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We Reveal Ourselves to Ourselves: The New Communication Media in the Philippines

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ABSTRACT

The cellphone and the Internet are very significantly changing the communication landscape in the Philippines. Concomitantly, the new media are transforming social relationships in new and unexpected ways. With the new media, not only can Filipinos more easily communicate with their relatives and friends abroad; they also have new possibilities for revealing important aspects of self-identity. Mobiles are the most important new technology introduced in the Philippines and their effects far exceed most expectations. Even relationships with the recently dead are being affected by this technology. Moreover, the new media are also transforming older communication media, helping them penetrate and influence increasing aspects of everyday life. While the emancipatory possibilities of the new communication media are promising, new divisions and inequalities are also arising. Access to communication is emerging as one of the major sources of inequality.

Keywords: New media, technology-mediated relationships, virtual reality, discursive intimacy, self and other

TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIETY

The relationship between technology and society has always been problematic. On the one hand, all technology is a product of its contextual culture but on the other, technology threatens to bring about societal change, often in unpredictable ways. The invention of mechanical printing enabled the wide circulation of the bible resulting in a religious revival in Western Europe that eventually produced not only science and secularism but also developed capitalism. According to Weber (1930), changes in the inner-world brought about by the Protestant ethic ultimately created the conditions for modern capitalism. This technological revolution ushered in a renewed spiritual awakening as well as its eventual replacement by natural science. What started out as a new form of reflectivity made possible by the bible resulted in inter-subjective as well as objective structures known as modernity.

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The rapid spread of literacy made possible by printing challenged the former hegemony of the Church, initially through the Protestant Reformation. Later, the rise of secular intellectuals and science provided a new perspective emphasizing the possibilities of the future rather than the constraints of tradition. The progressive rationalization of social life marked the triumph of science and technology. Religion, hitherto a public truth, was consigned to private belief (Pertierra, 1997).

The development and use of technology is sometimes unexpected and difficult to predict. The first typewriter was built by Pellegrino Turri in 1808 for his blind friend Countess Carolina Fantoni. Little did he predict that this machine would initiate a revolution in office practices, including the provision for female employment. The telephone was invented largely for business purposes but was quickly adopted by housewives to keep in touch with dispersed kin. The emotional closeness of the western family was preserved using the telephone (de Sola, 1977).

Initially, telephone companies employed young men to work in the switchboards; the world of business was after all the domain of men. But it soon became obvious that boys and young men were too indiscreet about private communications. In contrast, the growing acceptability of female employment provided the ideal workforce that required high levels of discernment. Telephonists and secretaries became the domain of women in a rapidly industrializing world (de Sola, 1977).

The mobile was obviously intended for talking but in the Philippines people mostly use it for writing. This is a good example of the complex interaction between technological design, user preference and cultural orientations. Moreover, as Fortunati (2007) argues, users are not only customers; they are also citizens, consumers, worshippers, workers, parents, teenagers, etc. The social construction of technology is the interplay of all these factors – technical design, user preferences, cultural choices and serendipity.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF TECHNOLOGY IN THE PHILIPPINES

The history of modern technology in the Philippines presents interesting paradoxes. Most modern technologies became available in the country soon after their invention in the West. But despite this technological acceptance, the Philippines has remained a poor and conservative society. Why has technology not produced the social transformation generally associated with it in other countries?

With the arrival of the steamboat in 1849, telegraph in1876, railway in 1888, telephone in 1890, motorcar in 1900 and electric tram in 1905, the possibility for launching the country into the age of modern communications and transportation became possible. Most of these technologies had only recently been invented in the West and their

effects were quickly felt in societies that had accepted them. In Asia, Japan was among the most quickly transformed by these technologies (Pertierra, 2003).

Unfortunately, the Philippines failed to take advantage of the opportunities these technologies offered. Most of their benefits were limited to the metropolitan area and failed to stimulate the development of the general economy. Instead, they often confirmed, widened or solidified social divisions. The motor car, telephone and air travel became the hallmarks of privilege rather than the necessities of modern living. Rather than stimulating social change, the new technologies symbolized the might of imperial Manila. National hero Jose Rizal recognized the significance of the telephone but used it to write a farce rather than argue for its political possibilities (Pertierra, 2003).

Modern communications technology requires less infrastructural support than road or rail transport. The telephone was introduced in 1890 but its advantages were not developed. While film (1897), radio (1922) and television (1953) quickly became popular, they mainly provided escapist entertainment rather than the basis for new social and cultural perspectives (Pertierra, et al., 2002). Indeed, the mass media became an extension of political domination best exemplified during the Marcos period.

Communication media, while potentially providing a basis for an informed citizenry, can also become a main instrument of state power. The control of information has always been a way of managing society. Censorship and other means of indoctrination are preferred by most governments over attempts to protect freedom of expression. Commercial interests are also likely to collude with the interests of the state.

The global condition exacerbates this tension between society and technology since technical advances can now rapidly spread to cultures far removed from their origins. Technology always responds to its cultural environment but it may also reflect trans-cultural and universal features. Technologies may express the *zeitgeist* and hence may be described as *apparatgeist* (Katz & Aakhus, 2002). Such claims may be made of mobile phones, not only because of their rapid spread globally but also because of their common enabling effects. They not only reflect the times but also usher corresponding changes.

Among the most important changes is the increase of individualization. Mobiles provide opportunities for cultivating private relationships with strangers. As a consequence, Filipinos are able to expand their affective ties more widely and with greater facility than previously possible. An example of these relationships is the increase in sexual liaisons. Case studies 1, 2 and 3 (see pages 30-34 of this article) illustrate these possibilities.

Fortunati (2005) has argued how contemporary communicative processes no longer depend primarily on unmediated body-to-body exchanges. Apart from the fact that corporeal communication is itself already mediated, extra-corporeal elements provided by modern media are now as important. Conversations while watching television, reading the newspaper, listening to music or bargain shopping at the supermarket increasingly frame our interactions. These media affect both what we communicate and how we communicate. Our world is increasingly crowded and our experience of it, including one another, often has a surplus of meaning. Sorting out their multiple significations has become a major aspect of contemporary life. In addition, communicative processes routinely transcend body co-presence. We now communicate just as often with absent as with present others. Mobile phones are the best examples of the extension and mediation of corporeal communication. This is indicated by the fact that mobiles are often incorporated into the body as prosthesis. They become 'handy' personalized tools.

Mobile phones also bring about changes in the inner-world of their users that have significant social and cultural consequences. They encourage a more privatized and personalized orientation to the world. They enable a discursive intimacy hitherto difficult, if not impossible, in traditional societies such as the Philippines. Moreover, private orientations may quickly coalesce into collective actions through the rapid transmission of information. These collectivities or smart mobs easily mobilized are capable of the micro-coordination of their hitherto unconnected participants. Rheingold (2002) and Rafael (2003) claim that this micro-coordination brought about the downfall of Philippine President Joseph Estrada in 2001, known as EDSA 2. This political event was referred to as a coup d'text.

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND THE CULTURE OF EVERYDAY LIFE

Philippine culture readily accepts new technologies but is less interested in developing them. Science and technology are not high on the list of the government's priorities. While technologies are quickly assimilated, their transformative potentials have been unfulfilled. In many cases, technology has served to strengthen conservative interests rather than widen opportunities. Cognitive changes and cultural reorientation are needed to harness the transformative capacity of science and technology. The undeveloped nature of the public sphere provides few opportunities and resources for research and development. Even when technology is accepted and its beneficial consequences are evident, the resources for its development locally are not available. Public resources are often beholden to narrow strategic interests. Furthermore, an autonomous subculture supporting the interests of science and technology is poorly developed (Pertierra, 2003).

The enormous success of mobile phones appears to be an exception but its success is due to a strong cultural orientation for constant and perpetual contact. Ironically, this communication mainly reinforces the private sphere (Pertierra, et al., 2002). Texting and voice calls are used mainly for friends and relatives. Attempts by the Philippine government to encourage people to text public agencies have not so far resulted in an improvement of governance (Kuvaja & Mursu, 2005). Despite the public response, the necessary structures to translate complaints into enacted policy are inadequate. Finally, while cellphones have significantly impacted on Filipino life, the consequence for the development of technology and the local economy is unclear. Call centers have become a mini-boom industry but their technical skills are often low-level rather than technically specialized. The new communications media may well encourage an interest in technology but resources will have to be reallocated for this interest to result in improvements in Philippine technology.

This tendency for general skills rather than specialized ones has been noted for overseas workers who returned after years working abroad (Arcinas & Bautista, 1988; Pertierra, et al., 1992). Despite acquiring specialized skills during their period overseas, Filipinos resume their more general activities on their return. This is partly attitudinal but also structural. Returned workers invest their savings in small neighborhood *sari-sari* stores, buy jeepneys, act as money lenders, and invest in land. None of these activities make use of their specialized experience abroad. Nurses who worked in intensive care wards or engineers in charge of repairing industrial equipment are obliged to obtain employment in less specialized fields on their return. This shift from specialized to general skills mirrors the de-skilling that occurs when workers leave to work abroad – for example, when teachers work as domestic workers in another country, or when medical doctors shift to nursing in order to find employment abroad. It appears, therefore, that societal factors operate to encourage and oblige Filipinos to develop flexible skills rather than highly specialized ones.

THE GLOBALIZATION OF CULTURE

The role of culture in the contemporary global condition is problematic. While culture has always been an essential component of all societies, the present conjuncture links culture to the global condition in a way that requires rethinking the role and function of institutions assuming a spatially bounded notion of culture. One of the major causes for this cultural disjuncture has been the unprecedented expansion of structures of communication. Spatial and other borders formerly blocking cultural dissemination have virtually disappeared. This has led to the rise of the global village where difference is no longer based on separation but on contiguity. The reproduction of difference in

contiguity creates problems for earlier notions of culture as society's cement. Culture now produces difference as much as similitude.

Culture and globalization are now so commonly used that their meanings are often reduced to the banal. This banality, however, hides a serious flaw – contemporary culture is unmanageable and is no longer the basis for stable social formations. How did this condition of culture come about and what is its consequence for the nation-state? The global condition overwhelms any territorially based culture. Locality is no longer a viable site for culture even when this locality is constituted by the nation-state (Appadurai, 1995; Pertierra, 2002).

GLOBAL MEDIA, LOCAL RESPONSE

In an episode of the popular television series *Desperate Housewives* (30 September 2007), the character Teri Hatcher was diagnosed as entering menopause. In disbelief she exclaims: "*Before we go any further, can I just check those diplomas; I'd just like to make sure they're not from some med school in the Philippines.*"

This brief remark in a fiction television series, a parody of American suburban culture, provoked outrage among many Filipino medical practitioners in the United States. The Philippine - American Medical Association claimed that the remark maligned their competence and soiled their reputations. The ABC apologized the following day for the possible offense caused by the comment. In a disputatious and politically correct society such as the U.S., such a response may not seem unusual but, even by local standards, demands for compensation (US$500 million) appear excessive. As often happens in such cases, the outrage quickly gathered pace among American-based Filipinos and soon enough some Philippine medical institutions joined the legal suite. The response in the Philippines was more muted and some commentators pointed out the weaknesses in pressing the case. Foremost among these weaknesses is the admittedly low standards of many medical schools and the recent scandal involving cheating in the nursing board exams. Government board national passing rates covering 2006 and 2007 for all types of examinations were very low (38%) (Virola, Martillan, Clariño, & Garcia, 2010). Disaggregated data showed 29% for accountants, 34% for dentists, 46% for nurses, 58% for physicians, 28% for elementary education teachers, and 31% for secondary education teachers. Passing rates for licensure examinations for physicians from 1997 to 2012 averaged 61% (Bisnar, 2013; CSC-PRC, 2012; Virola, Martillan, Clariño, & Garcia, 2010), far from the average in the 1960s, which ranged between 80% and 90% (Bisnar, 2013). The passing rates for the licensure examinations for physicians and nurses either have remained relatively constant or are showing trends of a decline, which indicates the poor standards of professional training in the country.

The increasing professionalization of overseas workers is reflected in the preference for choosing courses that facilitate employment abroad. According to the Department of Health (Jaymalin, 2007), 85% of health professionals are working abroad. This has led to a crisis in local health care. To compound the problem, many of these medical workers come from rural areas, already poorly served by the health profession. Health Secretary Duque said that "the health care delivery system in the Philippines has gone critical, almost desperate" (Jaymalin, 2007, p. 12). Duque added that for every 100 health professionals, 88 have left in search of high-paying jobs outside the country.

THE NEW MEDIA

While the Internet is only accessible to a minority (30% in 2010) of Filipinos, cellphones have taken the country by storm, exceeding the wildest predictions. Presently about 85% of Filipinos own or have direct and easy access to cellphones. There are about 65 million cellphone subscribers in a population of 90 million. No other technology has been accepted with such enthusiasm. It took television nearly fifty years to reach a penetration rate that cellphones achieved in five years (Pertierra, 2006).

Cellphones are not only mobile, allowing perpetual contact, but are also highly interactive. They connect to virtually all existing electronic services (e.g., radio, television, newspapers). They also connect hitherto unconnected aspects of the innerself and its relations with alter. Interactions between interlocutors are not the result of a prior agreement of a given situation but may be pursued independently. Thus, they facilitate the development of new discursive fields, resulting for example in intimate exchanges. The traditional constraints of speech in oral communities are transcended, allowing even strangers to be included within this new network of intimacy. This results in new forms of urbanity. SMS has generated new modes of writing, combining numbers, letters and new expressions such as "c u 2nyt" (see you tonight) or "got l8 tnx" (got late thanks). It has also enriched the vocabulary of interaction with words such as *lobat* (low battery), *nolod* (no load), eyeball (face-to-face meeting), *miscal* (missed call), and textmate, and acronyms like NASL (name, age, sex, location) and SOP (sex over phone). In a survey of the most important inventions, the readers of the *Philippine Star*, a major daily (5 October 2006) nominated the cellphone ahead of all the others, including the computer and electricity.

All previous media have had to adjust to the cellphone. TV and radio shows are now routinely assessed by their audience via cellphones. TV has also become a connecting node for mobile phones. Several channels display text (SMS) messages on their screens, allowing texters to contact one another. While the earlier communicative technologies (e.g., print, radio, television, and cinema) were mainly disseminative, the cellphone

empowers its user to express and share opinions, perspectives and strategies. The social, cultural and political implications of these new local, national and global interactions may transform the Philippines from being a conservative, elitist and poor society to a more open, egalitarian and dynamic one. But – a word of caution – the transformative potentials of earlier technologies were quickly controlled by conservative power holders to ensure their dominance. Existing cellphone services are mainly geared to the entertainment sector, encouraging private consumption rather than public commitment. But there are also signs that this technology may upset traditional hierarchies by subverting old verities and leveling access to the public sphere. Spreading gossip, rumor and scandal as well as the capacity to mobilize and network are greatly enhanced by this technology. They convert aimless crowds into smart mobs or individual protesters into organized demonstrations.

What the mobile phone also seems to encourage is a greater sense of individualism. This individualism is expressed in the establishment of novel relations with strangers. Whereas the stranger is assiduously avoided in traditional societies, the cellphone opens the possibility of cultivating virtual relationships. These virtual relationships can be transformed into more conventional ones should the circumstance arise or they may remain virtual as a choice. Virtuality may allow forms of intimacy normally disapproved. Mobile phones and the Internet have resulted in an explosion of virtual relationships in the Philippines, many of them explicitly sexual in nature. This virtuality takes on particular saliencies in an urban context, where hitherto unknown interlocutors can arrange to meet. As others have noted, the mobile phone allows you to put the city in your pocket (Kopomaa, 2000). It is an essential tool for navigating through the many byways of contemporary life.

ENABLING THE SELF THROUGH THE COMMUNICATION REVOLUTION

Heidegger (1977) has argued that technology does not only affect the world outside our existence but also enters into our being-in-the-world in new ways. We are thus 'in the world' differently, opening up new possibilities of being and becoming. Technology is not just a set of techniques but *techne*, a way of dealing with others in the world. New technologies allow us to relate to ourselves and to others in new ways. Technology is not only mechanical materiality or a body of techniques that stands in an exterior relationship to human subjectivity. Technology is also techne, the application of knowledge that connects us inter-subjectively to the material and the supernatural worlds. It enables new ways of being in the world (including the after-world), thereby revealing to us our human possibilities. As a recent conference on mobile phones concluded, 'the machine becomes us' (Katz, 2003). The passive voice transfers agency from humans to machines.

A less researched aspect of the new technology is its capacity to transform the agency of their users. The telephone made long-distance emotional relationships possible, just as the videoke transforms ordinary singers into public performers. Technological empowerment is as much subjective as it is objective. How exactly this empowerment enters into a person's sense of agency is an empirical question. In the Philippines, the similarity of behaviour between pedestrians and their motorized counterparts (e.g., motorbikes) indicates that the machine is mostly integrated into the self, rather than transforming it. Thus, motorbike drivers behave like pedestrians disregarding traffic regulations rather than as drivers of motorized vehicles. If this same attitude is found among airline pilots or sea captains, the consequences could be tragic. In these latter cases, we assume that the agents ought to become significantly transformed by the technology rather than seeing it as extensions of their private selves. In fact, as machines become more intelligent and complex, we are incorporated into them as part of a human-techno formation. The pilot of a highly advanced aircraft simply acts as an emergency computer substitute. Presently, machines have largely taken over most complex technical tasks, leaving us only with the non-technical administrative functions.

MOBILES AND THE INTERNET AS TECHNOLOGIES OF MEDIATION

Interviews that the author conducted about people's use of mobiles and the Internet revealed that most of the informants welcome the advantages of these technologies.While they also recognize some problems such as rising costs (e.g., over PHP 300 monthly for mobiles), the lures of gambling or the dangers of seduction, they overwhelmingly support the advantages of mobiles and the Internet (Pertierra, 2006). Remaining in contact with friends and kin or extending a social network, accessing useful information, including spiritual sites or playing games are among the most significant uses of the new technology. While mobiles have blended into the routines of everyday life, the Internet remains less accessible because of economic and technical reasons. But Internet access is readily available in most urban centers and young Filipinos quickly learn the skills needed to navigate in the cyber-world (Pertierra, 2010).

While class, gender and generation are factors affecting the use of the new communications technology, generally, they are surprisingly neutral. The rich make more voice calls and enjoy home Internet access, men surf for more instrumental sites – including pornography – than do women, who prefer religious sites and overseas connections. The young are more adept in all these uses than their elders and more willing to experiment with new identities and experiences. But most users quickly appreciate the advantages of greater access to the world of information (Pertierra, et al., 2002). The new technology does not eliminate existing inequalities but it offers its

users access to a world beyond the local. Hitherto, confinement to the local was a major aspect of inequality.

The Internet elicits greater ambivalence than the mobile among our informants. Many express the fear that cyber-reality is replacing the real. Cyber-reality not only replaces the real but reduces it to a simulacrum (Baudrillard, 1988). But all recognize that access to the cyber-world is necessary for contemporary life. The simulacrum is real. Increasingly, personal relations are technologically mediated, replacing face-to-face relationships with their cyber-equivalents. For many Filipinos this is both threatening and liberating. But it is also becoming a major expense for many households on low incomes. These new technologies also generate corresponding structures of inequality, requiring greater skills and economic resources to benefit from its possibilities (Pertierra, 2006).

Texting Strangers

The data presented in the cases below are taken from my research notes. Informants' names have been changed. The ethnographic details of certain information, however, remain unchanged.

Case Study 1

The following is a typical texting exchange involving strangers. Unless indicated otherwise, the text messages were translated from Tagalog and formatted from text language into English.

Richard : (*original in English*) A good person is hard to find, hard to lose, and impossible to forget. That's you! Thanks.

Gemmalyn: Who's this? You must have sent your message to the wrong number. I don't know the number that registered in my cellphone. But it's ok, I like your message anyway.

Richard: Really! Are you Alma?

Gemmalyn: No, I am Gemmalyn Israel from Subic. How about you, what is your name? Where are you from?

Richard: My name is Richard Garlon, from Antipolo City. I am 27 years old. How old are you? I'm sorry if I wrongly sent my message to you. Can you be my textmate?

Gemmalyn: Ok, I don't think there's something wrong with having a friend through texting. I am 25 years old, my husband and I decided to part ways a few years back. I am now working in a factory here in Subic Naval Base. Our company, Aiwa Electronics is manufacturing televisions.

Richard: I saw a program in TV that was about Subic. You got a nice place there, you have dolphin shows and nice beaches. Do you live near the White Rock Beach Resort?

Gemmalyn: Yes, it is about 5 minutes from my place. We just walk if my friends and I want to go there. Aside from White Rock, we also have other nice beaches here. But your place is also beautiful. I went swimming with friends in the Hinulugang Taktak a few years back. The swimming pools were so refreshing because the water is very cold. I used to live with my brother in Marikina City, that's why I know Antipolo. Do you also work nearby?

Richard: No, I work in Sta. Lucia as a supervisor in an appliance warehouse. I've been here for 3 years now. I invite you to come over to buy our products. If we go on sale you can get as much as 30% discount.

Gemmalyn: Are you kidding? I won't travel that far just to avail of your discount. I'm sorry but I have to do some things. I'll just text you again.

Richard: Ok, so we are friends now. If I'll receive a nice message I'll forward it to you. Because I have many textmates, if they'll send me sweet messages I will forward them to you.

Gemmalyn: That's good. I love to get sweet messages from friends I even save them in my Outbox so that I can forward them to my friends. Ok, I'm running out of text load. Thanks!

Richard: Ok, thanks also. Take care.

The following day:

Richard: (*original in English*) I feel so special every time you remember me. I feel so complete when I know that you're there for me. I feel so blessed because you're so nice to me. So please stay and be my friend forever.

Gemmalyn: (*original in English*) Your message is so nice, I'm already falling in love with you. I also have this message for you. A friend like you is a gift that paints a smile

in my heart. It gives memories that will stay in me not for a while but for a lifetime.

Richard: I was touched by your message. You must be pretty. If I may ask, what happened to your husband?

Gemmalyn: Don't ask about it. We might both run out of battery and I am not yet done telling our story. And that's very confidential. Just wait until we're already very close before you ask about my personal life. Just kidding!

Richard: Okay, I'll just text you next time. I have to go to work.

This exchange indicates the facility for developing close relationships with strangers. Filipinos rarely exchange intimacies face-to-face but readily do so through texting. But such discourses are framed by English adages or literary quotations that then allow interlocutors to broach embarrassing topics. While text messages appear spontaneous, their form usually follows a prescribed pattern. Apart from ritualistic greetings, the adages or quotations often introduce the flow of the exchange, culminating in expressions of love and sexual interest. The relationship may remain virtual or result in actual meetings. New friendships and even marriage proposals are often initiated through texting. A recent documentary (Txt before marriage) discussed engagements conducted through texting.

Cyber-cosmopolitanism

Filipina mail order brides were a common, if controversial, issue during the 1980's and 1990's. Much of the controversy eventually died down as these contracted marriages generally fared no worse than more conventional ones. However, this issue has been resurrected in association with female trafficking. The Internet greatly facilitates transnational marriages and includes the possibility of exploiting unwary users. Nevertheless, online marriages have become increasingly common and are now part of the wide repertoire of conventional courtship. Chen (2004) has studied Taiwanese online marriage sites. They combine traditional features such as marriage brokers with new technologies like the Internet. Clients are able to meet their possible brides online and arrange quick visits to Vietnam to meet their families. These sites are a response to shifts in marriage practices among Taiwanese women who are no longer willing to accept the traditional burdens of marriage. On the other hand, Vietnamese women are keen to improve their economic prospects and are willing to marry Taiwanese men. These marriages are arranged according to traditional rural custom except that the brides are recruited overseas. Chen argues that while these marriages conform to previous practices, their increasing commercialization poses new problems. In this case the Internet

opens itself not only to new marital possibilities but also to new forms of economic exploitation.

Case Study 2

Imee is a frequent user of Internet cafes. She had a bad marriage and uses the Internet to make new friends online. She claims that the Internet made her less lonely and opened possibilities for new relationships.

> *I met Roger, a black American affiliated with NBC, on a certain website. After a few emails and night chats, he came to the Philippines, twice, and we had a great time. But after a year, the flame just died down. And then I met Brian (from Victoria, Canada) from the same website, but we chat only as friends. Realizing I could be happy with someone else, I filed for annulment/presumptive death. (Her husband had disappeared years earlier.)*
>
> *It was December 2005 when I met my second (soon-to-be) husband, Marc (Australian-based French chef), at match.com.au. We started exchanging messages, pictures, even sharing our experiences and life stories. We came to know each other mainly through the Internet. After three months of exchanging emails, talking on the net and chatting, Marc came to the Philippines and professed his love. That was when I knew this isn't a dream. Then, I brought him with me to Cagayan where he met my family, friends and relatives. Next thing I knew, I was flying with him to Australia.* (de Leon, 2007, p. 74)

Case Study 3

De Leon (2007, p. 72) also provides an example of how the Internet has expanded the world of deaf Filipinos like Flora:

> *Though I don't chat with normal people, the fact that I could use the Internet the way they use it, I don't feel neglected or isolated at all. When I'm on the Net I don't feel disabled or left out. The Internet opened doors for me. Before, I had very few people whom I can call friends. With the Internet, I was able to meet other people like me. My circle of friends widened – from everywhere in the Philippines to people abroad. I often share my problems with them since they can connect with me given the fact that we're in the same condition.*
>
> *I have a cellphone but I still prefer the Internet to talk with my friends. It's a lot easier that way. I just log on to my account in camfrog.com and with a webcam, my friends and I can talk (through sign language) for hours. I am a*

> *regular customer here [Internet café] and I start chatting usually from 10 in the morning to around 4 or 5 in the afternoon. So you see, I spend most of my time with friends, though in a mediated way, I still feel that we are actually 'conversing' face-to-face.*
>
> *I didn't go to a school for the hearing impaired, that explains my weakness in using the cellphone and the keyboard. I'm not textual. I am not familiar with the alphabet and I use Filipino Sign Language (FSL) since I'm not educated. In the Center, they teach the American Sign Language (ASL). So when I chat with friends, we do the FSL of course with a webcam. And when I have to ride a tricycle, I let my other friends who know the alphabet write down the address of wherever I'm going and just show it to the driver.*

Web cameras provide Flora with a 'window on everyday life' not otherwise accessible. "Through it, everyday life and mediation become integrated and metonymic since the filming of everyday life, as well as providing a window on the life of the protagonist, also includes the camera as an actor in the network of relations" (de Leon, 2007, p. 74). The camera both mediates and is an integral part of the relationship. This mediation may increase the intensity of experience by highlighting perceived elements.

Texts from the Grave

On 26 February 2004, a passenger ferry bound for Bacolod departed from Manila. Barely an hour away, the ship caught fire and sunk, bringing down with it 116 passengers and crew. A member of the investigating committee (Ferdinand Flores, pers. comm., 2005) wrote the following account about the incident:

> *Two families whose relatives perished in the incident reported having received text messages of a disturbing nature. One was living in the United States when she got a call that her sister was trapped in the ship's comfort room. At the time of the alleged call, the ship had been burning continuously for the past 24 hours and was submerged on its side in Mariveles, Bataan.*
>
> *The second story also reported a similar situation where the caller was trapped in the comfort room of Deck A. The relatives in Mindanao got the call sometime after the ship had caught fire and had sunk.* (Flores, pers. comm., 2005)

Ramon Tulfo (PDI, 2 Nov. 2006, p. A-18), a well-known Filipino journalist, reported a conversation he had with his manicurist:

> *I was at Bruno's Tuesday for my haircut. Domencil was doing my nails. She said she was surprised Nazareno didn't show up for his appointment. He always came on time for his appointments, she added. When I told her that Nazareno couldn't come as he had died the previous day, Monday, Oct. 30, she was dumbfounded. "Don't kid me because I got two missed calls from him a while ago," Domencil said. She then showed me two missed calls on her cell phone from General Nazareno....The 'missed calls' that Domencil received on Tuesday was a way of telling her that he couldn't make it to his appointment.*

While the incidents described above could well have been emergency calls made by the trapped victims, their relatives believed that the callers were dead and that they were informing relatives of their situation. Tulfo and Domencil also accepted that the missed calls were sent by Nazareno after his death. In a popular T.V. show (*The Boy Abunda Show*, 12 May 2005), members of the audience were asked to relate strange experiences with their cellphones. Several participants volunteered information that they had received texts or calls from dead relatives. These calls came immediately after the callers' death or some time after. The purpose of the calls was to inform or warn relatives about the death of close kin. Many Asian cultures make provisions for such communicative exchanges, which the mobile phone readily accommodates (Barendregt, 2005).

A news item (Ramos, 2008) reported that many funeral homes in Manila now provide a broadband service that allows relatives abroad to access and participate in mortuary rituals through a website. The guilt felt by overseas relatives unable to attend the funeral services of close kin is significantly reduced through this mediated but nevertheless actual participation in the rituals. What a better example of connectivity than this ability to connect with the dead from abroad.

CONCLUSION

No other technical device has spread more quickly, including more people, than the mobile phone (3 billion by 2010) (Pertierra, 2010). The cellphone has become the new icon of Philippine life. Filipinos of all classes, generations and ethnicities have adopted this new technology to reproduce traditional relationships under new conditions. Moreover they also employ it to explore new identities and transcorporeal subjectivities. Freed from the constraints of spatial location, cellphones allow perpetual interaction with absent interlocutors. Cyber or virtual communities are easily generated by these new media. This technology has also encouraged or permitted explicitly sexual subjects as well as other subversive identities. The new media are easily able to generate virtual communities involving self and other. In these circumstances, notions of the social and

of culture have to be radically rethought. Co-presence and direct interaction no longer constitute the primary basis for relationships. These new relationships often provide an expanded role for the stranger, a role hitherto undeveloped in the Philippines in both private and public interactions. These conditions constitute new possibilities for the rise of a postmodern public sphere and new forms of politics. The Habermasian public sphere can now be extended into cyberspace, possibly generating a new basis for emancipatory structures.

While members of defined classes pursuing collective interests constituted an earlier (modern) public sphere, a postmodern public consists of a network of diasporal individuals with heterogeneous interests (Castells, 2004). The new media facilitates these networks and also reinforces private interests in the public sphere. This new form of politics characterized EDSA 2 (downfall of President Estrada in 2001), and to a lesser extent EDSA 1 (exile of President Marcos in 1986). The latter is described as the first electronic revolution, with its non-violent strategies, mass participation and media exposure (Brisbin, 1988). The more recent Arab Spring has also raised high expectations about the emancipatory possibilities of the new media such as social networking sites. However, caution must also be exercised before proclaiming the dawn of a new global democracy.

Mobile phones and the Internet have transformed the communication landscape for most Filipinos. What was until recently primarily an oral, local and consociational culture has been significantly transformed. Many Filipinos now routinely interact with family, friends and even strangers across previously insuperable barriers. These barriers were spatial, in the case of overseas workers, sensorial in the case of deaf Filipinos or cultural taboos about expressing vulnerable emotions. The facility of modern communications has overcome traditional barriers preventing novel and even liberational experiences. Earlier constraints on discourse, either through physical, social or cultural factors, are now less applicable, making possible new instances for emancipation (Habermas, 1984). The early literature on ICT stressed these emancipatory potentials (Kirby, 1997), leaving the flesh behind seemed to be the ultimate form of freedom. More sober expectations have now taken over and we realize that the body is still present even in the cyber-world.

While deaf Filipinos are eager to preserve their cultural differences, they are just as eager to participate in the broad spectrum of society. What some might see as a sensorial limitation, the deaf regard as a unique opportunity to cultivate special relationships with others like themselves. But they inevitably also have relationships with society's mainstream and expect to be treated equally. Mobile phones and the Internet are technologies that assist the deaf to participate in broader social structures. In this sense, these are enabling technologies but enablement is as much an individual as a collective

choice. Some deaf Filipinos prefer to use these technologies not so much to transcend their condition as to enrich its possibilities. These possibilities may include easier connections with the wider world while retaining the uniqueness of already established identities.

The reluctance of some deaf Filipinos to radically change their identity by effectively transcending their deafness indicates how importantly cultural factors enter into the application of technology. Technology as techne allows us to relate to ourselves and to others in new ways (Braithwaite, 2004). Technology is more than a body of techniques that stands in an exterior relationship to our human subjectivity. It also shapes identity and our relationship to others. For this reason some Filipino deaf argue against surgical interventions in children too young to express informed consent. They do not necessarily see deafness as a disability but a cultural position (Castro, 2004).

For the reasons cited above, the new media is a challenge for the social sciences to develop more appropriate paradigms. The new communication technologies require the social sciences to re-examine their understanding of structures, networks, hierarchies and other organizational modes. Functionalist and empiricist approaches have to be reassessed, positivist and other methodologies reevaluated, and actual expectations matched with virtual realities. The possibilities of imaginability have far exceeded previous boundaries. Neither space nor time and even the actual, constrain or inhibit the virtual. Only technology and human interests do so. As Kristeva (1991) argues, we recognize the stranger within ourselves. Technologies enable but perhaps only finally to reveal ourselves to ourselves.

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