the chapter takes a closer look at the power of Ryan Higa's vlogs. But this chapter also looks at the vlogs of Taiwanese American Kevin Wu, also known as "KevJumba," a former YouTuber who collaborated with Higa in a number of earlier vlogs. Though the metrics measuring Wu's popularity (2,848,186 subscribers as of August 2018) as a YouTube celebrity do not compare to those of Ryan Higa's, Asian American rhetoricians Vincent Pham and Kent Ono cite Kevin Wu's significance by acknowledging him as an influential YouTube star, a pioneer of Asian American Web 2.0 culture, and a producer of one of the most popular YouTube channels (74). In their book, *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture*, Burgess and Green reported "kevjumba" the 3rd most subscribed channel as of February 2008, one spot above "nighiga" (59). Although Wu stopped vlogging in 2013, *both* vlogs can continue to function as artifacts that perform Asian American rhetorical actions online in Thirdspaces of participatory culture and representations.

Though both vloggers are Asian American, the premise of their vlogs is not geared towards Asian American issues. In fact, most of the vlogs of Nighiga and KevJumba comically address mundane issues that are relevant to most young Americans of all ethnic backgrounds - family, dating, friendships, employment, food, etc. But the rhetorical efficacy of the new media

²¹⁹ <http://www.wolframalpha.com/input/?i=visitors+youtube>

texts on the YouTube channels Nigahiga and KevJumba is seen in vlogs that act as responses to audience requests and “to a specific type of recurring cultural context and social need in society” (Pashaei 21). The series of vlogs titled “ASK KevJumba” and “Dear Ryan” on each vlogger’s respective channels offer responses to audience requests and online comments, the first in the form of questions and answers (some trivial) and the latter to challenges presented by viewers. And while some segments of Wu’s and Higa’s various vlogs briefly address issues that are relevant to the Asian American position either at home²²⁰ or in show business,²²¹ each created specific episodes dedicated to Asian stereotypes.

Though there are five different episodes of “ASK KevJumba,” the KevJumba²²² channel houses (as of August 2018) only three of the originals: part II of the first “ASK KevJumba,” “ASK KevJumba 2,” and “ASK KevJumba 4.” “Ask KevJumba pt.3” resides on Wu’s “JumbaFund,” his other YouTube channel created for the purpose of raising money to establish schools in Lenana, Kenya.²²³ When Wu stopped vlogging in 2014, he made many of his vlogs inaccessible to the public. His sudden departure from Digital Thirdspace resulted from Wu’s uncertainty in maintaining a sustainable vlogging career in addition to his desire to find himself (Sun).²²⁴ However, the participatory culture of YouTube enabled individuals other than Wu to perpetuate his videos and provide them a Benjaminian “afterlife” (refer to Chapter Three for a more detailed discussion of Walter Benjamin’s “afterlife). YouTube users “RunescapeInVideos” and “patricia313tw” were able to share part I of the first “ASK KevJumba” and “Ask KevJumba 4,” respectively. Part II of the first “Ask” episode was published on March 22, 2008, and “Ask

²²⁰ <https://youtu.be/pGmO-jcKENQ?t=1m30s>

²²¹ <https://youtu.be/-mGeRC6k5Fc?t=1m48s>

²²² Though the KevJumba channel was renamed to “kev,” search engines still recognize KevJumba as a search term. This dissertation will use KevJumba as the name of the channel.

²²³ “Wu...raised \$50,000 on his 21st birthday to build a secondary school in Nairobi through the education nonprofit The Supply” (Sun)

²²⁴ <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/why-kevjumba-disappeared-inside-youtube-stars-departure-1031552>

KevJumba pt.3” was published on July 21, 2009. Because of Wu’s departure from YouTube, the publishing dates of the other vlogs seem less accurate; for example, “Ask KevJumba 2’s” publication date is listed as March 11, 2011, placing it after “Ask KevJumba pt.3” which appears out of order. Using deductive reasoning, it can be reasoned that the publication of part I of the first “Ask” episode took place around 2008, and using Wu’s other videos to find similarities, the publications of “Ask KevJumba 2’s” took place between 2008 and 2009 and “Ask KevJumba 4” occurred around 2012. Each of the “Ask” episodes allows the audience to learn a little about Wu’s preferences, idiosyncrasies, and/or anecdotes. While these types of vlogs are seen in vloggers of today, fan comments on these videos claim that Wu pioneered this episode format:

EverSeth: He invented the YouTuber QnA

Lexy Sam: I think KevJumba can be considered one of the pioneers of YouTube....

Things he did 4 - 6 years ago are what most ppl are still doing now.....had 2 start somewhere. I think even his "peers" copped his style in some way or another

Kay Algeithy: I totally agree. I just hope he comes back and makes more videos.

MrKockNoker: +Lexy Sam I agree, I think he pioneered the whole vlog-Q&A thingy. & I still think he is the best at doing those type of things. Way better than all these new Youtubers.

EverSeth’s comment from approximately July of 2016²²⁵ received 147 likes, and Lexy Sam’s comment from July 2015²²⁶ received 82 likes.

In contrast, Higa’s channel lists 35 different “Dear Ryan” videos, the first one published in 2010 and the most recent on June 16 2017. The earlier “Dear Ryan” series differs from Ask

²²⁵ Comment was made “1 year ago” when YouTube page was accessed in July 2017.

²²⁶ Comment was made “2 years ago” when YouTube page was accessed in July 2017.

KevJumba in that Higa's earlier efforts address the requests in the forms of short humorous video productions. Later episodes see Higa addressing a number of different requests, including challenges to perform certain trick shots in the style of YouTubers "DudePerfect." Though both Higa and Wu employ humor and comedy in their request videos, videos that are created in response to a request or many of the same requests from a fan or fans, the bulk content of Wu's request videos are framed in the traditional vlogging format: Wu is facing and speaking into the camera. Though Wu may include comedic dramatic shorts, (e.g. humorous dramatic interpretations (either by himself or with guests), cameo appearances, etc.), these quasi-skits serve to bolster or support the answers to the questions/requests he addresses and are, on average, much shorter than the video shorts used in Higa's vlogs. In one ASK vlog, Wu answers the question "what songs do you sing in the shower?" by letting his viewers know that he sang "a lot of oldies long songs, songs my parents used to make me listen to" (ASK KevJumba 2). The video then moves to a scene of Wu showering and happily singing Richard Marx's *Right Here Waiting*. Another voice joins in, confusing Wu, and as the camera zooms out, one sees Richard Marx reading an issue of *Rolling Stone* while seated on the toilet (ASK KevJumba 2).

Scholar Erich Werner writes that the "rhetorical affordances" of these sorts of vlogs exist in "its participatory architecture, its capture of emotion displays, its mechanisms for constructing and assessing credibility, and finally its speech and reach" (Werner 10). The requests made by the audience prior to request videos and the comments that follow speak to the participatory culture, or participatory architecture as Werner puts it, of the vlog. The mechanisms by which credibility is constructed and assessed for Wu and Higa lie in the relatability of both through their agreement to address the requests of their audience members. As mentioned before, some of Wu's vlogs that were known to his fans in the past are no longer accessible on his channels, yet

the participatory culture of this Thirdspace allows them to exist on other YouTube channels. The notion of having unavailable Youtube videos that were once available made available again by electrates in Digital Thirdspace is articulated by Burgess and Green:

[YouTube enables all of the] “participants [to serve in] varying degrees as audiences, producers, editors, distributors, and critic (82)...as a cultural system, [YouTube] is better understood as a ‘continuum of cultural participation’...because the practices of audiencehood -- quoting, favoriting, commenting, responding, sharing, and viewing -- all leave traces, and therefore they all have effects on the common culture of YouTube as it evolves. (Burgess and Green 57)²²⁷

This distinction serves as a significant departure from the traditional practices of audience hood of traditional paradigms of television culture and popular culture. Furthermore, far more competencies are expected not only of today’s vlogger or Thirdspace entertainer but also of today’s Thirdspace viewer/consumer. As Arroyo notes, “[p]articipatory composition requires rapid remixing of identity formation, technical savvy, rhetorical skills, and participation in networks, all of which are necessary components of video culture” (23). Wu and Higa began their careers as YouTubers but were able to become a part of the celebrity network which allowed them to collaborate on vlogs with mainstream celebrities, i.e. non-YouTubers, such as Richard Marx, Jessica Alba, Jeremy Lin, and Jamie Chung, to name a few. Richard Marx’s 2011 cameo in an “Ask KevJumba” episode of Kevin Wu’s vlog was mentioned earlier. NBA basketball star Jeremy Lin and Kevin Wu were featured in a 2014 “I Dare You” episode of Higa’s vlog where the guests (and Higa’s friends Sean Fujiyoshi and Will Shahan) compete in dares sent in by viewers. In 2008, Jessica Alba responded to a staring contest challenged by

²²⁷ *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture*. Polity Press, 2009.

Kevin Wu on YouTube. Actress Jamie Chung appeared as the love interest of Wu's in the humorous episode titled "Friend Zone ft. Jamie Chung."

Wu's history as one of the first "hot" YouTubers and the influence he had on his fans are more telling, however. The comments that refer to Wu's past reign as a YouTube celebrity point to the mark he made on this Thirdspace. Wu's video "Looks Determine Everything, Even on YouTube =/," a May 21, 2016 re-upload of his "very first rant posted February 19, 2007," prompted past fans and viewers to offer comments, some nostalgic, others hopeful.

Miss Mina [1 year ago](#) Feel like I just time travelled.

jaa.mes [1 year ago](#) who cares if this is a reupload, the legend has returned for us

Martin Anders [1 year ago](#) JESUS CHRIST I HAVE WAITED 700 YEARS

OYM [1 year ago](#) One million views in 19 hours

Seoul [1 year ago](#) This video was re-uploaded, as if brand new, even though its an old video. So yes, it got 1 million views in 19 hours which is nothing short of amazing.

Gabrielle Andres [1 year ago](#) Kev - dunno if you'll read this since you get so many comments but from the bottom of my heart your videos truly inspired me. I would watch your videos in high school and would get bullied constantly and when I would have a bad day your videos were always there to make me smile. I'm 24 now and I'm so happy I'm able to watch your videos. Till this day they still make my day a lot better.

Kevin Choi [1 year ago](#) does this mark the return of the most legendary original youtube vloggers

P.A.Desai [1 year ago](#) If only :(

cothikaju [1 year ago](#) i hope so. Since, he updated the description box. He's at least logging onto Youtube and even changed the channel name. Though he's apparently injured himself recently (see his blog <https://monkdotcollege.wordpress.com/>) and is taking a break from the blog. So YT may still be a long time away. But this is the first time he's returning to social media in whatever weird way. i hope he's resolved his issues and has found what he was looking for all this while.

kakokapolei123 [1 year ago](#) There's a video on his blog of him and his dad, and it looks like outtakes from a video that they're trying to do. Maybe there will be an update video from him soon

00ValiantFay [1 year ago](#) Okay so I used to be subbed to Kevin WWAAAYYYYY back in the day but unsubbed after he stopped making videos. Today, out of the fucking blue I decide to check in on the channel for the first time in like three years andhe JUST POSTED NEW VIDEOS?!?! This is crazy, I love it.

The comments sampled here represent only a sample of the 6,146 comments on this vlog, but they, and the other comments that follow, address Zappen's fourth point of his ideas of digital rhetoric as an integrated theory: the potential for building social communities (319). The social community of YouTube fans exists in this participatory culture of Digital Thirdspace since the participation, e.g. commenting, sharing, etc., is the mechanism that creates the social community. Without the aspect of participatory culture, there can be no evidence of an online social community. One example can be seen in the "hits counter" used online on various web sites. Used to measure the number of visitors to a site over a period of time, the metric recorded does

not really offer anything to suggest that all of the visitors who visited the site have created or have become a part of the social community of that site.

Comments under Higa's vlogs also reveal shared participatory experiences that lend themselves to a formation of a social community based on fandom. As part of a series that involved famous celebrities, Higa served as one of the participants of the "Draw My Life" YouTube channel, videos that "[bring] you the greatest lives in history - armed with only a whiteboard and a marker pen. Subscribe to see new movie stars, pop stars, sports stars, geniuses and legends tell us their life stories every week!"²²⁸ In Higa's episode, the viewer only sees Higa's arm as he illustrates and narrates key moments of his life that led to how he became a YouTuber. With 31,232,988 views, it is the 10th most watched vlog on the nighiga channel. Though there is no practical way to address all 113,521 comments of the "Draw My Life - Ryan Higa" vlog in this chapter, some recurring sentiments in the comments included reactions to the bullying that Higa had to endure, the rejection from his first unrequited love, and the inspirational nature of the arc of Higa's young life narrative. This particular episode also served as a departure from Higa's other vlogs since much of the matter in "Draw My Life - Ryan Higa" contained more serious and inspirational content than humor. Sketching stick figures as he narrates, Higa tells his viewers about growing up in the shadow of his older and much more accomplished brother, being bullied in school, gaining confidence in wrestling, and becoming happy with the life choices he made as a college student. Towards the end of his video, he offers the following advice to his viewers:

"But the one thing that you and you control is your perspective and your actions. Being depressed and feeling sorry for yourself is easy. I challenge you to change that today.

Choose to be happy. Choose to better your life because only you can make that happen.

²²⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/user/DrawMyCelebrityLife/about>

You're not less than anyone. There are only two things that can stop you: your own mind and your own body. Some might argue that there's a third and say your heart as well, but if you've been on my channel long enough you already know that even with heart, it's still less than three" (6:59 - 7:28).²²⁹

Higa draws the math symbol for "less than" and the number three next to it in a red marker to illustrate his point, but as the camera pans out, the visual of the two symbols, <3, clearly represents a heart. Some of the comments that followed also addressed Zappen's idea of the potential for building social communities:

sparkling pandicorn 2002 [2 months ago \(edited\)](#) ryan: my draw my life is not as interesting and dramatic...*two minutes later* me: *sobs *

BTS is the death of me [1 month ago](#) sparkling pandicorn 2002 same [no mouth emoji]

Kittie Scissor [1 month ago](#) sparkling pandicorn 2002 same here [crying emoji]

Belking844 8e838369 [1 month ago](#) sparkling pandicorn 2002 same

Evan Kirschenmann [3 weeks ago](#) saaame!

Each of the commenters listed here experienced some type of connection to this particular vlog post that caused them to "sob." Without the knowing the explicit details of exactly why it was these viewers reacted so emotionally to this vlog, one can presume that these commenters experienced a punctum, each having had their own unique punctum, given the resulting outcomes expressed in their comments. Higa's "Draw My Life" episode contains themes that are relevant to many young Americans -- teenage bullying, unrequited teenage love, trying to find oneself in high school, etc., and because Higa's narrative is placed based, his identity as an Asian American growing up in Hilo, Hawaii isn't a central issue in his narrative. However, the fact that

²²⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KPmoDYayoLE>

he is an Asian American YouTuber suggests that he provides a greater impact on Asian American viewers, as seen in the epigraph that begins this chapter.

Because “[d]igital rhetoricians are also concerned with the ways in which race is constructed, marked, or elided in online communities” (Eyman 79), one cannot ignore the impact of Wu’s and Higa’s online presence as Asian Americans. Through viewings of their vlogs, one can see that race does not serve as the crux of the themes of their shows. In fact, most of their vlogs, while humorous and entertaining, address issues germane to themselves and to their fans, most of whom are categorized as Youtube’s general demographic of the social media generation.²³⁰ A number of Wu’s earlier vlogs comment on issues pertaining to high school life, including girl problems and the SATs. Higa, too, creates vlogs that address relationship, cooking, and procrastination issues, to name a few. However, the rhetorical agency afforded them through this participatory culture of Digital Thirdspace platform allows them to address issues pertaining to race which can act to promote Asian American representations of normalcy and empowerment.

Among the episodes on his channel, there are some instances where Wu casually and briefly mentions the fact that he is Asian, but race rarely serves as the main theme of an entire vlog. However, two of his vlogs, “I Have to Deal with Stereotypes”²³¹ and “I Respond to Questions and More Stereotypes”²³² have titles that explicitly mark the respective themes of each. Both vlogs were published at the beginning of his vlogging career in March of 2007, the second (March 24) acting as a sequel to the first (March 7). In “I Have to Deal with Stereotypes,” Wu begins his commentary by addressing three stereotypes commonly associated with Asians: acting cheap, being nerdy, and having no social life. Wu begins by addressing the “slanty eye”

²³⁰ <https://fancultureandcelebrity.wordpress.com/2013/04/03/blog-post-3-nigahiga-and-his-fandom/>

²³¹ <https://youtu.be/nbZ9zJ22WfQ>

²³² <https://youtu.be/njcqMDk-xOM>

issue and uses humor to demonstrate that his (and other Asians') eyes are big by showing closeups of his eyeballs on camera, and in the rest of the vlog, Wu presents examples that subvert each stereotype and lists food stereotypes for different nationalities. Wu's vlog concludes when he announces that he needs to take part of his active social life only to be told by his "mother" (fictitious voice from offscreen) that there is no party to go to, that he can stay home and do math homework, and that she will prepare dumplings and egg rolls for him, each point undermining Wu's arguments against the stereotypes he wished to dispel. The participatory culture of YouTube is addressed in "I Respond to Questions and More Stereotypes," his follow up video to this one. Wu tells his viewers that he's been "getting floods of comments emails that I should respond to" (0:30 - 0:34), the bulk of the feedback questioning the omissions of other stereotypes. Wu then announces the three most popular stereotypes he failed to mention, Asians eat dogs, Asians can't drive, and Asians have small penises (1:22 - 1:29). Though Wu does not address the driving stereotype, he does sarcastically tell his viewers that the reason he owns his dog, Jackie, is to fatten up and eat, and he then refers to and shows a clip from an earlier vlog he created to address the small penis stereotype. The clip he references ends with his question, "what do you think there's like dick chromosomes, huh?" (2:17 - 2:20).

The stereotypes covered by Wu's blogs serve as a rhetorical response to an exigence in the framework of Bitzer's notion of the rhetorical situation, cited at the beginning of this chapter. Moreover, the situation in this Thirdspace where these discussions take place is created due to Wu's vlogging since the comments and emails were a reaction to his first vlog. The participatory culture of YouTube and the expressive freedoms permitted in this Thirdspace allow Wu to address concerns expressed by others by voicing his opinions as an Asian American teenager might, i.e. with mild profanity and some degree of irreverence (most likely not allowed by the

Federal Communications Commission on network television). The comments that are posted following viewings of these (or any other) vlogs create a unique forum for discussions that is not really possible for regular television shows. Though online discussions of traditional television shows or Netflix movies may exist in online spaces, those without digital literacies are precluded from participating compared to consumers of YouTube, which assumes some knowledge of technological competencies. Parallels to the points made about the rhetoric of vlogs can be drawn from Fatima Pashaei's scholarship on the rhetoric of blogs about Muslims after 9/11. In her scholarship, Pashaei researched the spaces where Muslims and allies were able to express themselves in a public sphere to counter the racist and stereotyped narratives and attitudes that were being constructed about Muslims post 9/11 in the United States. Pashaei's profile of the blog can be appropriated for the vlog where she writes that it is a "forum where individuals with various backgrounds and opinions could convene to discuss and debate various topics as well as connect with individuals that they would not normally have communications or interactions" (20-21). Though YouTube vlogs probably did not have had the post vlog discussion or debate as an intended goal or aim, today's users and viewers of YouTube are able to and do in fact add their opinions and comments either in opposition to or in solidarity with the vlogger(s) and/or other commenters, in many cases creating a forum for discussions and/or debate in addition to having the fans "connect" with one another through validating or addressing comments or inquiries.

Higa also has a number of episodes dedicated to matters of race, but the two regarding stereotypes examined here are the vlogs titled "Are Asian Stereotypes True!?" and "Can Asians Be Sexy?" Higa, in his May 15, 2015 "Are Asian Stereotypes True!?" vlog, takes the position that "Asian stereotypes aren't going anywhere because they are based off of truth. Rather than be

offended and try to deny stereotypes, I say just own it. And prove people wrong. Don't give them the satisfaction of being insulted" (2:18 - 2:28). Higa then lists stereotypes and uses irony and humor to challenge them instead of owning them. For the claim that all Asians are good at math, Higa states "Now, I don't even know why Asian people get offended by this one. It's a compliment! And again, I know this stereotype doesn't apply to everyone. I mean, I can name 5 Asians at the top of my head that aren't good at math: Sean, Greg, Derrick, me" (2:53 - 3:02). Higa also addresses the stereotype of non athletic Asians by saying "Oh, all Asians are bad at sports, try to saying that to Jeremy Lin. He is so good at DOTA,²³³ you don't even know!" (3:20 - 3:25). Though Jeremy Lin is an NBA basketball player, Higa marks him as an eSports "athlete" here. Higa also addresses the small Asian penis stereotype and informs his audience about his "ownership" of the stereotype by using a series of double entendres, each turning out to be literal before finally telling his audience that he has a vagina.

Higa's 2017 "Can Asians Be Sexy" vlog is an episode that served as a direct response to talk show and game show host Steve Harvey's joke about Asian men not being attractive. Though Harvey made this joke on his Secondspace show, Higa's YouTube channel uses the participatory culture of Digital Thirdspace as it offers a forum for responding to mainstream media. Higa begins with the position that he wasn't personally offended by Harvey's joke: "I'm not saying what he said was right, I'm just saying for me personally, I-I don't get offended by things like that. I've been hearing it my whole life!" (0:34 - 0:43). The tone of the vlog becomes more serious compared to Higa's usual humorous content, as the opening monologue includes his assertions that "Asians are like the punchbags of society. I could understand if this was, like, the first time that this ever happened in mainstream media But let's be real, these kinds of things happen to Asians all the time" (1:24 - 1:32). Higa's episode also presents an imagined scene of

²³³ Acronym for *Defense of the Ancients*, a multiplayer online video game

Higa and Harvey (Higa doing an impression of Harvey) having difficulty ordering lunch at a Chinese restaurant, a skit in a reaction to Harvey's claims made after he joked that Asian men were unattractive: "You like Asian men? I don't even like chinese food. I don't eat what I can't pronounce" (2:39 - 2:44). The vlog ends with a skit called "Ryan on the Street" where Higa asks female (and one male) passersby to choose the more attractive individual when shown two photos (See Appendix E). Each set of photos pits Steve Harvey against Asian male celebrities. Figure 1 in Appendix E shows Steve Harvey and Steven Yeun; Figure 2 in Appendix E shows Steve Harvey and John Cho, Figure 3 in Appendix E shows two (shirtless and nameless) "K-pop guys," and each time, the respondents chose the Asian males. In the final photo set, Figure 4 in Appendix E, Higa pits a photo Steve Harvey against a photo of himself, and the vlog's traditional brand of comedy surfaces when each of the respondents choose Harvey when asked "If you were to come across one of these next two people randomly on the street right now, who are you most likely to kiss?" (6:37 - 6:43).

Similar to Wu's vlogs on stereotypes, Higa's vlogs serve as a rhetorical response to an exigency, but Higa's second vlog response is more specifically directed towards the treatment of Asians and Asian Americans in mainstream media, something that came about due to Steve Harvey's remarks on his talk show. In the same vlog, Higa also calls out the double standard in American society when comparing how racial slurs against Asians are measured in comparison to racial slurs against African Americans:

But my point is, the fact that anybody would actually think it's okay to title an article "A Chink In the Armor," when you know it's a non-comedic sports related article, is kind of ridiculous. I mean the word 'chink' is basically like the 'N' word for Asians. Do you think anybody would dare to publish the article if they switched out the word 'chink' with the

'N' word? Of course not, because society and mainstream media has taught us that it's not okay to make black jokes but it is okay to make Asian jokes. (1:45 - 2:06)

Higa's popularity as a YouTube celebrity can be attributed to the comedy of his vlogs and his reputation as a good-natured individual, but his star power in this Thirdspace enables him to address a heavy topic such as representations of Asians in society and/or the media. And because he is the content creator of his works on YouTube, there are no issues regarding creative control of his vlogs.

In addition to assigning the label "rhetoric is epistemic" to Higa's vlogs, the rhetorical work of addressing stereotypes is also evidenced in the viewer comments, many of which express solidarity, community, and resistance. Moreover, the vlogs and the participatory culture of YouTube not only allow audience and fans to experience a punctum but also empower themselves through shared experiences regardless of whether or not the experiences were exactly the same. Arroyo writes that this is "...what is expressed in the language of online video and participatory cultures, which, as a language of popular culture, is understood through sharing, or being-*with*, relations of exteriority" (60). Wu's vlogs also serve similar rhetorical functions, therefore, the existence of the KevJumba and nigahiga channels fills a void present in traditional popular culture. Because Brummett also writes that "people need to see their engagement with popular culture as participation in rhetorical struggles over who they are" ("Rhetorical Dimensions" xxi), it can be argued that even the less prominent YouTube channels of Asian American and Asian vloggers serve the same rhetorical functions and address the same exigencies because of the continued under-representation and misrepresentation of Asians and Asian Americans in American popular culture. These options on Digital Thirdspace, unavailable in the past but now accessible for free at any time for those who have an Internet connection,

allow individuals like Victoria Chiu (author of this chapter's epigraph), or others in situations similar to hers, to be able to search for vloggers so that they may be engaged with popular culture in a way that can be more meaningful to them.

As an entertainment format that became more popular as the Internet developed over the years, the vlog earned a place in and the respect of American popular culture, given the influencing capabilities and earnings potential as a culture industry. YouTube has also enabled fans to embed and share vlogs (and other videos) on their social media sites or even host videos that are no longer accessible (e.g. KevJumba's "Ask" vlogs unavailable on his channel). The attractiveness of this style and function of online video is encapsulated by Werner's description that "Vlogging is a highly interactive and highly emotional mode of address that...[takes] on new affordances that allow video messages to circulate in extreme, unpredictable, and transformative ways" (Werner 5). The participatory culture of YouTube reveals the symbiosis that takes place for vlogs to become successful, a framework that was analyzed in Pashaei's scholarship of the rhetorical functions and studies of web logs or blogs and is appropriated for vlogs here:

In the genre of [vlogging], the [vlogger's] ability to invent is largely dependent on the public's participation in their discourse. The [vlogger] and [audience], in other words do not operate in isolation, but rather in collaboration. Thus, when the public responds to an author's [vlog], they too become part of the invention process. Based on the feedback [and subscriptions] provided by the public, the author is afforded status and value in the online world. Simply put, the author-function that endows the author with a certain cultural status and value cannot exist without the public to assign those values that validate the author-as-self. (44)

The proliferation of vloggers on YouTube has created countless number of vlogs from which people could choose. According to YouTube statistics at fortunelords.com, “300 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every minute” (Donchev). With so much new media content being produced for consumption on this Digital Thirdspace, the pessimist or neo-Luddite may conclude that the glut of digital texts can lead to viewer fatigue and dissatisfaction. But for those who acknowledge the merits of electracy today in the same vein as literacy was embraced in the past, the pluralistic nature of the many video and vlogging options available on this Digital Thirdspace serve as a marked improvement in choices for entertainment in popular culture. Viewed through the lens of a rhetoric of popular culture, the vlogs of Higa and Wu, in addition to the many other rising Asian American vlogs being presently uploaded, also serve to address the deficiencies of the traditional American popular culture industry, the practices of which were questioned by Brummett way back in 1991:

“As the public increasingly depends on television for entertainment -- indeed, for a description of reality -- what meanings does such an underrepresentation of people of color convey to the public? What effect might those meanings have on the members of those populations themselves?” (“Rhetorical Dimensions” 123)

Being able to see faces like Ryan Higa and Kevin Wu on the screens mediated by popular culture allows audiences and the general public to understand, and in some cases realize, that Asian Americans can be more than stereotypical tropes. More specifically, being able to choose from and watch new channels and unique vlogs by a diverse array of content creators in a participatory culture on Digital Thirdspace is a liberating development, especially for an eleven year old Victoria Chiu and those in situations similar to her.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

The first movie I remember seeing in a theater had a black hero. Lando Calrissian, played by Billy Dee Williams, didn't have any superpowers, but he ran his own city. That movie, the 1980 Star Wars sequel The Empire Strikes Back, introduced Calrissian as a complicated human being who still did the right thing. That's one reason I grew up knowing I could be the same.

If you are reading this and you are white, seeing people who look like you in mass media probably isn't something you think about often. Every day, the culture reflects not only you but nearly infinite versions of you—executives, poets, garbage collectors, soldiers, nurses and so on. The world shows you that your possibilities are boundless. Now, after a brief respite, you again have a President.

Those of us who are not white have considerably more trouble not only finding representation of ourselves in mass media and other arenas of public life, but also finding representation that indicates that our humanity is multifaceted. Relating to characters onscreen is necessary not merely for us to feel seen and understood, but also for others who need to see and understand us. When it doesn't happen, we are all the poorer for it. - Jamil Smith, Time Magazine²³⁴

Recently I ran across a paragraph describing how the artistic vision of French painter Georges Braque was transformed by seeing a single painting by Pablo Picasso, Les Demoiselles d'Avignon. The contemporary poet David Whyte tells of watching a Jacques Cousteau documentary as a boy and thereafter spending much of his young manhood pursuing the dream of being a marine biologist. I recall an interview with Sugar Ray Leonard in which he described seeing, as a youngster, a single round of one of Muhammad Ali's fights and thereafter knowing what kind of fighter he was going to be. A relative of mine watched the movie The Mission and left his comfortable life in America to be a Christian missionary among squatters in the rural Philippines. And I just told you how a single chapter in a book by Frantz Fanon enlarged my understanding of a particular phenomenon and in a very real way set me free. In each of these examples, timing was crucial: exposure had to occur when the seeker was able to receive the revelation.

If a painting or a chapter or a snippet of video had that power, could a single face have given me what I needed during all those glum hours of seeking a worthy origin and a worthwhile destiny? I imagine now that it could have made a difference to me as a young boy in Los Angeles and Seattle, or a teenager in the Bronx, or a young man in Oregon and Alaska seeking a place to belong and permission to stretch out. To become a human of worth. I mull the notion that something so simple could have launched me sooner, and a few feet farther, into a wide-open life. - Alex Tizon, Big Little Man²³⁵

²³⁴ Time Magazine, Vol 191, No 6. February 19, 2018. pp 38-45.

²³⁵ Big Little Man. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014. pg. 243.

Challenges

Due to the vast riches of Digital Thirdspace, it is no exaggeration to make the claim that in terms of entertainment options, there is something for everyone. A quick search on YouTube or Google will allow anyone to find and watch a personally relevant vlogger or site, and then, join a discussion or a community related to the topic shared by others. For example, doing a search on YouTube for “swimming technique” results in a lineup of choices; the first video listed is one titled “Freestyle Swimming Technique | Stroke,” produced by SpeedoInternational. Nearly two and a half minutes long, the video is narrated by an unnamed British voice who goes over the technical aspects of the stroke while concurrently showing different camera angles of a male swimmer swimming freestyle. Many of the 616 comments underneath the video have posters professing their love of swimming, but some commenters ask questions about technique while others respond to the video by confessing the fact that such a new media text has provided the motivation to resume swimming again or to begin learning how to swim.

The vast array of new media texts in Digital Thirdspace also allowed me to go off on inadvertent exploratory tangents as I wrote this dissertation given the sites of analyses for my research aims. Searching for videos and ethnic-based reality shows resulted in unintended discoveries, many of which had no relevance to my research but whose themes were so fascinating that I was compelled to see what some of these shows were all about. Having come across the trailers to these shows on *YouTube*, I took the liberty of going to some online streaming sites (based in Russia) and had the privilege of watching a few episodes of “Party South 2” and a few more of Season 2 of “Famously Single.” Each reality show broadcast the unscripted drama and antics of respective groups of twenty-something youths who identified themselves as southerners and moderately famous celebrities who were single while living

together as housemates. Though much of these reality show episodes entertained via the unpredictable nature of drunk youths caught on camera combined with the dramatic aftermaths and resolutions that followed, I found it incredible that there was no market audience or curiosity for similar antics played out by a house full of Asian Americans in Secondspace.

Additionally, I was amazed at the variety of standard Secondspace videos, i.e, scripted shows and films produced in and by Hollywood, that were housed online in Digital Thirdspace, albeit illegally so. While many of the most current and up-to-date television shows and films are available through these illegal and free streaming sites, cancelled shows and other hard-to-find shows are also available through these streaming sites. That the afterlives of these cancelled shows could exist outside of the stratagems of Hollywood's Secondspace and that those with the electracies needed were able to access and share these links are significant realities as one works to understand the full capabilities of the Internet. Participatory culture of Digital Thirdspace and those with Gregory Ulmer's concept of electracry enable some to circumvent fair use laws and other copyrights, but corporate run, legal, free streaming sites such as *Sony Crackle* are establishing their presence in Digital Thirdspace, ostensibly to compete against streaming giants such as *Netflix* and *Hulu*.

While the benefits of the participatory culture of Digital Thirdspace cannot be overstated for matters involving varied, more positive representations in popular culture and the theft of intellectual property, the same participatory culture of Digital Thirdspace has also helped contribute to an unprecedented increase of platforms for hate groups online in the United States and the world. As many Americans have witnessed from 2016 through 2018, the idea of Hauser's reticulate public sphere is not limited to help breaking stereotypes and helping all groups feel like they can be properly represented in American popular culture. Digital

Thirdspace in conjunction with the incendiary rhetoric of current U.S. President Donald Trump “has ‘electrified’ the radical right, contributing to an alarming spike in the number of hate groups operating in the United States, particularly anti-Muslim groups” (Weisberg). The ability of Digital Thirdspace to help wider audiences gain a better understanding of marginally represented ethnic groups from and in Secondspace also functions in the same manner to spread hate. John Herrman writes that the “all-encompassing internet platforms...promised something that no previous vision of the public sphere could offer: real, billion-strong mass participation; a means for affinity groups to find one another and mobilize, gain visibility and influence” to explain “how hate groups forced online platforms to reveal their true nature” (Herrman). Harvard University’s site “Hate Groups on the Internet” affirms this opportunity by quoting Don Black, a former grand wizard of the Ku Klux Klan: “[the Internet] has been a tremendous boon for us. That’s why I dedicate most of my time to this. I feel like I’ve accomplished more on the Web than in my 25 years of political activism. Whereas before, we could reach only people with pamphlets or holding rallies with no more than a few hundred people, now we can reach potentially millions” (Black qtd in Harvard). In addition to “reaching millions,” owning electracies has also resulted in real and damaging consequences. Louis Weisberg writes about the electracy of Dylann Roof, the white man “who shot nine African-American people attending a prayer service in Charleston, South Carolina, in 2015. [Roof] was a closeted racist unaffiliated with any white-supremacist organizations. But police later discovered he owned a website promoting new-Nazi views” (Weisberg).

There are valid concerns over the rhetorical efficacy of hate groups in Digital Thirdspace and how such influences are so great that they may overshadow or even nullify the benefits and gains of an egalitarian, progressive Internet full of diverse communities. And while this

dissertation does not claim that hate groups and the participatory culture of Digital Thirdspace with which they assemble belong as part of the aforementioned diverse communities, there exist checks and balances in the online world of Digital Thirdspace that work to hinder the spread of hate groups. As mentioned above, there is no illusion about the proliferation of hate ideology on the Internet and Digital Thirdspace, and the presence of such online sites is unmistakable.

However, John Herrman writes that even before the events of the “Unite the Right” hate rally in Charlottesville, VA, began in August of 2017, Internet companies began their deletions: “the “Unite the Right” Facebook page...was removed the day before the event was scheduled” (Herrman).²³⁶ Following the rally, “Social media networks Twitter and LinkedIn, music service Spotify and security firm Cloudflare [became] the latest internet firms to cut off services to hate groups or remove hate speech. They [joined] Google's parent company Alphabet, Facebook and domain provider GoDaddy, which have already taken steps to block groups propagating hatred” (Reuters/AP qtd in Deutsche Welle News).²³⁷ In the same week following the “Unite the Right” rally that occurred from August 11-12, 2017, Herrmann documents the aftermath :

The clampdown extended beyond the walled gardens of social platforms to a wide array of online services. The Daily Stormer, a neo-Nazi site that promoted the march and celebrated its fatal outcome, was banned by the domain registrar and hosting service GoDaddy, then hours later by Google’s hosting service, then lost access to SendGrid, which it had used to deliver its newsletter; PayPal cut off the white nationalist Richard Spencer’s organization, which later lost access to its web host, Squarespace; Airbnb removed the accounts of a number of Charlottesville attendees before the event, and released a statement saying that “violence, racism and hatred demonstrated by neo-

²³⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/21/magazine/how-hate-groups-forced-online-platforms-to-reveal-their-true-nature.html>

²³⁷ <https://www.dw.com/en/internet-companies-join-backlash-against-neo-nazi-groups/a-40129305>

-Nazis, the alt-right and white supremacists should have no place in this world”); by

Wednesday, Spotify was even expunging “white supremacist” music from its library.²³⁸

On July 26, 2018, Todd Spangler reported a similar development in a *Variety Magazine* article titled “YouTube Deletes Videos Posted by Infowars, Suspends Alt-Right Channel From Live-Streaming.”²³⁹ Spangler offers YouTube’s official statement in the article: “We have long-standing policies against child endangerment and hate speech... We apply our policies consistently according to the content in the videos, regardless of the speaker or the channel” (YouTube qtd in Spangler). Such actions by Internet companies have not resulted in the complete eradication of hate groups and/or hate speech, but the moves made by the “major tech firms [to deny] services to white supremacists... [are] a rare departure for an industry that has faced criticism for not doing enough to block hate speech” (Reuters/AP qtd in Deutsche Welle News).

But major companies are not the only entities that can combat the vile hate speech that reside online. Individuals with electracies have also used the participatory culture of Digital Thirdspace to counter hateful attitudes online. In a 2015 online essay titled “How I Infiltrated a White Pride Facebook Group and Turned It into 'LGBT Southerners for Michelle Obama,’” Virgil Texas of vice.com chronicles how he used his electracies to successfully disturb and hinder the group, eventually resulting in Facebook taking the page for the group down. Texas documents the beginnings of his inadvertent plan:

Just go to a news article about a police shooting and scroll down to the comments. Most comment sections are linked to people's Facebook accounts, so you just have to find someone with a Confederate flag avatar expressing a racist opinion, click through to his

²³⁸ <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/21/magazine/how-hate-groups-forced-online-platforms-to-reveal-their-true-nature.html>

²³⁹ <https://www.yahoo.com/entertainment/youtube-deletes-videos-posted-infowars-033150961.html>

or her profile, and select "Add Friend." Everyone in Confederate Facebook seems to accept friend requests from strangers, which I guess can be chalked up to Southern hospitality....Just when I was about to unfriend them all and start drinking, I was invited to a private group of about 2,500 called "confederate pride, heritage not hate." The group consisted of more of the same good ol' boy palaver about Southern Pride and Confederate Lives Matter, peppered with tirades from a handful of out-and-out Stormfront white supremacists and neo-Nazis. I added a few dozen of my friends, who promptly started trolling the shit out of the group.

Though the tone of the essay is comedic, Texas subverts the serious and sometimes deadly notion of trolling, "the act of antagonizing others online by deliberately posting disruptive content,"²⁴⁰ an established tactic used by online bullies the world over. But here, Texas and his friends use their electracies to counter hate instead of promoting hate. Texas describes the group by writing "It should go without saying that the folks who have built their identities around a 150-year-old treasonous cause to keep human beings in bondage are not very good at the internet. The group's creator had no idea how to lock the banner image at the top of the page, so friends of mine added their own" (Texas). The first banner image (Figure 1, Appendix H) Texas and his friends used portrays a seemingly zoned out young male whose white t-shirt bears the unmistakable stains and remnants of vomit in the front, the image conveying a humiliating representation for the group. The second banner image (Figure 2, Appendix H) shows the backside of a defecating pig in a pig pen, again, the imagery used to provide a crass and derisory symbol for the group. The third banner image (Figure 3, Appendix H) is an absurd line-up of people dressed in feline-like costumes, each colored costumed individual holding an oversized crayon of the same color. Each of the banner images are emblazoned with an abbreviated version

²⁴⁰ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/troll>

(presumably due to graphic spacing issues) of the Facebook group's name in white letters, "confederate pride," a juxtaposition of text and images that provides humor to those who are against confederate hate and that rankles those who are for confederate hate.

The participatory culture of Digital Thirdspace allows for anyone or any organization or company to share a link to Texas' essay through social media sites. In addition to being shared on personal Facebook and Twitter accounts, the essay has also been shared on other public forums, creating discourse that allows for other individuals to counter the promotion of hate. Started in the summer of 2017, an online "discussion"²⁴¹ of Texas' essay took place in a reticulate public sphere-like space in the forum titled r/hillaryclinton, "a pro-Hillary Clinton forum to support Hillary Clinton"²⁴² on Reddit, a website that hosts interest group forums and that functions as an aggregator of news. The first comment that followed in the "r/hillaryclinton" forum, or subreddit, a forum dedicated to a specific topic on the website Reddit,²⁴³ posted by "wallumbilla_Jamorie" reads "Eh... I don't like this. Everyone deserves freedom of speech and the ability to form groups with likeminded individuals - without it being subverted by people with opposing points of view." In trying to defend the Facebook hate group profiled in Texas' article, redditor (a registered user of the website Reddit)²⁴⁴ "wallumbilla_Jamorie" is challenged by other redditors. "Christmastreefarmer" responded with "Jfc"²⁴⁵ freedom of speech doesn't protect hate speech. Freedom of speech protects you from persecution from your government not protection from your peers. Don't just fucking spew something if you don't know what it means." Redditor "dhnaranjo" also responded to "wallumbilla_Jamorie" by having written

²⁴¹

https://www.reddit.com/r/hillaryclinton/comments/618pj9/how_i_infiltrated_a_white_pride_facebook_group/?sort=old

²⁴² <https://www.reddit.com/r/hillaryclinton/>

²⁴³ <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/subreddit>

²⁴⁴ <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/redditor>

²⁴⁵ Internet acronym for "Jesus Fucking Christ"

Man fuck what you don't like and your lack of understanding of the First Amendment. The Bill of Rights states what the government is and isn't allowed to do to citizens. The government is not restricting these dumb fucking racists right to be dumb fucking racists. They're still dumb fucking racists, the only difference is that they were tricked out of their dumb fucking racist clubhouse. (dhnaranjo)

The responses to redditor “wallumbilla_Jamorie’s” reactive post act to counter a conflation of hate speech and free speech, and this is a scene that is probably played out in various forums on Digital Thirdspace more than I can imagine. The vehemence used by “Christmastreefarmer” and “dhnaranjo” is visceral as a reaction to the fallacy of “wallumbilla_Jamorie’s” post. But such rhetorical acts of grassroots electrates also serve as checks and balances in Digital Thirdspace, and as the number of hate groups increase, so too, do the number of online activists working for progressivism and tolerance. Joshua Holland’s 2017 article “Your Guide to the Sprawling New Anti-Trump Resistance Movement”²⁴⁶ asserts that “[a]n explosion of new activism offers a ray of hope in these dark political times” (Holland). Citing the “5.2 million people” who participated in the “hastily organized” Women’s Marches that took place in January 2017 and the polls of American Democrats who vow to become “more involved in the political process in the next year as a result of the election,” Holland gives synopses of what he deems are the most promising grassroots resistance groups formed in response to the presidential election of Donald Trump, which resulted in the “expansion of the number of U.S. hate groups fueled by Trump’s immigration stance and the perception that he sympathized with those espousing white supremacy” (Simpson).²⁴⁷

²⁴⁶ <https://www.thenation.com/article/your-guide-to-the-sprawling-new-anti-trump-resistance-movement/>

²⁴⁷ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-trump-hate-groups/u-s-hate-groups-proliferate-in-trumps-first-year-watchdog-says-idUSKCN1G5286>

The growth of hate in Digital Thirdspace is attributed to the changes in the U.S. political climate and the efficacious utilization of reticulate public spheres. But this growth is neither unchecked nor unchallenged. Progressives and non-haters also use their electracies to provide resistance through online organizations and/or individual grassroots efforts, simply by calling out, responding to, or educating the ignorance in reticulate public spheres. Those journalists and essayists who write exposés regarding hate groups on social media, for example, also use other forms of participatory culture on in Digital Thirdspace as well. In addition to having written for vice.com, Virgil Texas also serves as one of the hosts for the podcast *Chapo Trap House*, described by The Guardian as “the leftwing alternative to Breitbart – a subversive, humorous and politics-focused new media presence that has attracted a devoted following on both sides of the Atlantic”²⁴⁸ (Helmore). Digital Thirdspace is not the wild west of the American frontier. Checks and balances enacted by tech corporations and companies are also adhered to by most netizens. Though the liberatory nature of Digital Thirdspace has allowed some hate groups to recruit and attract members, the same liberatory nature of Digital Thirdspace has allowed those with competencies in electracies to disrupt and eventually help close certain avenues to such groups.

Though the sharing and embedding of news items, photos, and videos are the benefits of the participatory culture of Digital Thirdspace, these digital technologies are also used by bullies to harass and demean their victims (as mentioned above). But for many who are not being bullied, social media sites are still creating a negative effect on individuals. In a 2017 article in the *Harvard Business Review* titled “A New, More Rigorous Study Confirms: The More You Use Facebook, the Worse You Feel,” Holly B. Shakya and Nicholas A. Christakis remind readers that “research has shown that the use of social media may detract from face-to-face relationships, reduce investment in meaningful activities, increase sedentary behavior by

²⁴⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jul/23/chapo-trap-house-leftwing-breitbart>

encouraging more screen time, lead to internet addiction, and erode self-esteem through unfavorable social comparison”²⁴⁹ (Shakya and Christakis). Shakya and Christakis then present their most research findings to conclude that “...our results showed that, while real-world social networks were positively associated with overall well-being, the use of Facebook was negatively associated with overall well-being...We found consistently that both liking others’ content and clicking links significantly predicted a subsequent reduction in self-reported physical health, mental health, and life satisfaction” (Shakya and Christakis). Psychologist Susan Krauss Whitbourne Ph.D. also refers to the dangers of FOMO, or “Fear of Missing Out,” as one of the hazards of Facebook use.²⁵⁰ Similar to the notion of “keeping up with the Joneses,” parts of social media have created situations for some who feel the need to try to keep up with or impress those who post their vacation, dinner party, or fun-filled photos online. When keeping up with those on social media becomes difficult or impossible to achieve, there is a sense of letdown, either due to envy, exclusion, or a sense of unfairness.

Even more serious is the fact that a number of images posted on social media are manipulated through lighting angles and/or editing to create an illusion of perfection, creating an alternate reality that is nearly impossible to compete against. Though the popularity of certain social media “influencers” remains high in spite of all this, some are resisting. In 2015, Essena O’Neill, “[a]n Australian teenager with more than half a million followers on Instagram...quit the platform, describing it as ‘contrived perfection made to get attention’ and called for others to quit social media – perhaps with help from her new website”²⁵¹ (Hunt). In her effort to become more transparent, O’Neill edited one of her bikini photos with a new caption: “see how relatable my

²⁴⁹<https://hbr.org/2017/04/a-new-more-rigorous-study-confirms-the-more-you-use-facebook-the-worse-you-feel>

²⁵⁰<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/fulfillment-any-age/201710/is-facebook-making-you-depressed>

²⁵¹<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2015/nov/03/instagram-star-essena-oneill-quits-2d-life-to-reveal-true-story-behind-images>

captions were – stomach sucked in, strategic pose, pushed up boobs. I just want younger girls to know this isn't candid life, or cool or inspirational. It's contrived perfection made to get attention" (Hunt).

Social media influencers who are not leaving their platforms and are still continuing to contribute unfavorable social comparison includes Instagrammer and YouTuber Heba Ali, a fitness coach and social media influencer. Many of Ali's photos and videos on social media show her working out while provocatively dressed in workout tights and sports bra. However, the participatory culture of Digital Thirdspace has allowed Kenny K.O., another social media fitness influencer, to call her out on her video - a 900 pound wall sit. The video in question, which has been taken down since (but captured by Kenny K.O. and portions of it shown on his *YouTube* channel), shows Ali in a sitting position with her back to the wall as her assistants place twenty 45 pound plates on her thighs. The video feat is questioned by "brettdumas" one of the commenters who responds to Kenny K.O.'s question the video: "Fake lift caught? What do you think?"

brettdumas this girl would have broken the world record for wall sits. hell, she would have smashed it and could have. but chose to make an instagram video instead? Does that not sound fishy? Record is 1000 pounds for 5.62 seconds. This 900 for what looks like more than a minute

Kenny K.O. challenges Ali to repeat her 900 pound wall sit for a video he would like to use on his *YouTube* channel,²⁵² and Ali accepts but cannot replicate her feat. Such users of social media sites who wish to become influencers must rely on their electracies to negotiate the participatory culture of Digital Thirdspace. Suspicious feats of strength (like Heba Ali's) create pushback by other influencers who also possess electracies needed to be honest players of the participatory

²⁵² <https://youtu.be/EkSc51fS4uw>

culture in Digital Thirdspace. In addition to Kenny K.O., the fitness influencer who tries to find other fitness influencers who use fake weights on their social media posts, comedian Joe Rogan has use Digital Thirdspace to publically call out comedian Carlos Mencia on stealing jokes. YouTuber “Buds131,” a former Navy Seal, uses the videos on his channel to expose men who lie about having been Navy Seals, and there are countless other electrates in Digital Thirdspace who make attempts to right the wrongs of some who mislead and misrepresent themselves on the Internet. And those with electracies know how to share their videos to the fullest by utilizing social media with *YouTube*:

While 1.5 billion people go to YouTube every month specifically to watch videos, Facebook users stumble upon videos among a friend’s vacation photos or in a news story. Because it’s easier to share content, videos like “Chewbacca Mom” tend to spread like wildfire on Facebook.²⁵³ (Wakabayashi)

²⁵³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/09/technology/facebook-video-stars.html?smid=pl-share>

Coda

In spite of the hazards that exist in Digital Thirdspace, the current situation surrounding American popular culture for Asian Americans and other Americans of color is better than before. This is not to downplay or ignore the challenges of Digital Thirdspace that were discussed in this conclusion chapter. But if one were to think of the options that exist in a buffet line, some of the food choices are healthy and others are not. The other alternative, in another food analogy, could be imagined in a *prix fixe* situation, “a fixed price charged for one of a set number of meals offered on a menu,”²⁵⁴ especially if the customer wasn’t pleased with any of the options in addition to the price paid for the meal.

But today, of the current selection of videos, shows, and new media texts, there are countless options for viewers to choose from. Additionally, the participatory cultures that coexist with these entertainment options on Digital Thirdspace allow for public spheres and solidarity building among people with the same interests. Most, if not all, of the information regarding old media and new media texts are at the fingertips of those who have the electracies to mine the Internet for such knowledge. The fact that these options are now available for public consumption (whereas in the past they were nearly impossible to access) allows the current generations of viewers of mainstream media to see Asian Americans normalized in popular culture. Scholars interested in the fields of Asian American digital rhetorics and the rhetoric of popular culture may now also utilize the riches of Digital Thirdspace to engage or re-engage with the new media texts that are relevant to their research aims.

²⁵⁴ <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/prix-fixe?s=t>

APPENDIX A - ALL INDUSTRY INSIDER BLURBS FOR *KAT LOVES LA* SECOND

SEASON INDIEGOGO CAMPAIGN

“Funny funny stuff. Really good writing.”

- David Shore (Creator of THE GOOD DOCTOR and Emmy Award winning writer of HOUSE)

"I laughed. I cried. I couldn't believe I was watching Youtube."

- Ethan Rieff (Writer/Showrunner, HBO's SLEEPER CELL, KUNG FU PANDA)

"An exceptional mix of writing, directing, and acting."

- Bobby Moresco (Academy Award Winning writer CRASH, MILLION DOLLAR BABY)

"I really stayed glued to it. Your characters were real and very relatable and your acting is very honest."

- Mei Melancon (Writer/Actor, "X-Men: The Last Stand", "The L Word")

**APPENDIX B - FAN COMMENTS FOR SEASON ONE OF *KAT LOVES LA* - SECOND
SEASON INDIEGOGO CAMPAIGN**

The feedback from both Asian and non-Asian communities has been astonishing:

“This is fantastic—probably the most relatable show I’ve seen in a long time as an Asian American.”

“Love this series so far. In my opinion, far better than some of the stuff on the air.”

“Brilliant. Wonderful actress.”

“Characters are immediately relatable and sincere.”

**APPENDIX C - ALL 10 COMMENTS FOR YOUTUBE'S "MARGARET CHO - ALL
AMERICAN GIRL, PILOT (2/2)"²⁵⁵**

LeeAnne in Japan 3 years ago (edited) I have never heard of this until FOB aired. No wonder since the show only lasted 6 months. But based off of this episode, I love it already. I want to see more!

Joshua S 2 years ago Omg this would of been the best nineties show

Nina Jansson 3 years ago Wow! This brings back childhood memories.

I remember something about Margaret and Grandma breaking in to steal a portrait of M and not being able to resist popping bubble wrap, ha, ha.

Grifter Wolf 3 years ago I really wouldn't have minded this show, it played on stereotypes for sure, but it had a heart to it, it's too bad the series was so short run.

Myong V 2 years ago i loved this show.... margaret cho. i love you.

cj wins 3 years ago It's a cool show. I like it.

Yukaleebuce Yakushimaru Hiroko 5 years ago I have watched all episodes. Margaret Cho best actress of the show. 19 years ago at the age of 25, Margaret starred in All - American Girl. US Korean American family comedy tv show. Margaret best actress, best character, excellent performance. Today, now 19 years later, the year 2013. Thank you Margaret.

carrotjuse 5 years ago The grandmother rocks! That was a great show. i wish it were still running.

Zachary Matthew James 6 years ago ... They seriously wouldn't let you put the last 48 seconds onto the other video?

²⁵⁵ As of June 21, 2018

NewtonDKC 6 years ago Ahhh, okay, didn't realize the pilot was in 2 parts...with :48 seconds making up part 2! Still, love Margaret Cho and Granma is hoot! Lol! :-)

**APPENDIX D - SELECT COMMENTS FOR YOUTUBE'S "THE TONIGHT SHOW
STARRING JOHNNY CARSON: 02/14/1979...JOHNNY YUNE"²⁵⁶**

David Y 1 year ago Johnny Yune, what a legend.

Eve Nam 1 year ago He was one if the most frequent guests in Carson but somehow it's hard to find videos of him on the show... Needs more!

Pedro Tweed 11 months ago I had the honor of teaching him Martial Arts. I remember when he was a singer and little by little started doing jokes

Rick Morrison 1 year ago I heard him on johnny carson one night and at the end of the show he sung a song in english i thought he had a beautiful voice been searching for that episode but can't find it anywhere if anyone knows i would very much like to hear and see that episode again !

Soon Lee 1 year ago 아 대단해요²⁵⁷

Jeongjun Park 1 month ago 벗 아 스목 템 애니웨이²⁵⁸

ㅋㅋㅋㅋㅋㅋㅋㅋㅋㅋㅋㅋㅋㅋㅋㅋ아 존나웃겨²⁵⁹

박응희 3 months ago 대한민국 최초 스탠드업 코메디언²⁶⁰

Seo Vincent Jean-yves 2 months ago Comedy was good back in the days. You could make people laugh without being rude, vulgar or aggressive. Those are the real shows.

june 6 months ago Poor Johnny Yune. He lost everything and now living in a small nursing home. He has alzheimer and doesn't remember anything.

²⁵⁶ As of June 21, 2018

²⁵⁷ "Ah this is excellent"

²⁵⁸ "But I smoke them anyway"

²⁵⁹ "hahahahahahahahahahahahahahaha ah fucking funny"

²⁶⁰ "Park Woong Hee" 3 months ago "The Republic of Korea's first ever stand up comedian"

Kane Alson 7 months ago (edited) Just saw him cited on Norm MacDonald's show with Bobby Lee as guest at minute 25. This guy is pretty funny, and what a set of pipes too.

Noa Baak 1 month ago It,s 2018 and he still surprises me.

**APPENDIX E - COMMENTS FOR YOUTUBE'S "JOHNNY YUNE DOES STAND-UP
ON THE 1987 NATIONAL EASTER SEAL TELETHON"²⁶¹**

Shoplifters United / Comedytron 1 year ago oh wow, he's very funny. the karate teacher joke was great.

Bure Godwin 1 year ago I wish I was related to this guy

Michael Steven Martin 2 years ago "The most important thing in life is broads...BROADS!"

-Grandfather in THEY CALL ME BRUCE

Robert Tsuhako 4 months ago He talks like the Asian Arnold Schwarzenegger!

Alan Katzer 3 years ago WGN-TV in Chicago/Cable and WGNX in Atlanta.

gotwa229 5 months ago I love his un-pc oneliners that wouldn't make it past the censors today. Even though he was a walking cliché, he was really the first of his kind back in the day. Other than Pat Morita, there were NO Asian Americans representing anywhere, let alone Koreans, let alone stand-up comedians on the Johnny Carson Show. Unfortunately, right now, he's destitute, living in a senior citizen's home suffering from Alzheimer's as of 12-25-2017. We don't know how much longer he'll have but he certainly will be remembered by an entire generation of Koreans and other Asian Americans who grew up in the U.S. in the 1970s and '80s

Sujeong Chun 1 year ago They call me Bruce is a sequel to they call me Bruce Rofl

김나경 2 months ago 성공해서 재산은다 어디로 갔을까?? 누구한테 물을까??²⁶²

²⁶¹ As of June 21, 2018

²⁶² "Kim Na Kyung" 2 months ago "He succeeded but where did all his wealth go?? Whom do I ask?"

**APPENDIX F - COMMENTS FOR YOUTUBE'S "DICK CLARK'S LIVE
WEDNESDAY SHOW 01 JOHNNY YUNE COMEDY PERFORMANCE"²⁶³**

Terry 3 years ago (edited) Amazing man to perform English talk show after coming to US to study English not so young.

Name 3 years ago +Terry Ko Of course it's a great deal for an immigrant to be on TV back in the days but at the time, he'd been living there for over 20 years. That's how he understood both cultures and what Americans would find funny.

Terry 3 years ago If you study another language that does not share roots with your native language after certain age, even if it's long time, it will not be so comfortable for you to speak it in place like National TV Show.

Angry JO 2 years ago +Terry true. big claps for this johnny fella

Dallas Smith 4 years ago Johnny Yune is the funniest comedian ever!

360Warlock ! 3 years ago I still call him Bruce

charlton myers 2 years ago +Derek God - Iz - illah James ditto

Bigd53224 4 years ago awesome throwback!! gosh i remember this like it was yesterday thanks for the upload friend!!

Trevor Estrada 4 months ago I think it was Bobby Lee who I first heard of him from

RD Policarpio 6 months ago Kojap HAHAHAHA

gocolago33 4 years ago I still call him Bruce.

Frank M 2 months ago He should definitely make a come back!!

²⁶³ As of June 21, 2018

Sang Chun 5 months ago He was one of the best performer of that era.

APPENDIX G - IMAGES USED IN RYAN HIGA'S 2017 "CAN ASIANS BE SEXY"

VLOG EPISODE



Figure 1

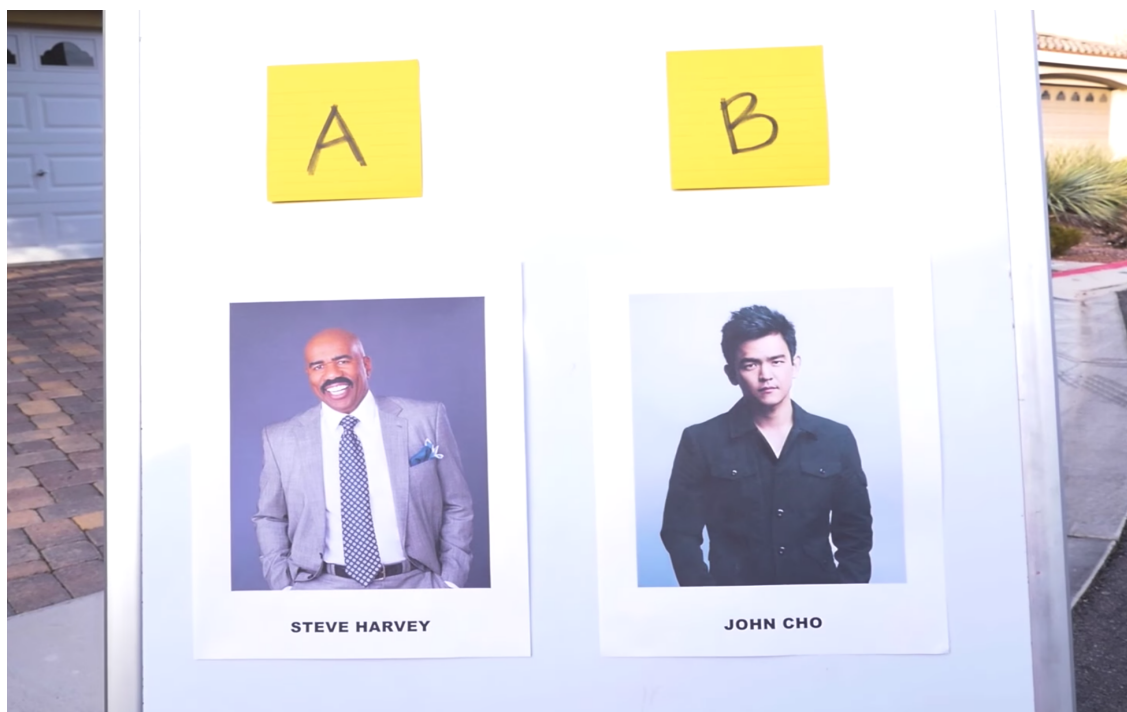


Figure 2

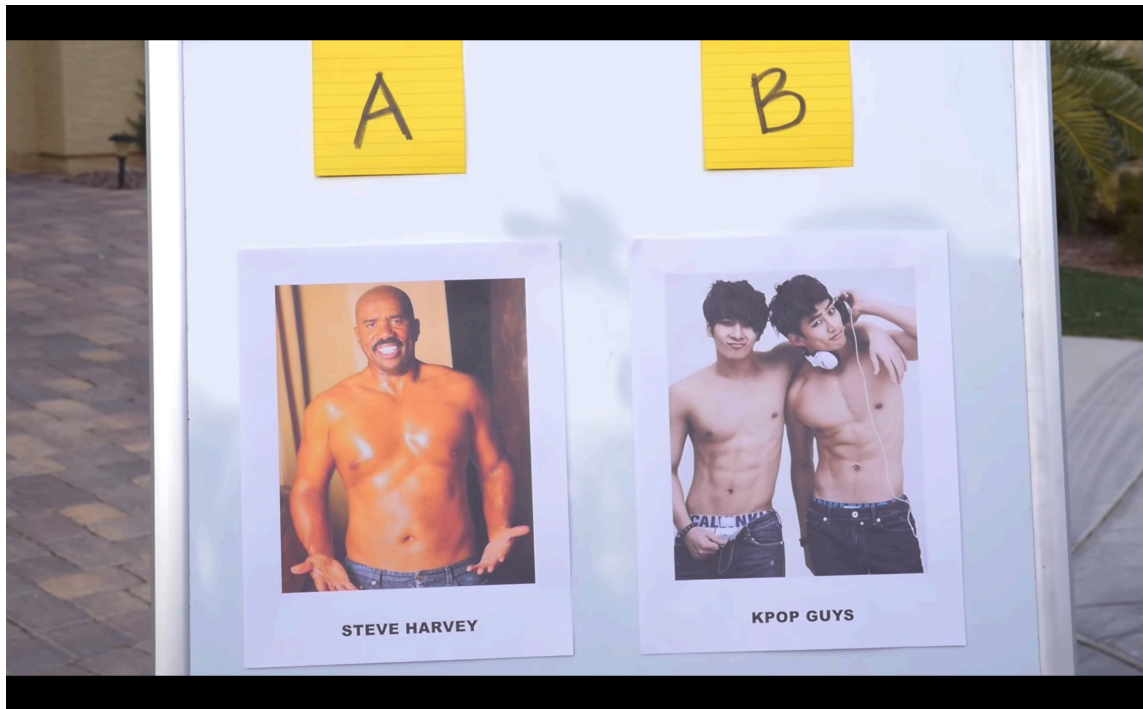


Figure 3

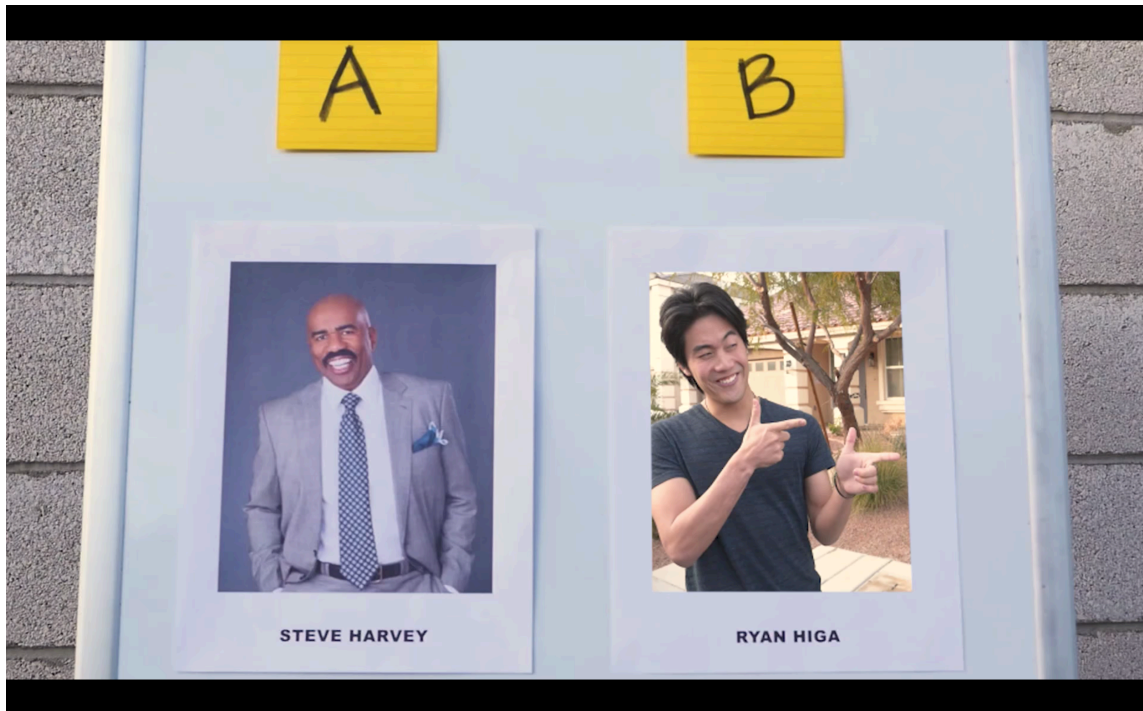


Figure 4

**APPENDIX H - BANNER IMAGES USED IN HOW I INFILTRATED A WHITE PRIDE
FACEBOOK GROUP AND TURNED IT INTO 'LGBT SOUTHERNERS FOR
MICHELLE OBAMA'**



Figure 1

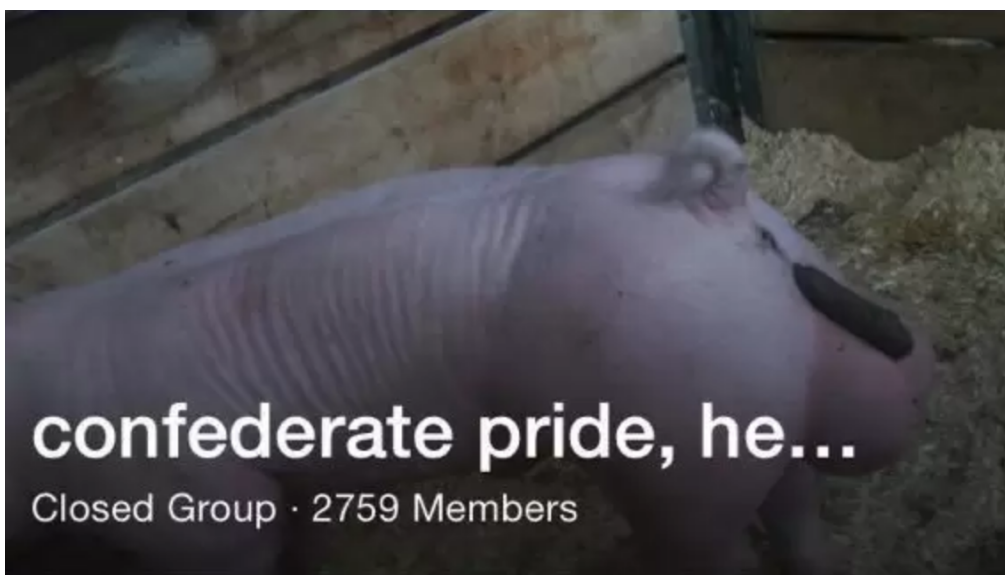


Figure 2

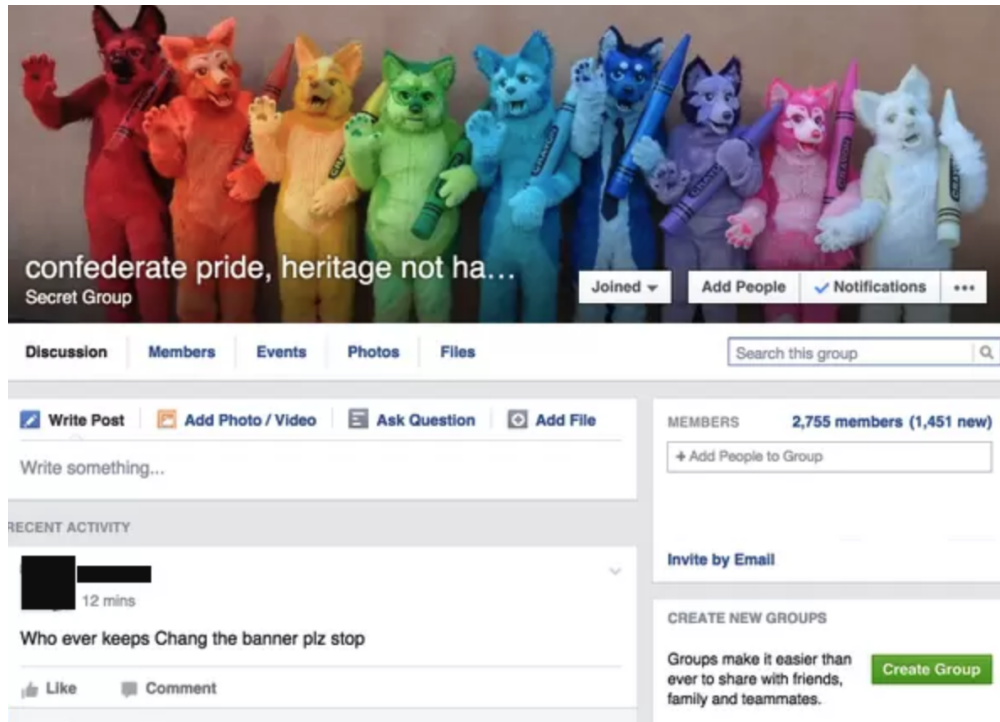


Figure 3

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²⁶⁴ "Bangtan sonyeondan" which translates to "Bulletproof Boy Scouts."

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