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11

RIP Gangnam Style¹

Brian Hu

"Gangnam Style" happened. Past tense. Just months after the video featuring Korean rapper Psy broke out internationally in late summer 2012, American commentators were calling it done. On September 21, *E!* Online dubbed it "officially over" (Boone 2012). On October 1, *Time* said the "meme" was "killed" (Carbone 2012). CNN Tech proclaimed October 12 "the day 'Gangnam Style' died" (Bellini 2012). Even Psy himself said that his New Year's Eve performance on the popular *Dick Clark's Rockin' Eve* program was "the ending of 'Gangnam Style'" (Wood 2012). In every instance, the cause of death was overexposure. And in every instance, the track, the video, and the dance lived on.

The desire to see "Gangnam Style" dead, to call it the best/worst song of 2012 in order to taper off an end date, even to associate the song with the Mayan apocalypse (Shepherd 2012) and the actual death of forty-six-year-old Eamonn Kilbride, who allegedly died doing the "Gangnam" dance at an office party (Hall 2012), stands in stark contrast to a Korean entertainment industry and Korean government doing everything it could to keep "Gangnam Style" alive, all while shrugging their shoulders over how it was born to begin with. "Gangnam Style" as a national-institutional campaign, to use JungBong Cho's distinction earlier in this volume, caught on quickly, from state-sponsored international megaevents like the Gangnam-styled Busan International Film Festival in October, to world-stage photo ops like Psy's meeting and dance with United Nations secretary general and fellow South Korean Ban Ki-moon. The questions of why Psy blew up, what in him appealed to the rest of the world, and how to keep him—and indeed all of K-pop—from being an international one-hit wonder, began to vex the Ko-

rean entertainment industry. Did this seemingly uncalculated pop cultural phenomenon, in overexposing itself to the world, essentially kill Hallyu's dreams of mainstream success in the West? How would the traditional recipes for success, like those observed by Roald Malingkay in an earlier chapter in this volume, have to be rewritten, or was Psy simply the gargantuan exception that proved that there were no rules?

The nervous ways in which these questions have been lodged and debated in the wake of Psy's unprecedented international popularity, as well as the time-sensitive need to ride his coattails via viral video parodies or special guest appearances, speak to everyone's knowledge that fads have expiration dates, that pop cultural explosions leave nothing but dust. Perhaps because of the foreignness of "Gangnam Style" itself, or perhaps because the public was weary of what happens to Macarena, Running Man, and Dougie when they've overstayed their welcome, Psy and his success were never taken as anything but a trend in the United States, even as they time and again defied death. As a Korean-born entertainer who wore his otherworldliness on his sleeve, Psy is in many ways an extreme example of what Sue Collins (2008, 89) has called the "dispensable celebrity" of contemporary reality-TV culture in the United States, whereby outsiders are cast into the mainstream, only to be discarded with a "temporal flexibility" that audiences fully anticipate. It's precisely that imminent expiry, accentuated by the perceived alienness of Psy and the "Gangnam Style" video itself, that accelerated so much creativity, debate, explanation, grievance, suspicion, anxiety, and celebration in late 2012. Before it inevitably vanishes, exploit it, mimic it, dissect it as an allegory for our troubles. Caught in the middle of it all were Asian Americans, a group already marginalized and made invisible in the American mainstream, suddenly lumped together with the ubiquitous Psy and his looming disappearance.

In hindsight, it's easy to pinpoint the qualities that made "Gangnam Style" such an object of fascination and idolatry. Blogs, newspaper articles, even other YouTube videos have all offered their explanations. However, given the notoriously formula-driven mind-set of the Korean pop industry and its calculated strategy for breaking out onto American televisions and concert venues, it would have been nearly impossible to predict that Psy, a portly thirty-four-year-old rapper riding on seemingly excessively local references to Korean leisure culture would have been the one to do it when the sculpted Rain and the choreographed Wonder Girls couldn't. In fact, Psy's presence in the Korean entertainment industry has from the beginning run against the traditional stakeholders of Hallyu and K-pop,

incensing governmental bodies, record labels, and independent watchdog groups for obscene lyrics and the promotion of lifestyles deemed inappropriate for youth. He was known as a double dropout from American universities (Boston University, Berklee College of Music), a pot-smoker, and a military conscription-dodger. Like many acts in Korean pop, Psy was famous for distinctive, expressive dancing, but with a dose of mockery: an excess of energy, a swagger to the point of exhaustion, and as flaunted in his "Right Now" (2010) video, a chubby man in a muscle suit looking deeply into the camera daring us to look away. If traditional pop mass-produces desires, Psy has us desire his mass. But the joke's neither on him nor the viewer, as it is in a parody like Weird Al's "Fat" (1988). In Psy's videos, the singer's agile, throbbing round body is always juxtaposed with the carbon-copied ones: the lean b-boys and the supermodel-shaped vixens. And it's Psy who's the leader of the pack, the spark for celebration or dancing in the streets, the pied piper of the pop wannabes. The joke's on the K-pop formula itself: behind every beautiful girl or boy group is a decked-out chubby thirtysomething with the fastest, freshest, and most fabulous moves of all.

With 2012's "Gangnam Style," Psy's leadoff single to his sixth album, the joke is extended to Seoul's glitzy Gangnam District, its horse-owners, Benz-drivers, and yoga-practitioners—and the sexy ladies who love them. It's the perfect target for the image-driven Psy. The song's video begins with a shot of a plane and a fawning woman reflected on Psy's sunglasses; luxury surrounds but doesn't faze him, for he's sipping drinks under an umbrella on the beach, as revealed to us by the camera that suddenly zooms to a wider view of his surroundings, a comedic trope repeated four more times later in the video to juxtapose the portly Psy with what culture tells us should be "luxury living." Prancing Psy + Seoul World Trade Center. Creepy Psy + man relaxing in spa. Throughout, Psy struts with an uncommon force, arms flailing and feet bouncing just a bit harder than any other dancer in the shot; he's both the embodiment of everything over the top about the Gangnam lifestyle, as well as the only character in the video who seems to self-consciously appreciate that it's all a performance. These moments are punctuated by moments of environmental excess—a wind machine blowing sticky white material, a spontaneous combustion, slow-motion seduction—that seem the culmination of Psy's exploding energy. The pulsating images of what cultural critic Hua Hsu (2012) calls the video's "vigorous euphoria" are matched by a song whose structure seems designed to thrust the listener from toe-tapping joy to arm-waving bliss to body-shaking delirium and finally to chant-along numbness. The song has

an elaborate density (“wall-of-buzzsaw,” according to Hsu) that ignites and cools with robotic precision, and is textured by Psy’s buzz-phrases (“oppa Gangnam style,” “hey, sexy lady!”) and comically assured rap-boasting.

For the non-Korean-comprehending audience, Psy’s lyrics of upscale romancing are indecipherable, but his cocksure verbal declamation manages to communicate enough for most international listeners. But nothing seemed to better express everything/nothing, while also catapulting “Gangnam Style” into the stratosphere, than the video’s signature dance move. Early in the video, Psy is seen marching down a stable, surrounded by horses. He then breaks into a gallop, legs arched open and wrists overlapping and bobbing as if controlling the reins of a horse. In a later variation of the gallop in the video, one arm is extended upward moving in a lasso motion, while the other is horizontal and held toward the chest. The “horse dance,” as Psy calls the move in an address at Oxford University (Oxford Union 2012), is performed with a determined seriousness (aided by Psy’s ever-present sunglasses), if not a manic seriousness, again juxtaposing the ludicrous with the self-important luxury symbolized by the Gangnam District. Beyond mere mockery though, the horse dance is captivating as a sort of glorious mindless movement. Formally, the move has a simplicity and novelty that invites imitation, which is punctuated by the video’s ending in which two lines of ordinary people (a chef, boxer, college graduate, cosplayer, among many others) join Psy in the dance. And yet its awkwardness and unusualness make the dance difficult to perfect, let alone to perform with Psy’s swagger, as the video’s ending group dance also reveals.

On July 15, 2012, the “Gangnam Style” video was released on the “officialpsy” YouTube channel. The video helped make the song a sensation in Korea, where it peaked on the Mnet and Gaon charts by the end of July for record label YG Entertainment. After gaining traction among K-pop fans around the world, the video was shared on several notable American websites between July 28 and August 3: Reddit, Gawker, Dailly Beast, and finally, the sites for CNN and the *Wall Street Journal*. Fueling the excitement during those days were notable blog and Twitter endorsements from music celebrities as diverse as former British pop-idol Robbie Williams (“TRY WATCHING THIS AND NOT SMILING I DARE YOU”), American opera-pop star Josh Groban (“It’s a Gangnam Style world, we’re just living in it. Amazing video”), and American hip-hop mainstay T-Pain (“Words cannot even describe how amazing this video is”). These early notices, essentially social media “shares” on a mainstream platform, expressed mostly the kind



Fig. 12. Psy introducing the horse dance. (From <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9bZkp7q19f0>.)

of hyperbolic statements that get other shares moving: “Best music video of the year?” asked Gawker (Zimmerman 2012); “Quite possibly the most incredible music video ever made,” joked The High Definite (Endswell 2012). Enabled by Facebook shares and Twitter retweets, the “Gangnam Style” video hit 10 million views by the end of this original blast of international notice.

In August and September, the video entered full acceleration mode. Early August saw the video receive a remarkable million views per day. By the end of September, it was receiving over 10 million daily views. Psy made his first U.S. appearance at a Los Angeles Dodgers baseball game on August 20. On August 22, Psy appeared on VH1’s *Big Morning Buzz Live* and more significantly, on September 10, he appeared on the high-profile *Ellen DeGeneres Show* alongside Britney Spears. In both television appearances, Psy’s on-screen role was to provide simple instructions about how to perform the horse dance, turning fascination with the dance into an incitement to mimicry. Not that the move needed the help, but Psy turned the attention to the viewer, literally asking Ellen DeGeneres’ audience to stand up and try out the gallop.

Meanwhile, YouTube users were doing exactly that, posting videos of themselves doing the dance. Possibly the first to do so were Canadian expats in Korea Simon and Martina Stawski, who run the English-language

Korean culture site EatYourKimchi (2012), and who posted a parody video on July 23. Soon, parodies were shared as vivaciously as Psy's original video and became phenomena in themselves, from a 10-ft August 26 video of lifeguards dancing in and around a suburban swimming pool (Roaboot 2012),² to a perky August 30 reenactment featuring the duck mascot of the University of Oregon (Goducksdotcom 2012), to a September 1 video featuring babies (including one in Psy's signature blue tuxedo jacket) and their dancing, diaper-disposing, carriage-pushing mothers (Whatsupelle 2012). Many of these early parodies took advantage of the "style" of Psy's video, adapting the juxtaposition comedy format to satirize seemingly any lifestyle possible, in these cases suburban swimming, college masocing, and yuppie parenting. "Gangnam Style" provided professions, localities, and other identity groups a formula for self-deprecation and self-affirmation before a hungry, international online viewership. In the early months, it seemed that every day saw yet another viral parody, which then did its part to turn those not yet aware back to Psy's original video, adding to its skyrocketing pageviews. Also doing its part was Psy's own mid-September U.S. media tour, which kicked off with the *Ellen* appearance, followed by spots on *TMZ*, NBC's *Today* show, *Saturday Night Live*, and *Chelsea Lately*. On September 20, Guinness World Records crowned "Gangnam Style" the "most liked" video in YouTube history (Barrett 2012). The next day, entertainment site *E!* called "Gangnam Style" "officially over" (Boone 2012).

October to December 2012 could be called the phenomenon's "officially over" months, by which one could mean the months in which timing, momentum, and the sense of the inevitable fall were essential to keeping "Gangnam Style" relevant on the air and online. TV parodies and appearances had to be prime time (*Glee*, *Dancing with the Stars*, *South Park*, Country Music Association Awards), and not just daytime and late night. Celebrity mentions had to be of the highest order—Justin Bieber, Shah Rukh Khan, Cristiano Ronaldo, Ai Weiwei, Ban Ki-moon—to warrant a retweet. With multiple parodies appearing online daily, they were the ones by celebrity reenactment artists (like the Cebu Dancing Innates from the Philippines) that rose to the surface. Suddenly, creativity and cute parodies of other life "styles" were not enough; there needed to be timeliness and a sense of urgency. The November U.S. election, for instance, provided fodder for parody and Internet buzz. Late-night host Jay Leno used the video to mock Mitt Romney's difficulty appealing to young voters at the Republic National Convention (Tonightshownc Aug. 2012). The comedy site College Humor released a video entitled "Mitt Romney

Style," which lampoons the candidate by comparing his elite background (and his wife's penchant for equestrian sports) to Psy's Gangnam (Collegehumor 2012). On the day of the final debate between the candidates, animated Obama and Romney engaged in a virtual "dance-off" in another video (ItsOnBTV 2012). Finally, in the most urgent of references, on Election Day President Obama told a New Hampshire radio DJ that he'd seen the video and "can do that move" (Pendrich 2012).

That Obama's public statement was national news was not just a testament to the video's popularity at the highest levels of society. Rather, it was a symbol of the video's utility and short-term exploitability, which had already permeated the market in the form of digital downloads, video games, and Halloween costumes. References to the video in shares and tweets were no longer of the "greatest video ever" variety. The video that was once introduced in news articles and blog entries with the enthusiasm of "In case you missed it . . ." (Thunderstix 2012) was now introduced with the knowing sarcasm of "Unless you've been living under a rock . . ." (*New York Post* 2012). Not only was the Internet teeming with "Gangnam," users were self-conscious that the saturation point was near. Nobody's under the rock. It's over. Past tense. And of course these proclamations of the video's death took on a momentum of their own. If the early references to the video were a race to see who could mention the video first, the later ones were a race to see who could first declare its time of death or scapegoat the celebrity performance or amateur video that killed off the last modicum of cool the video still seemed to possess. There was communal pleasure to be had in bemoaning the video's omnipresence, especially against the looming deadline after which even bemoaning would be considered old news. The video rode this postmortem pleasure all the way to one billion views by December 21, well ahead of its nearest competition, making it the most-viewed video in the history of YouTube.

What has gone relatively unremarked is the extent to which Gangnam stopped being just a social media phenomenon, and even not just a traditional media phenomenon, but a real-life one. In these later months, the impetus to hop online and search "Gangnam Style" on YouTube was often in response to a real-world incident. Grandchildren would show their bemused (and non YouTube) grandparents the video that inspired the dance they were doing during Thanksgiving dinner, for instance. Parties would have to show the video to rabbis and priests to explain what they were going to do during bar mitzvahs and weddings. Tens of thousands of sports fans were introduced, however unwittingly, to football players' horse-riding touchdown celebrations or to the "Gangnam Cam" at Phila-

delphia 76ers home games. Suddenly, the crowning moment of Hallyu 2.0 became a bizarre, nontechnological, and to some extent de-ethnicized, spectacle. The funny-sexy horse-riding was performed as a ritualistic collective dance in moments of religious celebration and at all-American sporting rituals. Offline, it gave families something to talk/dance about across generations. Flash mobs wove the dance and song into the fabric of daily life; just beneath the surface of shopping, strolling, and going to school was the possibility of a “Gangnam Style” breakout. Corporations, nonprofits, and business associations would recruit horse dancers for their events to seem “with it” (and not under a rock) or just to get employees, clients, and supporters “going” to Psy’s catchy beats. In this environment of being “caught up” to what the kids were doing, going online to see the video was a means of being coeval with the offline world.

There’s more to coevality, though, than just keeping up with the latest fads. The online and offline mimicry (or “reverse mimicry” if we heed Homi Bhabha’s colonial interpretation of the concept) of the horse dance reveals discrepancies of power that go beyond cool kids versus square adults. “Gangnam Style” is a perceptively Korean production, Gangnam is a district in Seoul, and Psy was born Park Jae-sang in Korea. While Korean pop culture has grown in popularity among diasporic, niche, and cult audiences in places like the United States, it is far from accepted in the mainstream, just as most of contemporary Asian culture more broadly has not found favor in mainstream American television, film, and music. Is the appetite for “Gangnam Style” then a realization that America has to “catch up” to Korea in the realm of music video amazingsness? Are the American parodies and reenactments a way of mimicking the new cultural torchbearer?

These suggestions, while exciting for K-pop fans and stakeholders in the Korean national-institutional campaign to promote Korean culture internationally, don’t adequately account for the ways in which the idea of “catching up” in a twenty-four-hour newsfeed culture is precisely the game itself, and that musical novelties and viral stars are only valuable inasmuch as their expiration—the proverbial fifteen minutes of fame—is anticipated by all so we can make room for the next act. Sue Collins (2008, 95) writes of the “temporal flexibility” of the dispensable celebrity, and the way in which the industry itself has structured the new second-tier stars’ rise and fall into a larger system of celebrity scarcity. Collins describes the new star system’s stratification between A-list celebrities and lesser ones that come from the pool of amateurs, reality show participants, and outsiders. The system thrives on the sense of “anyone-can-make-it” democ-

racy (which includes racial/ethnic diversity) embodied by the lesser celebrities, but by constructing them as inherently inferior to the A-listers, is able to maintain the scarcity of “true” celebrities and thus keep their values high. The quick-paced revolving door of the dispensable celebrity keeps the star system intact while producing the illusion of access and diversity.

In the case of Psy, mimicry was one of the mainstream’s strategies for accentuating his novelty and, consciously or not, keeping him at the lower strata of celebrity, alongside other amateurs and song-and-dance oddballs. In so many of Psy’s early American TV appearances, he is brought onstage to teach the celebrity host how to do the horse dance and thus take entertainment value away from himself. As he teaches Britney Spears and Ellen DeGeneres the steps on TV, it’s clear who the “real” celebrities are, because they’re the ones who get applause for effort, whereas Psy is the one to bring external interest to familiar, preexisting celebrity. The true purpose of Psy’s appearance became apparent in an unanticipated on-air aside. Before Psy enters the scene, DeGeneres reminds the audience that Britney Spears had tweeted that she wanted to learn the dance. The host then surprises Spears by bringing Psy out from behind the curtain for the purpose of fulfilling Spears’s wishes. The three of them line up and Ellen is giddy for the instruction to begin. Unexpectedly, Psy interjects and says, “By the way, can I introduce myself? Not just dancing.” DeGeneres agrees, at which point Psy looks to the audience and says, “I’m Psy from Korea, how are you?” (TheEllenshow 2012). By speaking, in confident English, when he was expected merely to work, Psy exposed the existing celebrity stratification, and perhaps even threatened it. And yet, through the show’s mimicry games that followed, Psy was immediately reduced to mere trainer to the stars.

At other times, the mainstream did not even need Psy’s physical presence to bolster the “real” A-list through “Gangnam Style.” During an appearance on Jay Leno’s *Tonight Show*, Hugh Jackman, in town to promote the musical *Les Misérables*, boasted to Leno that Psy had taught him how to do the dance, and he proceeds to demonstrate it for the host and for the audience (TonightshowNBC Dec. 2012). Though they joke that Jackman does the dance incorrectly, Jackman gets the applause—for effort or for demonstrating that he’s “with it,” however awkwardly and even self-deprecatingly. Jackman’s performance of “catching up” to “Gangnam Style” was thus another high-profile reminder that Psy was a novelty to be subsumed and discarded so that the real celebrities could go on doing what they do best.

It’s tempting to make the analogy that, as the “real celebrity” is revealed

to be in the position of power, so is the “real race” of American celebrity revealed. Psy’s Koreanness and Asianness is discarded, as is his budding celebrity, when the dance is subsumed by established white (and sometimes black) celebrities and Psy is marginalized from the stage altogether. As “Gangnam Style” is mimicked throughout the United States, it becomes increasingly perceived online, on TV, and in real life as “transcending race”—that is, turning white. The lyrics may be predominantly Korean, but most fans have no problem with “*oppa Gangnam style*” or “hey, sexy lady!” while they do a “universal” dance that even the president of the United States claims he can do. Most revealing of the shifting national/racial identity of the phenomenon is the aftermath of Psy’s past “anti-American” comments, discovered in an early December by the media. As those reports detail, in 2004, Psy told a Korean audience, in Korean, “Kill those fucking Yankees who have been torturing Iraqi captives,” among other incendiary comments. Surprisingly, after a quick apology, Psy escaped further scrutiny by the American media and public. But it could be that, by December, the United States had already annexed “Gangnam Style” and in Americans’ minds Psy was already discarded or at least on his way out as a one-hit wonder.

But in fact, the Internet was ready to racialize “Gangnam Style” when tempted. Most notoriously, following Psy’s live performance of the song with MC Hammer (a brilliant pairing in celebration of celebrity dispensability) at the American Music Awards on November 18, the twitter-verse erupted with tweets like “I’m pretty sure this is called the American Music Awards #gobacktoasia” and “this is an AMERICAN MUSIC AWARD show not fucking chink music awards” (Public Shaming 2012). Comments like these, as well as their less overtly offensive variations, have triggered defensive positions from critics, especially Asian American ones, who suspect that Psy’s mainstream popularity stems from a desire to see Asian masculinity as uncool, clownish, and nonthreatening.³ In these critiques, Psy is compared to caricatures ranging from Mickey Rooney in *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* to William Hung on *American Idol* to Ken Jeong in *The Hangover*. For these critics, many of whom actually admit to enjoying the song, Psy is not just one in a revolving door of dispensable celebrities, but also the latest in the revolving door of stereotypical Asians. In these analyses, the death of “Gangnam Style” only means another one is just around the corner. Other Asian American critics, who have chosen not to enter the chorus against what some see as racism, have responded instead by ignoring the phenomenon for as long as they could get away with it. The anonymous blogger at Ask a Korean! (2012) wrote about his attempt to wait out

the storm: “The Korean tried. He really tried to avoid the fad. He thought this was going to blow over in a few days, and everyone will feel a bit silly afterward. But no.” Phil Yu from the ever-popular site Angry Asian Man also quipped, “I’ve been trying to avoid all things ‘Gangnam Style’” (Sept. 2012) and forced himself to do the “obligatory ‘Gangnam Style’ post” a whole month after the video was first posted (Aug. 2012). These critics mistimed the end of “Gangnam Style.” As is the case with so much pesky “Asian” culture that calls on Asian American commentators as “ethnic informants,” it’s sometimes impossible to wait it out given the aggressive incitement to discourse that is race and meme culture in the United States. For those Americans who have relatives that look like rotund Korean troublemakers, or who might be called “Psy” in the schoolyard just as they’ve been called “Long Duk Dong,” “Daniel-San,” “Jackie Chan,” and “Yao Ming” in the past, this spectacular, hilarious, heart-pumping, and thoroughly amazing track couldn’t die sooner.

And yet there was a steady legion of Asian Americans who boldly took to the Internet to embrace “Gangnam Style”—albeit on their own terms. Their medium was not the blog, but video. They didn’t try to “beat” the temporality of viral videos the way commentators like Phil Yu tried to do. Instead, they saw in the video’s goofy song-of-the-hour charm an opportunity to capture a quirky view of life in all of its ephemerality. If more jaded bloggers chose to wait out the storm of viral-ness’s short-term fever, these Asian Americans jumped on the bandwagon, steered it, and indulged in the speed of it all. Ironically, one of the first “Gangnam Style” parody videos produced primarily by Asian Americans was made on the occasion of an event that traditionally symbolizes the opposite of temporary and dispensable frivolity: a marriage.

In late August 2012, as “Gangnam Style” was gaining traction but before Psy’s *Ellen* appearance, San Francisco Bay Area couple Stephani Nguyen and Jeremy Ueno were in search of a song that could be the basis of a video celebrating their marriage and their wedding party. A mere week before their September 2 wedding, they stumbled upon Psy’s “Gangnam Style,” which they noticed had over 15 million views on YouTube.⁴ Though neither of them were K-pop fans, they immediately picked “Gangnam Style.” In collaboration with Asian American Bay Area production company Lightbulb Videography, the couple concocted a plan to parody Psy’s video in various locations throughout San Francisco. As seen in their final video, the locations are casually ordinary: a kid’s park, a trolley, a parking lot (LightbulbEnt Sept. 10, 2012). Meanwhile, the settings are populated by the effortless multiculturalism of the wedding party and the ran-

dom bystanders drawn by and into the horse dancing. In short, this is a self-conscious take on “San Francisco Style,” celebrated with vivacity and a taste for mischief. The video incorporates a “flash mob” mentality, embracing an aesthetic of stolen locations, rubbernecking passersby, and a mundaneness shattered by music and dance. In the context of Asian American representation, Stephani, Jeremy, and their friends are no stereotypes. They are simultaneously ordinary and spectacular. In their struts, gestures, and stolen Psy-isms, they seize the opportunity to play the role of a star—even a fifteen-minute one from a production culture of “temporal flexibility.” The video seems to acknowledge that a wedding is none other than the one day in an average person’s life to be a superstar, referencing a fleeting sensation like Psy doesn’t undermine the convincingness of their real-life stardom, but rather propels it to furious heights in a flash of jubilation that everyone can immediately feel and identify thanks to Psy’s popularity.

For the group of friends that made up the wedding party, the production of the “Gangnam Style” parody video was also a celebration of friendship in an era of time-space compression. Only five of the ten members of the wedding party were based in the San Francisco area, so the virality and shareability of the YouTube video gave it legs in the week the team had to prepare remotely. The video was shot on two days: four hours on the Thursday before the Sunday wedding, and just before the wedding itself. Wardrobe was bring-your-own-ridiculousness and the actions were largely improvised on the spot. The video’s acceleration as an Internet phenomenon in many ways was mirrored in the speed and giddiness of the shoot. Beyond just borrowing the original video’s high-speed antics, the wedding video also borrowed its exploding momentum as a beacon of collective ecstasy. It’s an elation that apparently quickly brought the entire wedding party together in the spirit of collaboration. As groom Jeremy Ueno puts it, “If anything, [the video] symbolizes that my wife and friends are a lot of fun and we are lucky to have these great people in our lives that would travel across the country to be with us on this special day and dress up and act stupid in front of the camera.” The corollary to Ueno’s statement is that not only is the wedding a special occasion for friends to all be together, but that they will all soon be separate again too. For these friends, the wedding is a temporary state of bliss that the videographers strove to capture in all of its energy, and Psy’s “Gangnam Style” was the perfect crystallization of that momentary excitement. As evidenced by the wedding video and the circumstances of its production, the fleetingness of “Gangnam Style” gave many of those who mimicked Psy’s original video a ver-



Fig. 13. Stephani, Jeremy, and friends doing the horse dance in San Francisco. (From <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0yr7FW1S5e0>.)

acular with which to memorialize the present—to celebrate it, laugh at it, and then let it go so as to clear the way for the future. The birth of Stephani+Jeremy must be at the cost of the inevitable but glorious death of “Gangnam Style.” R.I.P. “Gangnam Style.”

NOTES

1. In February 2013, “R.I.P. Gangnam Style” was the “Top Comment” on several extremely popular “Harlem Shake” YouTube videos.
2. The posting of the video led to the termination of the lifeguards. After the media reported their firing, the lifeguards were reinstated.
3. For instance, see Anderson 2012; refresh_daemon 2012; Shigematsu 2012; Lu 2012; and Liu 2012.
4. Details about the background of the production come from Jeremy Ueno, email message to author, June 25, 2013. See also LightbulbEnt (September 14, 2012).

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