

Computer-Mediated-Interactive-Communication-Technology (CMICT) & the Anthropology of Communication: A Philippine Example

RAUL PERTIERRA



Raul Pertierra is Visiting Professor at Univ. of the Philippines and Ateneo de Manila Univ.

Recently a Philippine tourism official claimed that a mobile saved his life. A bystander took pictures on a mobile while the official was being menaced by kidnappers – seeing this, the kidnappers fled. Another triumph for the mobile.

To some, the microchip was a wondrous invention – a high-tech helper that could increase security at nuclear plants and military bases, help authorities identify wandering Alzheimer's patients, allow consumers to buy their groceries, literally, with the wave of a chipped hand. To others, the notion of tagging people was Orwellian, a departure from centuries of history and tradition in which people had the right to go and do as they pleased, without being tracked, unless they were harming someone else. Chipping, these critics said, might start with Alzheimer's patients or Army Rangers, but would eventually be suggested for convicts, then parolees, then sex offenders, then illegal aliens – until one day, a majority of Americans, falling into one category or another, would find themselves electronically tagged.

Li Yijiang, 25, killed and mutilated six Beijing men between late 2002 and early last year, the Beijing Today newspaper reported. Police linked the murders by discovering all six victims had regularly used a pornographic website called Purple Boy. They then followed the trail to Li, who was arrested in August last year. Li confessed to the killings, saying he had logged on to the website after moving to Beijing from remote Xinjiang region to attend university. Li told police he was gang-raped after meeting the six men at a disco used by Purple Boy regulars. He later lured each man separately to his death.

With the development of the Internet, and with the increasing pervasiveness of communications between networked computers, we are in the middle of the most transforming technological event since the capture of fire. I used to think that it was just the biggest thing since Gutenberg, but now I think you have to go back further. (Barlow, 1995:36)

We're going to be Gods, we might as well get good at it. In another thousand years, we'll be machines or gods (Gray, 2002:9).

This paper examines some of the claims about the transformative consequences of the new communications media, especially as they apply to the Philippines. Modern technologies were introduced into the country soon after their discovery abroad but despite their transformative potential there was very little change in the basic structures of society. Why was this so? The transformative capacity of technology has been the driving force for social change in modern times. Why has the Philippines basically remained a conservative society unable to harness the potentials of technology despite its rapid introduction into the country? Will the mobile revolution finally transform the Philippines into a technologically driven economy and society? The mobile phone and to a lesser extent the Internet have been rapidly incorporated into everyday Philippine life. No other technology has received these rates of diffusion. What major transformations may be expected as a result of mobiles and the Internet?

Technologies often have unexpected uses. The use of SMS (texting) is an instance of this unforeseen usage.

The mobile has become as much a writing as a speaking tool. But it has also transformed the relationship between writing and speech. Texting tries to convey the saying rather than the said (Ricoeur, 1971). A consequence of this is the explosion of banality, where texters exchange banal messages to reassure one another of their continuing relationship. Moreover, in texting, the formal rules of writing have been replaced with the informality of speech. Texting has taken over many of the ritual functions of talk in constituting and reproducing relationships. It expresses new forms of sociality.

Texts are also often used for religious messages, reinforcing traditional notions of spirituality, including exchanges with the dead (Pertierra, 2006). These unusual and heterotopic uses connect hitherto distinct elements into new hybridities. They also make possible an absent presence, allowing overseas workers to stay in close contact with their village kin. New forms of socialities such as online affairs, cybersex and postcorporeal relationships are some of the consequences of the new technology. The paper

concludes by examining how the new communication technologies may be expected to change personal identities, social relationships, political alliances and global perspectives of Filipinos in the 21st century.

Transformative Capacities of Technology

Despite having many features commonly associated with western modernity, such as a vigorous democracy, an accessible education system, a relatively free media and an obsession with western pop culture, the Philippines is not known for its technological development. The lack of resources is often blamed for the failure of the Philippine state to support science and technology but the opposite view is just as valid. The country's lack of resources is also due to its inability to harness the gains of technology for economic development. When the local legislature took over funding from the American colonial authorities in 1933, one of its first decisions was to drastically cut funds for the Bureau of Science, until then well known for its original research on tropical medicine and agriculture (Caoili, 1991). Local legislators saw the Bureau of Science as engaged in non-relevant research. This simple utilitarianism, seen from the view point of the layman, still characterizes much of Philippine life. A research orientation is lacking even in the leading universities for a variety of reasons such as poor facilities and heavy teaching loads but also because of the lack of a culture of critical discourse. Only what is seen as immediately practical and relevant is the subject of research. But relevance and the practical should themselves be open to a critical anthropological discourse and not assumed as givens. Anthropology should also interrogate notions of the practical and the relevant in order to expose their often unstated assumptions.

The main reason why technology has not so far had a major transformative role is that it mainly benefited metropolitan areas and was controlled by elite interests. These technologies did not enter into the everyday life of most Filipinos. In Luhmann's (1998) terms, technology lacked system-integration. It affected external but not internal system functionality. While the mass media is more accessible, these are under the control of special interests whose main concern is entertainment rather than conscientization. Communicative practices retained their traditional orientation and under these conditions, the new technologies were unable to produce significant social change. Some technologies such as the railway and the motor car principally affect our relationship to space. But these experiences of speed and linearity also altered our notions of spatial perspective. Distant horizons are now perceived as easily attainable. Other

technologies like the telegraph and the cinema alter our sense of time, merging the present with the past and the future. Together these technologies change our understandings of nature as well as of ourselves. These are as much technologies of the soul as of the body. They reconstruct our identities and our understanding of the conditions of possibility. For technology to become the engine of social change, it must affect our relationship to ourselves as well as to the material world. Technology allows societal structures to simplify their internal relationships and their external effects on the environment. They expand system feedback. It seems that the government is now investing more in science and technology but the underlying structure has to undergo significant changes before significant results can be achieved.

Mass Media, Mobiles and National Consciousness

While television was introduced initially as a means for political advertising, its role is presently seen as entertainment. But according to David (2004), television converted the Filipino masses from an inchoate, local patrimony into an organized mass audience. This medium politicized its audience in unexpected ways. This television generated mass audience elected Estrada into the presidency in 1998 and it remains the largest political force in the country. Estrada's election indicated that the mass vote was up for grabs and that traditional politicians no longer dominated the political landscape as they had done. In the last elections (2007), access to television was seen as the most crucial determinant of success (Teodoro, 2007). Although media exposure is important its effects are not always predictable. The public can assess paid ads and celebrity news for their political relevance as indicated by the electoral victory of Trillanes (who got elected to the senate in May 2007 with almost no resources while in jail on charges of mutiny and who since then – November 2007 – has attempted another unsuccessful coup). While radio has remained local and vernacular, television has always been national. This signified a shift from an aural to a visual medium. Television's importance is not primarily related to the dissemination of information but rather to its capacity for mobilization via entertainment. To succeed politicians have to transform themselves into media stars, while the latter can often convert their popularity into political success. But even media stars such as Manny Pacquiao (boxing world title holder), prominent screen actors such as Cesar Montano and Nora Aunor have failed to transform their screen popularity into electoral success. The masa (mass audience) obviously distinguishes popularity from electorality. Presently, candidates can also extend and individualize their visibility by using mobiles and the

Internet. Some commentators (Magno, 2007 PDI 9 March) have pointed out that political constituencies now include virtual as well as actual ones. The ontology of the real now includes the virtual as well as the actual. The major telcos handled over a billion text messages daily for the 2007 election campaign (Philippine Daily Inquirer, 6 March 07).

The new media is now routinely linked to the old media and often transforms its character. Now that the mobile has penetrated television, making it more participative (e.g. program ratings, posting messages) and interactive, what effects might this produce? Is this combination of mass/personal media likely to individualize a hitherto impersonal mass audience and transform it into more coherent and specific segments? Can it transform ordinary and even talentless people into media stars, bypassing former structures of competence? Reality television and the Internet present evidence that this may be happening. Pinoytube (a local version of Youtube) provides ordinary users with the opportunity to become global stars. CMICT gives global access to all its users, a possibility hitherto limited to a privileged few.

Rafael is an 18 year old bisexual who frequently participates in TV channels that post text messages. Using this service Rafael has been able to meet groups of friends with similar interests. When asked how he felt about texting, Rafael replied – *My attitude changed because of texting. I wasn't like this before ... He feels that his social network has expanded* (Pertierra, et al, 2002:72). People sharing special interests or orientations like Rafael can now more easily coalesce. Similar examples can be readily found about the coalescing potentials of the Internet.

Political organizing is also facilitated by the new media. Bautista, a party list coordinator explains:

With cellphones we can coordinate our schedules effectively. Moreover, supporters can quickly inform us regarding 'black' propaganda thrown against us – we reacted by contacting local radio stations. Cellphones 'secure' our coordinators in a game of psywar. Our political opponents with bad intentions are less likely to harm our members knowing how quickly we can react. In San Remigio, where our coordinators were threatened, using our cellphones other members quickly responded and came to the rescue. (Pertierra, 2006:54)

Mobiles become protective devices. They achieve this by acting as information beacons for colleagues and the general public. Examples such as the one concerning its salvational role against kidnapping are common.

If television created a national audience as David argues, the mobile individualized its members, converting large collectivities into micro-political units or smart mobs (Rheingold, 2002). By 2001, mobile phones had entered the communications landscape and sweeping claims have been made of its consequences (Pertierra, et al., 2002). The role of texting in EDSA 2, although exaggerated, is nevertheless significant. The Internet has extended these micro-political units onto the global stage combining them into new and larger collectivities. The Filipino Diaspora now actively participates in local everyday life while also giving it a global sensibility. At last, it seems that these new technologies will transform the structures of consciousness of most Filipino hitherto unaffected by earlier inventions.

The Internet (10 % of households) has not yet achieved the penetration rates of the mobile and remains limited to areas with landlines. Nevertheless, the presence of Internet Cafés has become a standard feature of most cities and large towns. For example, Tuguegarao with a population (2004) of 120,645 has 105 Internet Cafés offering nearly 1500 broadband connections (de Leon, 2007). People use them in favor of home connections for speed and privacy. This usage is mainly among young people, their purposes range from school research, games, job searches, emailing relatives and friends, accessing pornographic or religious sites and exploring online relationships. The global condition has reached Tuguegarao, bringing with it new expectations and understandings of the world.

Kinship

Philippine kinship is composed of bilateral descent groups. Bilateral kinship prevents the formation of stable lineages since each generation has competing claims. Affinity as much as consanguinity is the basis for kin group formation. Enduring group structures or coalitions are rare. Instead ego-focused kin groups coalesce around common temporary alliances. Kinship and local associations appear to be the main building block of Philippine society (David, 2001; Dumont, 1992; Zialcita, 2005). Beyond kin and the local, most Filipinos feel little solidarity. Social institutions eliciting wider loyalties exist but are not very developed. Since the Philippine state cannot provide adequate essential services – e.g. education, health, employment and security – it is unable to demand the corresponding loyalty from its citizens. Perhaps, more accurately, state services are allocated on the basis of kinship, locality or patronage rather than on the abstract rights of citizens. Hence its beneficiaries feel obliged to their patrons rather than to the corresponding state institutions.

The most obvious advantage of the new media for kinship is their ability to maintain synchronic ties with overseas relatives. The latter enjoy an absent presence in their village communities, and are able to participate in the routine decisions of family affairs. Most text messages and a frequent use of the Internet involve these kinship links. Personal confessions, intimate thoughts and anxieties generally avoided in direct talk are the favorite subjects of texts and the Internet. These exchanges generate a textual intimacy absent in ordinary discourse.

The phenomenon of an absent presence sometimes leads to unexpected consequences. Sarah worked in Hong Kong for several years and sent money to her husband regularly. He was supposed to use the money to build house extensions but instead used it for personal pleasures. Suspecting that something was wrong, Sarah spoke to her sister to confirm what was happening. She returned to the village but separated from her husband. Similar cases of close surveillance are now a common consequence of having mobiles (Pertierra, 2006).

Nagasaka (2003) describes how mobiles have changed the communicative practices in an Ilocano village, many of whose members work overseas. Prior to acquiring mobiles, rural villagers seldom communicated with their overseas kin except for emergency telephone calls or the exchange of gifts (*paw-it*) by returning and departing migrants. A developed system of sharing gifts and information assured that villagers and their overseas kin remained in contact. But the mobile significantly changed this system of communication, making it much easier. Apart from contemporaneity, the messages themselves become more private and emotive. Nagasaka argues that Ilocano kinship is processual and contingent, dependent on regular exchanges and reassurances.

It is in this context that everyday conversations associated with paw-it should be considered. To share their mutual experiences or incidents through everyday conversations is particularly significant for overseas migrants who cannot be physically present to engage in daily interactions in the village (Nagasaka, 2003:49).

Nagasaka gives an example of a typical conversation between a husband in the village and his overseas spouse:

My wife asked how much money was withdrawn from the bank, how much is left and what are the details of the expenses, particularly those asked by the children – those they bought and those paid in

school. She also asked their school performances and health status of Remy (one of his two children) who was then recovering from a fractured arm (her right arm was broken after falling from a tree). Aside from these, she also asked about the news from the neighborhood. What was new and what was happening. And she talked about the news from friends and their living conditions in Hong Kong (Nagasaka, 2003:51).

Another conversation:

The same with the first call. 'How are the children?' Like that. We talked of their activities in school. About the expenses, this includes everything bought like school supplies, books, home appliances, grocery items, everything. Their health problems, who got sick and how much is spent. For some other news, she asked how were her parents, her relatives, her aunt, the neighbours, her in-laws, their children and so on. There are so many topics to discuss (Nagasaka, 2003:51).

The processual nature of local kinship depends on access to information (*damag*) and particularly to gossip (*tsismis*). Most social interactions concern this exchange of information. But gossip is always about other people and never consists of personal confessions or admissions. It is a system of surveillance that deals with exterior behaviour rather than interior feelings. Fault rather than sin becomes the crucial determinant of moral behaviour (Pertierra, 1988). Public shame through gossip rather than contrition supports the normative world.

The facility to communicate intimate feelings via texts or voice calls has added a new dimension to family relationships. Exchanges between parents and children and between spouses indicate an emotional familiarity and closeness generally lacking in traditional families. Paradoxically, this closeness to absent parents occurs as children are looked after by extended kin, either grandparents or aunts. While the village households of overseas parents include extended family, the discursive closeness of mobile communications only includes absent kin. Discursive intimacy and spatial propinquity are disengaged. This intimacy of virtual communications may lead to the nucleation of Filipino kinship hitherto a composite of Hawaiian generational and Eskimo nuclear family. While extended family relationships are still strong, factors such as the urban drift, overseas work and contemporary culture may be favoring closer ties within the nuclear family.

Texting Romances

Texting has now become a routine way of establishing new relationships, including romantic ones (Solis, 2005). While people still consider textmates a superficial mode of relating, Solis argues that these virtual friendships are as authentic as conventional ones.

In the case of romance, texting can take the form of technological foreplay leading eventually to more corporeal contacts. Contemporary life is often based on mediated relationships drawn from the media or conducted through the mobile and the Internet. Most of these relationships simply extend and reinforce already existing ones but others are generated exclusively through the new communication technologies as argued by Miller (2007). These latter relationships are a product of the new media and increasingly characterize contemporary life. A popular example is online marriages discussed below.

As Pertierra, et al. (2003) have shown, both men and women use the new media to explore aspects of their inner selves. Women use the Internet more extensively than men in this exploration, particularly to find marriage partners. Most of our informants admitted having established firm friendships through texting or the Internet. Some of these relationships resulted in face-to-face interactions while others remained virtual or online. Overseas workers often exchange and pass on mobile numbers to their friends and relatives in the hope of encouraging courtships. Nagasaka (2007:219) writes:

Young villagers told me that there are many cases where textmates become one's boyfriends or girlfriends. There is also a case in Salpad where a female domestic worker in Italy got married to her textmate in the Philippines. She got his cellphone number from his mother who is also working in Italy.

The large number of female overseas workers is also shaping the use of the new media. Their interest in keeping in close touch with their village families has been mentioned. Given that these women have become the major income providers has given them an added status and importance. Pingol (2006) has shown how their financial independence has extended into areas of personal freedom, including a more assertive sexual agency. The case of Sarah (Pertierra, 2006:110) is typical of these independent women. While waiting for her return to Hong Kong Sarah exercises her new self confidence through texting.

Interviewer: So, what do you think the cellphone has done to you? Do you feel different without the cellphone?

Sarah: Yes, if there's no cellphone, I also don't think of him (her boyfriend). My daughter borrowed my cellphone for a month; I did not look for him. 'Never mind', I said. But if I have the cellphone with me and no load, I feel that I must load.

In this case the cellphone clearly gives Sarah a new sense of agency. It is not only a mnemonic device but in itself generates social practices. The mobile is not simply a medium of communication but an object to which one relates in a new way. The mobile is part of a relationship *sui generis* (Miller, 2007). This self confidence also results from her experience of financial independence. The mobile complements the new economic role played by women working overseas.

Virtual but Real Intimacy

The liberational and emancipatory role of the new media has often been noted. Partly motivated by the anonymity of interlocutors but also because of the intrinsically democratic and unconstrained element of interactions, intimate exchanges are a marked feature of these media. This intimacy often involves participants known to one another but also arises between unknown interlocutors.

Carol: Hi, I saw your name in Abante Tonite. So, you want to have a friend? I am Carol De Guzman, 24 years old. Is it okay to text you so that we can exchange sweet messages?

Linda: You know Carol, since I advertised my name on that tabloid, I have been receiving a lot of text messages so that I have to load my cellphone twice a month. In fact, others would even insist on seeing me but I just tell them that I live far away.

Carol: I am just contented with texting because it is quite boring here in our workplace.

Linda: Why? What type of job are you doing? Where are you from?

Carol: I live in Cubao, Q.C. When my boss is not around I have nothing to do, that's why I get bored. So when I was reading a tabloid I saw your name and I decided to text you.

Linda: Really? Thanks, I'm just lucky to have a textmate who is from Quezon City. How's your work there?

Carol: Its fine, my employers are already old and they are always out of the country. Most of their relatives are living abroad, that's why they are

always not here. So I just end up watching tv and texting.

Linda: And that's really boring. But you can always go out during your day-off. Have fun with friends, go to disco houses.

Carol: I don't know how to dance. I just love listening to music. Maybe you're a good dancer.

Linda: I know some steps. I'm a big Sexbomb Dancers fan. When I'm not doing anything I go with my friends to Padi's Point, they got such good musicians that you can't really keep from dancing.

Carol: My body is not really that graceful for me to go dancing.

Linda: I'm sorry. I'll just text you again because I have to do something. I'll forward a nice message to you.

Carol: Ok.

Later that day.

Linda: True friends are gifts not easily gained. It roots stem from one's heart and involves memories that stay, not for a moment, not for a day but forever. God Bless.

Carol: 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.

Linda: That's a sweet message, it is very heartening. Maybe, you also have a lot of other textmates.

Carol: Of course, the maids from the next subdivision. I have many woman friends that give me nice text messages.

Linda: I had a girlfriend once. She went to work in Japan. She had this Japanese boyfriend who hurt her when the guy was high on drugs. I feel sorry for her because when we were together she did not experience that. I love her very much. But she learned how to use drugs and that was when I decided to break up with her.

Carol: So you're a lesbian. I have a nurse girlfriend, she's a jealous type of person but she's not checking my cellphone. We used to quarrel every time because of the messages in my cellphone. So I told her not to look into my messages and to mind her own business, that's why I only got to text with other people now.

Linda: How long have you been together?

Carol: Around two years. She always took me to this bar called Clowns, and we would watch comedians. It's very entertaining.

Linda: I saw these comedians on tv and they're really funny. When do you usually go to Clowns?

Carol: Every Saturday, the place is always full. But it is really nice, I enjoyed a lot going there, we usually go home at 2am.

Linda: You have a very nice girlfriend. She really loves you.

Carol: She's a good lover. I also have some male suitors but I am afraid of getting involved with them because I have this sister who got married to a guy. They have many children and her husband would beat her sometimes.

Linda: Maybe that's why you do not like to have boyfriends.

Carol: I am not yet totally closing my heart to men. I also want to have children some day. But I only want children, not a husband.

Linda: If you only want children, why not get one from the nursing homes?

Carol: I want one that is made of my own blood. You can't be sure with adopted children, they might grow up bad.

Linda: But you will teach them good values. They can even help you when you grow up.

Carol: Well, you have a reason but I am not planning to do it in the near future. It might take some time. Sorry, I have to go now.

Linda: Okay, Thanks for texting. Take care.

The exchange above illustrates the rapid transition from stranger to intimate made possible by mobiles. While such exchanges also took place before the mobile, e.g. during long bus trips, in certain life rituals, this technology greatly expands the capacity for discursive intimacy among strangers. This creates new social networks hitherto difficult to establish and thus generates new forms of sociality.

Internet Cafés

While household access to the Internet is still relatively low, Internet Cafés have become a common feature of most Philippine cities. Even people with household access often go to these Cafés for privacy and camaraderie. They are sites for both virtual and corporeal sociality. Internet Cafés are new sites for exploring novel relationships, virtual and actual, often resembling what anthropologists call liminal situations, where new identities are explored. People in Tuguegarao use these cafés to remain in contact with friends and family abroad, to supplement the meager resources of local libraries, play games, search for porn, access useful information and as a place to meet friends. Janna is a young married woman (de Leon, 2007: 49):

I still go to the Internet café to download software, music videos, games and also to play with other gamers who I now consider friends. Actually I feel more 'free' in Internet cafés since I could open and browse any site I wish to visit. Although my personal computer is protected with several anti-viruses, I am still very cautious, especially that all important files are stored in it. My husband and I love online or network gaming and we do it in the Internet shop. Battle Realms, DOTA, and Need for Speed Underground are a few of our favorites. We like to compete with each other and since we have only one computer at home, we go to net cafés to play. I tried playing alone, but I get bored easy. With someone to compete with (not the computer), I can really be motivated to do well and win. One time I beat my husband, he got all boos, and hurrahs for me, he suddenly turned red because of embarrassment. I pitied him, but I was too overwhelmed by the other gamers' applauses.

From then on, everybody wanted to play with me but I never beat my husband again ... it's a matter of choice. I am actually withdrawn around people but in my constant visit to Internet cafés I eventually gained friends, especially those I played with. Most of them are males and in their late teens. Considering my personality I didn't imagine I could be friends with them. Our interest in computer/online games creased out unfriendly encounters.

For Janna, the Internet Café is a new domain for exploring new relationships as well as for asserting new aspects of herself. She feels more confident in the Café and meets new friends. Her relationship with her husband takes on a more egalitarian aspect even as she continues to defer to him in important ways. But it is the capacity to form new friendships both online and on site that the Café provides that makes it significant. Married Filipinas are very circumspect

about relationships with young men unrelated to them. The fact that Janna feels comfortable in befriending her Internet buddies indicates a new sense of individual confidence. The important thing is to contain these relationships within their appropriate sites, in this case the Internet Café. In this sense we can say that Janna's relationships are virtual in two senses – because they occur in cyberspace and because they are limited to the Internet Café.

Cyber-Cosmopolitanism

Online marriage sites are a common example of this new mobilizing potential. Constable (2005) has explored some of these sites and points out the opportunities it opens for both men and women for experiencing new bodily pleasures. While the Internet is often associated with disembodied experiences, it actually encourages particular corporealities. Combining virtual and bodily experiences with cultural values, the Internet reconstitutes the lived body, resulting in new possibilities. Filipina mail order brides were a common, if controversial, issue during the 80s and 90s. 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.

Imee is another frequent user of Internet Cafés. 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 then 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, 2007:56)

Conclusion

The mobile phone and the Internet have been accepted into Philippine society with unprecedented speed. Their transformational effects have yet to be fully assessed but early signs indicate that, unlike previous technologies, the new media are inducing basic socio-cultural changes. Older technologies, while readily assimilated, rarely entered into the lives of most Filipinos or only did so under constrained circumstances. Mobiles have penetrated all aspects of the private and public spheres, including religion, politics and economy. They affect not only relationships with the outside world but also transform orientations in the inner world. Functional capacity is enhanced both within and without the system. The new media not only enable their users to link more effectively with the environment but also interiorize these linkages to reconstitute the self. The environment is itself changing rapidly. Overseas work, tourism, virtual organizations, electronic transactions and transnational migration are transforming the social, political and cultural landscapes.

If the old media such as television constituted a national audience, the new media have both globalized and individualized their members into autonomous but linked units or smart mobs. Their political and social consequences are now being felt. Politics has to deal with both virtual and traditional constituencies. A hitherto hierarchical cultural order is quickly being subverted by popular choices. The results are unpredictable but certain to shake former

structures. Traditional politicians, media stars and gay activists, each drawing on their respective constituencies (virtual and actual), compete in the new order.

The Filipino family has undoubtedly benefited from the new technology, at least in its capacity to enable closer relationships. Diasporic ties and overseas work have become normal aspects of family life. But the new media also deepens communicative exchanges, allowing hitherto unexpressed aspects to express themselves. Spouses frankly discuss their sexual needs and children more readily express their affections within the family. These exchanges tend to encourage a condensation of ties within the nuclear family. The democratization of feelings becomes a feature of family life.

The new media has been described as a technology of the soul as much as that of the body. They reconstitute our inner as well as our corporeal self, enabling new spiritual and bodily pleasures. Notions of authenticity are redefined. Traditional institutions such as marriage are readapted to respond to new possibilities. Space-time compression creates new landscapes within which to live old and new identities. Virtual, actual and liminal spaces characterize contemporary life, combining the old with the new. Electronic communication ushered in new realities combining elements of the natural and the spiritual worlds. No wonder these technologies often evoke supernatural expectations. Gray (2002:9) exclaims: *We're going to be Gods, we might as well get good at it.* Most of us, remembering earlier promises, may choose to remain more skeptical.

Bibliography

- Barlow, J P. 1995. Is there a there in cyberspace? *Ume Reader*, 1 (1), 50–56.
- Caoili, O. 1991. *Policy making for science and technology in the Philippines: Changing structures, processes and directions*. Diamond Jubilee Lecture, University of the Philippines.
- Chen, Y S. 2004. Virtual Spaces for Imaginable Marriages: A Discursive Analysis of Structured Powers for Foreign Brides in Taiwan. *Asian Studies*, 40 (1), 35–61.
- Constable, N. 2005. Love at first sight? Visual Images and Virtual Encounters with Bodies. *Asian Digital Cultures Conference*, Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, Taipeh.

- David, R. 2001. *Reflections on Sociology & Philippine Society*. Quezon City, University of the Philippines Press.
- David, R. 2004. Media. *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, Manila, February 8, p 11.
- de Leon, K. 2007. Ethnographic Study of Internet Cafes in Tuguegarao. *Living the Information Society Conference*, Manila.
- Dumont, J P. 1992. *Visayan Vignettes*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.
- Gray, C. 2002. *Cyborg Citizen*. London, Routledge.
- Luhmann, N. 1998. *Observations on Modernity*. Stanford University Press.
- Nagasaka, I. 2003. Cellular Phones and Filipino transnational Social Fields. *Pilipinas*, 40, 44–54.
- Nagasaka, I. 2007. Cellphones in the Rural Philippines. In: Pertierra, R (ed). *The Social Construction and Usage of Communication Technologies: Asian and European Experiences*. 2007. Quezon City, University of the Philippines Press.
- Magno, A. 2007. *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, 9 March p. 12.
- Miller, D. 2007. *What is a mobile phone relationship?* Paper presented at Living the Information Society, Manila Philippines.
- Pertierra, R. 1988. *Religion, Politics and Rationality in a Philippine Community*. Quezon City, Ateneo de Manila University press.
- Pertierra, R et al. 2002. *Txt-ing selves: Cellphones and Philippine Modernity*. Manila, De La Salle University Press.
- Pertierra, R. 2003. *Science, Technology and Everyday Culture in the Philippines*. Institute of Philippine Culture, Ateneo de Manila University, Quezon City.
- Pertierra, R. 2006. *Transforming Technologies: Altered Selves – Mobile Phone and Internet Use in the Philippines*. Manila, De La Salle University Press.
- Pingol, A. 2006. Personal communication.
- Rheingold, H. 2002. *Smart Mobs, Basic Books*. Massachusetts, Cambridge.
- Ricoeur, P. 1971. The model of the text: Meaningful action considered as a text. *Social Research*, 38, 329–362.
- Solis, R. 2005. Mobile Romance. *Pilipinas*, 45, 18–28.
- Teodoro, L. 2007. Beyond the TV Ads. *Standard Today*, 2 March.
- Zialcita, F. 2005. *Authentic Though not Exotic*. Quezon City, Ateneo de Manila University Press.

Raul Pertierra is an anthropologist specializing in research on the Philippines. He taught at various Australian universities and is presently visiting professor at the Asian Center, University of the Philippines and at the Department of Sociology & Anthropology, Ateneo de Manila University. He has published several books on Philippine society and culture, the latest being *Transforming Technologies: Altered Selves – Mobile Phones and Internet Use in the Philippines*, De La Salle University Press, Manila, Philippines, 2006.

email: rpertier@mozcom.com
raul_p29@pltdsl.net