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TXT-ing Selves: Cellphones and Philippine Modernity. By Raul Pertierra, Eduardo Ugarte, Alicia Pingol, Joel Hernandez and Nikos Lexis Dacanay. Manila: De La Salle University Press, Inc., 2002. 197 pages.

The foundation of all theorizing is a close observation of the world. This means that one begins not with a theory but rather with an empirical area, and allows what is relevant to that area to emerge. The observations that Pertierra et al. are working on in *TXT-ing Selves* are directly related to the Philippines being called the text messaging capital of the world. In 2001, the leading providers of text messaging services in the country were processing about 65.4 million text messages daily, a volume that is more than that of all of Europe. In that year, there were about seven million mobile phone subscribers. While the country's number of cellphone subscribers is not large by international standards, its number of text messages—double the world standard—invites an examination. Thus begins Pertierra et al.'s quest to locate the ubiquitous cellphone within the question of Philippine modernity. What does being the text messaging capital of the world mean at the ground level?

The job of the social scientist is to construct a rational framework based on actors' explanations of their own activities. The authors embark on this noble pursuit by outlining the nuances and manifestations of Philippine modernity in one chapter and offering "global modernity" and "complex connectivity" as the framework for understanding Filipino behavior around cellphones in another. They also include a chapter on the historical context of mass media in the Philippines, which works well to relate contemporary cellphone use to the wider structures of society. For the empirical presentation, one chapter presents twelve case studies of people's use of the cellphones and its social consequences on the users. Another chapter treats the role of cellphones at the EDSA II event, which overthrew then President Estrada. In concluding the work, the authors provide an analytically-informed summary of the empirical findings through which they consider once more the nature of Philippine modernity.

TXt-ing Selves locates the question of modernity in three social fields where the use of cellphones has significant imprints: one, in the continued conflation of the private and public spheres, two, in the extension of orality, and three, in the development of a diasporic consciousness that makes Filipino migrants want to retain links with their families. All three social fields or areas of activities interact in the current Filipino experience of governance, consumption, and migration. In this work, Pertierra et al. argue that "cellphone use is as much a cultural response to the disaggregative effects of modern life as it is an instrumental tool to operate within it" (p. 11). The dynamics of the cultural appropriation of cellphone technology by Filipinos may therefore differ from the way other societies use this technology because of specificity of the context (i.e., costs, tradition of orality).

Let me discuss these manifestations of (non)modernity sequentially.

In the Philippines, it is common to mix the public and the private as seen in the blurring of the political and the theological genres, of the political and the personal. Cited by the book as more recent examples of such a conflation are the mixed private and public metaphors used to refer to President Arroyo (e.g., "Ate Glo," "Ina ng Bayan"). Pertierra et al. examine whether the remarkable absence of a separation between the private and the public worlds in the Philippines gains new meanings with the use of the cellphones. The answer provided to this question is expected: the book laments the weak public sphere in the Philippines. While the cellphones have political uses (e.g., as a way to mobilize publics), they have not generated corresponding structures that would make it easier for the government to provide services or for people to participate in political affairs. In a study of eighteenth-century French salons and English and German coffee houses, Habermas writes about the transformation of the bourgeois public sphere. This transformation involves the creation of a space where people could exchange ideas on matters of shared interest or concern. Within the Habermasian framework, the weak public sphere in the Philippines precludes its own transformation. The use of cellphones does not effect the transformation of the Filipino public sphere because there is no instrumental rationality (i.e., long term goal-orientation) involved in the way Filipinos use the cellphones. In general, Filipinos use the cellphones for entertainment and for ritual contact.

Ritual contact, in this sense, explains why Filipinos prefer texting to voice calls. They like being connected to fellow individuals even though there is no urgent reason for them to be so. Ritual or symbolic connectivity, however, means that the cellphone is not used in knowledge production and management. Filipinos enjoy telling stories, but these narratives do not offer analysis. Borrowing from Geertz, texting is all about sending "thin text," in contrast to "thick description" or those intensive, small-scale, dense and analytically informed descriptions of social life drawn from observation. Despite being early adopters of the technology that introduced public consumption of the media (e.g., books, magazines, newspapers, telephone, film, radio and television),

contemporary Philippine media, Pertierra et al. point out, still continues to grapple with mediocrity. Whether as an outcome or a cause of the underdevelopment of the media, face-to-face interaction and the oral tradition remain to be the most favored modes of communication.

Yet, the cellphone, particularly texting, relates positively to the tradition of orality in the Philippines. One such occasion is when texting provides a space where people can challenge the societal impositions which are passed along through the oral tradition. In a society where social acceptability is a supreme value, people cannot be direct with their assertions. In some cases, people prefer to write out their dissent. For Pertierra et al., texting combines the informality of speech and the reflexivity of writing. Moreover, aside from providing a means to deal with a potentially oppressive society, cellphones cultivate the emotional life of its users. Members of a globalizing society with a significant number of labor migrants continue to operate in the oral tradition by using the cellphone to convey affections. Thus, while the use of communication technologies in other contemporary societies has led to a kind of sociality with objects (e.g., where objects such as cellphones and computers replace human beings as relationship partners), there are no signs that the use of cellphones in the Philippines has led to the replacement of real life by the virtual. Filipinos mainly use the cellphones to be in perpetual contact with family members and other associates.

TXT-ing Selves successfully shows that cellphones have changed the way Filipinos traverse modern life. It succeeds at reminding the reader that these changes also tend to be disjunctive, selective and incomplete. Some people might therefore disagree when the authors choose to exaggerate, calling the current phenomenon a cellphone revolution. This is supposed to be the third revolution after the Christianization of the Philippines by the Spaniards and after its so-called Americanization. The cellphones may have changed the functional rationality of everyday life (e.g., convenience, confidentiality, instant connectivity), but the substantive rationality of everyday-life has remained unchanged. The authors themselves note that there is no significant increase in economic productivity nor improvement in governance which can be linked to cellphones. Likewise, with "thin text," new forms of knowledge cannot be expected to come out of this kind of texting behavior in the near future.

The book might also disappoint those who search for definite answers as to what modernity, or specifically what Philippine modernity, is. Yet its strength lies in this particular omission. Modernity, with its textbook definition as "the pluralization of worldviews," calls for a model of society where individuals, places, cultures, and technologies do not relate in a unitary fashion. In this regard, the book is very instructive about how students of culture can deconstruct a phenomenon into its various expressions: in migration, consumption of malls and information technologies, governance, changes in the gendered order (in the context of sexuality), communication patterns, etc. Pertierra et al. show how one can study a phenomenon by asking questions.

Thankfully, the authors were able to provide answers, considering it wise to label these answers as tentative, yet also branding them as "grounded responses" to point out that these answers come from a close observation of the world.

Now, what comprises a close observation of the world? The authors do not make claims of the representativeness of the sample, preferring to claim the exemplarity of the samples instead. To appease survey specialists, they identify statistically-oriented samples as an important component of future studies. Of course, statistics are necessary for contextualization, but it should be maintained that a theoretical sample (as used in "grounded theory") is still the most appropriate way to design a study of an emerging social field. A theoretical sample, arrived at by sampling on the basis of concepts that correspond to the activities, actors, and meanings in that social field, is a systematic way of identifying typical or exemplary cases. This way, a researcher would not have to make a caveat about the representativeness of the sample used in a study.

Pertierra et al. outline an agenda for future research: the measurement of productivity that can be attributed to cellphone use and how the Philippine state can make more effective use of communication technologies. Two others may be suggested here: How is modernity experienced by that portion of the Filipino population which has no access to cellphones and other communication technologies? How is modernity experienced by Filipino creators and providers of various cellphone technologies and services who do not simply use the cellphone as a consumer item but also relate to it in terms of knowledge production and management?

There are probably more than ten million cellphone subscribers in the Philippines nowadays, yet that constitutes only about eight percent of the Philippine population. Moreover, consider the picture which appears on the book's cover. By many accounts, the not-necessarily-the-latest cellphone being used by one member of the Bungkalot tribe of Nueva Vizcaya shows a model of Philippine modernity that is a continuum, with so-called obsolete cellphones coexisting with the so-called state-of-the-art. This imagery embodies the current understanding of Philippine modernity: the use of cellphones does not mean a displacement but rather a diversification, even fragmentation, of activities and worldviews in selected arenas of Philippine society. In the end, Pertierra et al. do a superb job of showing that Philippine modernity does not come in a single form.

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