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ENABLING TECHNOLOGIES
Extending the senses beyond body-to-body communication in the Philippines

The relationship between technology and culture 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 cultural change, often in unpredictable ways. Moreover, technology may also be adapted in new cultural contexts. While technology does not itself determine socio-cultural change, it opens up new conditions of possibility hitherto unavailable\(^1\). These new conditions of possibility, using a Weberian metaphor, act as rail switches enabling social change to proceed along new ways. According to Weber (1930)\(^2\), changes in the inner-world brought about by the Protestant ethic ultimately created the conditions for modern capitalism. This change in attitude was the product of the wide accessibility of the bible made possible by mechanical printing\(^3\). This technological revolution ushered in a new spirit of inquiry enabling 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 text\(^4\) resulted in inter-subjective as well as objective structures known as modernity.

Among the technological devices of modern times, mobile phone is one of the most successful. Its effects may not be as dramatic as electricity or nuclear power, as necessary as the internal combustion engine, as beneficial as medical technology or as entertaining as television and radio, but mobile phones have taken the world by storm, exceeding all commercial expectations, particularly in poorer countries were other technologies are simply unavailable or too expensive. By 2010 over four billion mobile phones have been sold, the bulk in Asia. They enable communication to become an extension of the hand-ear, a prosthesis, allowing its owner instant access to friends and strangers elsewhere. It allows discourses of intimacy to take place anytime, anywhere. While the telephone created similar opportunities, the mobility and portability of mobiles gives them a special relationship with their users. The unity of mobile and user is expressed in a variety of ways. Mobiles come in myriad shapes and colours, with individualized ring tones and screens, have distinctive functions and put to a wide range of uses. At the same time, mobiles are a technology with a truly global reach. Their effect

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is to link individual users across the world or in the neighbouring village. No other technology manages to compress both the global and the local into the immediate, contiguous and personal. In the context of the contemporary city, with its excessive distractions, anonymity and fast pace, the mobile phone provides a reassuring connection with hearth and home. As Kopomaa\textsuperscript{5} says for Finnish youth, it puts the city in your pocket. But for the Filipino users focused in this paper, mobiles also connect the rural world to its urban counterpart and even beyond, effectively effacing their differences. Overseas work is now almost routine for many of our informants and mobiles connect them to meaningful others, allowing domestic workers in Hong Kong or seamen in distant ports to maintain an absent but active presence in their home communities. Synchronous communication allows subjects to share a simultaneous present\textsuperscript{6} anywhere, anytime with anyone.

This paper explores the cultural effects of those technologies, such as the mobile phone and the Internet, that extend communicative processes beyond physical co-presence; the discussion will focus on the Philippino context. At the same time, it shows how this peculiar cultural context contributes to shape the ‘postcorporeal’ communicative practices allowed by new media. In a way that may seem unusual to western eyes, ‘postcorporeal’ communication comes to include forms of contact with the transcendental (religion) and also with the realms of magic, like in the cases related to communication with the dead\textsuperscript{7}.

The capacity of ICT to extend communicative exchanges is in fact particularly salient for the recently deceased. It is a common belief in the Philippines and throughout much of Southeast Asia that the spirits of the recently dead hover around their place of death and seek to re-establish ties with their living kin\textsuperscript{8}. Many death rituals involve convincing the deceased that their new condition prevents them from re-joining their living relatives. They must be convinced to depart from this life and travel to the land of spirits. The new media serves as a tool for communicating with the dead. Their mysterious capacity to transmit messages through space undetected by human senses gives them an affinity with the supernatural.

While traditional beliefs in the Philippines easily adapt the technology to former practices, the early history of the telephone and radio in the West echo these structural affinities.

\textit{Etheric messages}

Thomas Watson, Alexander Graham Bell’s assistant described how he was fascinated by the power of the telephone:

I used to spend hours at night in the laboratory listening to the many strange noises in the telephone and speculating as to their cause. One of the most common sounds was a snap, followed by a grating sound that lasted two or three seconds before it faded into silence, and


\textsuperscript{6} R. Perttierra, \textit{Explorations in Social Theory and Philippine Ethnography}, University of the Philippines Press, Quezon City 1997.


\textsuperscript{8} Ibid.
another was like the chirping of a bird. My theory at this time was that the currents causing these sounds came from explosions on the sun or that they were signals from another planet⁹.

Michael Heumann¹⁰ writes:

There is, no doubt, a link between the telephone’s otherworldly sounds and the voices and noises [Watson] heard during Spiritualist séances. That he approaches both the spiritualist and the scientific mediums with the same careful scrutiny suggests not merely the seriousness with which he held both subjects but also a willingness to see in the telephone the same supernatural forces that are conceivably at work during a séance. Sound, in Watson’s case, is the medium through which science and superstition are able to converge.

Moving from the telephone to the phonograph, Heumann continues¹¹:

Just as the phonograph presents a new conception of communication based upon replication and reproduction, so it also questions the authenticity and authority of the human voice as maker and definer of meaning. The ambivalence generated by such disconcerting consequences is raised in the December 22, 1877 article in Scientific American, which […] emphasizes the phonograph’s humanity as if to «deliberately magicalize the apparatus as if it were animated by a little human inside it», with a full knowledge of social customs, an eager concern over others well-being, and a calm and graceful demeanor.

For Heumann¹²:

Just as the phonograph has the potential to transcend death and heighten democratization (making music available to all citizens), it also alters the reality of a sound so that even ‘the illusion of real presence’ cannot be certified without first checking with the phonographic recording. This is a point Theodore Adorno and Walter Benjamin, among others, make in the 1930s; however, by then, the focus had shifted away from the effacement of reality to fascism’s manipulation of that ‘illusion’ by technologic means. This results in a newly conceived ‘reality’ that is wholly subsumed within the ‘virtual’ realm of technology.

Antinomian technologies

Technologies of displacement, whether spatial, temporal or communicative, inevitably produce neurasthenia. No wonder that new technologies evoke antinomian and even eschatological fears. The disengagement of time from space has led to the transgression of hitherto impenetrable boundaries. The divisions between life and death, nature and culture, male and female, human and machine have to be renegotiated. The hopes and fears initially accompanying the implementation of a new technology not only tell us much about how such novel technologies are embedded in existing practices but also about how such a novel technology comes to be culturally constructed in a particular context, time, and place.

While popular fiction and the cinema have often expressed the anxieties caused

¹⁰ Ibidem.
¹¹ Ibidem.
¹² Ibidem.
by novel technologies, this concern is also found in more realist, albeit non-western accounts. There have been reports in Nigeria that people die after receiving certain mysterious calls. Agbu\textsuperscript{13} recounts the case of a woman who claimed to have received a call that almost led to her death. The phone flashed the name of a relative but without the number:

On the first day the phone rang, I picked it up and shouted hello, hello but did not get any reply. I was hearing strange noises in the background. The call came again at the weekend, when I picked it up, I lost control completely. I don’t know who is behind this and I don’t want any problems.

A similar incident was reported in Lagos that same year. A young man received a call from a number 0172021127. Suddenly he shouted "Blood of Jesus, Blood of Jesus" before he collapsed. Fortunately sympathizers were able to revive him. A company in Lagos warned its employers about these killer numbers and posted them in its notice board:

Please beware of these strange GSM numbers: 0801113999, 08033123999, 08032113999 and 08025111999. In short any number that ends with 333, 666, 999. They are killing! This is nothing but reality, you are warned\textsuperscript{14}.

Texts from the dead

Jaime Licauco is a well known commentator on supernatural matters. His column often has examples of supernatural communication. He wrote about the case of a texting (sms) exchange between a man and his dead girlfriend:

Two weeks ago, Carmina, who became my girlfriend through text messaging, died. After her death, she started sending me text messages. During her wake, she continued to text me, telling me how much she loved me. In one of our conversations, she told me she was not dead. After her burial, I thought she would stop sending text messages. I was wrong. She would usually send me text messages around 11 in the evening or at midnight. Her cousin is now using her SIM card, per Carmina’s request. I asked her cousin to turn off the phone but Carmina was still able to get through to me. It’s funny that she found herself in different places, like her home or a resort. I want to ask: Should I continue talking to her? Please enlighten me on this strange event. Thank you\textsuperscript{15}.

Licauco advised the young man to inform his dead girlfriend that he still loved her but that she should accept her new condition and move on. This example is a logical extension of extended communication, from corporeal to postcorporeal absence. It is not clear if the two ever met; perhaps the whole relationship was conducted via texting, in which case, the example simply refers to a cyber relationship, independent of the corporeal.

On 26 February, 2004, a passenger ferry bound for Bacolod departed from Manila. Barely an hour away, the ship caught fire and sunk with the loss of 116 passengers and

\textsuperscript{14} Ibidem.
crew. A member of the investigating committee 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.¹⁶

Ramon Tulfo, a well-known 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 kin of their situation. Tulfo and Domencil also accepted that the missed calls were sent by Nazareno after his death. In a popular TV show (The Boy Abunda Show, 2005), members of the audience were asked to relate strange experiences with their mobile phones. Several participants volunteered information that they had received texts or calls from dead relatives. These calls came immediately after the callers’ death or soon after. The purpose of the calls was to inform relatives and to ensure that the appropriate rituals are conducted. Traditional culture has provisions for such communicative exchanges, which the mobile phone readily accommodates. Similar uses of the mobile are reported from Indonesia.¹⁸

The strange stories pages of a Javanese weekly newspaper in early 2002 contained a piece on a mysterious phone in one of Yogyakarta’s public payphone centers. The writer was asked to dial the numbers 11378 and to ask for a person named Endang of Dewi, and when she did so, she was told politely that Endang was not in. When trying again, now asking for other persons a similar thing occurred, as she was told that the person had just left. More scarily, the booth’s display unit (the meter that records the duration of the call) did not record the use of any pulses. The writer of the piece was left wondering where in the city of Yogyakarta would one have a five-digit phone number, but to the street vender it was clear – the woman must have phoned the cemetery. How else could one explain the fact that whoever one asks for has always just left? It must be that the phone number connects one to the grave or to the alam gaib, the world beyond.

¹⁶ Ferdinand Flores, personal communication, October 24, 2006.
¹⁸ BARENDREGT - PERTIERRA, Supernatural Mobile Communication in the Philippines and Indonesia, p. 378.
Indonesian media often report stories of *mailbox hantu* (voice mail ghost). These involve mobile phone numbers such that when people ring they hear mysterious voices often associated with the *kuntilanak* (the ghosts of women who have died in childbirth). The craze of ringing these numbers included children who would ask their parents for money to make these calls. Other Asian societies have similar beliefs and several films have featured the mobile phone as a direct connection with the supernatural world. Even high-tech societies such as Japan and South Korea often associate the supernatural realm with the new technology.

*Technologically mediated communication*

Fortunati 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, driving to work 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. These absent others include the recently deceased, with whom Filipinos expect to have communicative exchanges until the final burial rites are consummated. Mobile phones are the best examples of the extension and mediation of post-corporeal communication. Their close association with their users makes them an extension of their owners.

The Internet is also a site for intimate exchanges where emoticons and images on the screen replace body-to-body interactions. In both cases, the body is presented as a mediated reality. Since notions of the body are themselves cultural constructs, the role of technology has to be situated within an enframing context. Hence, what for the English may be described as face-to-face communication strikes Italian speakers as particularly nondescript since for them the whole body is engaged in the communicative process.

Technologies often have enabling properties. They allow their users to initiate and conduct social interactions not otherwise possible because of the constraints of space, time or the corporeal. Communication technologies are particularly relevant for initiating, continuing or complementing social relationships that otherwise may be difficult, inconvenient or physically impossible. Mobile phones and the Internet are especially effective technologies for conducting social interactions. They not only transcend space, create a simultaneous present anywhere, at anytime but also provide new channels for discursive intimacy. Moreover, these technologies often invoke notions of the cyber-natural and even the religious, with their capacities to transcend spatial and temporal boundaries.

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21 *Ibidem.*
While technology always responds to its cultural environment, it may also reflect trans-cultural and universal features. Technologies may express the zeitgeist and hence may be described as *apparatgeist*\(^{22}\). Such claims may be made of mobile phones, not only because of their rapid spread globally but also because of their common enabling effects. Despite local variations, mobile phones share many uses universally. It is a technology that addresses the primal needs (i.e. connectivity) of the human condition. Needless to say this connectivity may extend beyond the corporeal, the actual and even the possible. The genre of science fiction is the clearest example of the boundless nature of such connectivities.

**Instant media evangelization**

In a generally unexpected development, the expansion of media technology, radio and television in particular, has allowed the rapid diffusion of religious orthodoxy. Televangelists have taken on new and expanded forms, reaching new audiences and encouraging novel forms of fundamentalism. The rapid transmission of religious imagery encourages a standardization of religious ideology not possible in the earlier days of evangelization. The early Spanish missionaries managed to convert Filipinos to Catholicism only after centuries of colonization (1521-1898). This very successful but relatively slow process of conversion allowed local beliefs to penetrate and even transform orthodox Catholic practices. Hence, contemporary Filipino Catholicism is an amalgam of orthodox as well as indigenous beliefs and customs. Moreover, their synthesis has taken place in the context of everyday life and practices.

In contrast to this slow and gradual process of conversion are present day televangelists who broadcast their messages from Texas across cultures and continents. Such rapid transmission does not allow for local adjustments in the context of everyday life. Instead of culture reflecting practice, technologically mediated culture shapes and constrains the practices of everyday life. From reflecting areas of practical signification, postmodern culture becomes a set of free floating ideas and images at most loosely connected to quotidian life. Hitherto closely attached to a form of life, postmodern culture becomes a sphere of autonomous signification. The virtualization of the local has detached culture from its sources in the routines of everyday life and instead culture becomes a product of globality. The structures of meaning provided by culture are no longer rooted in ordinary experience but are instead linked to complex and abstract systems. When abstract systems impinge on everyday life, abstraction becomes a concrete ability. A paradox of contemporary times is the rise of fundamentalisms in an otherwise technical and secular age.

In some ways this development parallels the age of print, which initially resulted in the reinvigoration of religiosity and the rise of new forms of reformed Christianity. Only much later did a print culture also result in the rise of modern forms of secular consciousness. Perhaps, a similar trend will develop with the new media. A new public sphere combining old and novel features is still too early to fully predict.

**Transforming technologies**

We seem to be on the cusp of a new age! Astonishing claims are being made by social theorists. According to Barlow\(^{23}\):

\(^{22}\) **KATZ - AAKHUS** (eds.), *Perpetual Contact: Mobile Communication, Private Talk, Public Performance*.  
\(^{23}\) **J. BARLOW**, *Is There a There in Cyberspace?*, Utne Reader, 2005, pp. 50-56.
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.

The printing press and literacy made the transition from feudalism to modernity possible. The easy availability of information made possible by the printing press shattered the hegemony of knowledge controlled by the Medieval Church, eventually leading to the secularization of society. Religion, hitherto part of the public sphere, retreated to the private sphere. From being public truth, religion became private belief. Its place was taken by science, henceforth the arbiter of true knowledge. A sphere of mundane aesthetics, distinct from the sacred, began to develop. Secular law separated itself from canonical theology, and was presided by a group of lay specialists. A new political consciousness began to emerge throughout Europe, resulting in the replacement of the divine right of kings by the sovereignty of parliament and the people. But claims such as «We are going to be Gods, we might as well get good at it» or «In another thousand years, we will be machines or gods»24 are as millenarian as earlier prophecies.

In a parallel but opposite direction, modern technology such as mobile phones bring about changes in the inner-world of their users25 that have significant social and cultural consequences. Mobile phones encourage a more privatized and personalized orientation to the world. They enable a discursive intimacy hitherto difficult if not impossible in traditional societies. Moreover, private orientations may quickly coalesce into collective actions through the rapid transmission of information. These collectivities or smart mobs26 easily mobilized, are capable of the micro-coordination of their hitherto unconnected participants. Some claim that this micro-coordination brought about the downfall of Philippine President Joseph Estrada in 2001. This political event was referred to as a coup d’text.

The first steam locomotive initially unsettled the tranquillity of the English countryside but quickly established itself as integral to commerce and everyday life. From initially unsettling the routines of everyday life, the railways became an impetus for achieving a tighter coordination through the use of schedules27. The telegraph, the motorcar and other inventions followed in quick succession, reflecting as well as exacerbating the rapid changes of late modernity. Colonialism and imperialism imposed alien forms of life in distant lands and a global economy brought everything into flux everywhere. No wonder that the present condition is ontologically insecure28 or as some have described the contemporary world – a surplus of meaning but a lack of sense29. We need anchoring structures in such a shifting condition and mobile phones respond to this need. The irony of the mobile phone serving as an instrument for rootedness is not lost on many of our local informants. Hence the common complaint of Filipino mothers about having to abandon their children to work abroad as nannies. Using their mobile they can at least maintain a virtual rootedness in their home communities.

While the feelings of ontological insecurity are a consequence of the material

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27 PERTIERRA, Explorations in Social Theory and Philippine Ethnography.
changes brought about by modernity, they also express new ways of relating to the mundane world. Heidegger\textsuperscript{30} 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 \textit{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 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. Sometimes ‘the machine becomes us’\textsuperscript{31}. This incorporation of the machine into the body is a familiar theme in contemporary culture.

\textit{Online relationships}

As stated in its introduction, this paper examines how the new communications media shapes post-corporeal relationships. The extension of the senses may transcend body-to-body communication but they nevertheless still involve corporeal identities. These corporealities are culturally constructed and while they may take new shapes and expressions in the communication process, they remain rooted in broader cultural sites. Due to the large exodus of Filipinos abroad in search of work as well as the cultural consequences of globalization, an increasing number of Filipinos are actively engaged in online relationships. Exact figures are unreliable but millions of Filipinos are believed to be regularly using online sites to extend their personal relationships. Constable\textsuperscript{32} has noted several hundred websites offering introductory services involving Asian women.

The dangers of the new media are now a regular feature of the mainstream press. Chito Aragon\textsuperscript{33} reports the case of an American who developed a relationship with a young woman from Zamboanga in a dating website called \textit{Cherry Blossom}. They made plans to marry and he sent her money for her travel and visa expenses. When she didn’t arrive on the agreed date, he reported the case to the police in Cebu and they discovered that the American was fooled. The picture she sent of herself and her local address were fakes. The dating website describes itself as:

At Cherry Blossom dating service, the ultimate goal is for every man to find the Asian woman of his dreams. The Cherry Blossom dating service has set the standard for other sites that specialize in matchmaking for men seeking an Asian friend or wife\textsuperscript{34}.

Apart from initiating new relationships using CMICT (computer-mediated-interactive-communicative-technologies), many Filipinos resort to it for maintaining and even strengthening existing relationships. Spatial separation may be the immediate cause for having online relationships but this communicative process also reveals aspects of relationships hitherto unstressed. Hence, notions of honesty and disclosure of hitherto

\textsuperscript{33} \textit{PDI}, November 27, 2009.
\textsuperscript{34} www.dating-site-advisor.com/cherry-blossom-dating-service.html, March 4, 2010.
suppressed desires may express themselves more fully online than when face-to-face (body-to-body) communication takes place. Paradoxically, leaving the body behind during online relationships may result in specific corporeal experiences. Informants often claim nearly falling off their chairs in excitement or shock during online exchanges. Sometimes, the distinction between the virtual and the actual in online relationships become problematic. Online relationships are now so common that the traditional media barely mention it except when unusual things happen such as the case of David Pollard and Amy Taylor in the UK. They met in an Internet chat room and had a registry marriage two years later. They also married in Second Life (a virtual world inhabited by avatars created by members) where their respective avatars had a lavish wedding. Their double lives (actual and virtual) seem to go well until Amy discovered that David (avatar-Dave Barmy) was having an affair in Second Life. She was furious but forgave him until she saw his avatar (Dave Barmy) cuddling a woman in a sofa. This was too much for Amy so she sued for divorce. She also divorced him in Second Life. David admitted his virtual affair but justified it on the grounds that Amy spent the whole day playing World of Warcraft, instead of attending to his needs. While this case may be unusual, it shows that played out fantasies in the virtual world can have consequences in ‘real’ life. This couple is clearly unusual in merging their actual with their virtual selves but less extreme examples are regularly reported in the media.

The new media do not only expedite communication, they also generate new conditions of possibility. In the example above, Second Life provided David and Amy with alternatives to their actual lives that eventually ruined their relationship. While fantasies, suspicions and other distractions have characterized earlier relationships, CMICT gives them a reality that approaches and even exceeds materiality. Other cultures also cultivated states of altered consciousness that impinged on everyday life such as shamanic trances and religious visions but the new media allows ordinary people to experience these altered states much more easily. What we have here is not only communication but also communion. Moreover, this communion includes aspects of us hitherto unrecognized. The new media allows us to recognize the stranger in us. David, Amy and many like them can now engage in a dialogue with themselves.

The example above also shows us the often mistaken distinction between Asian religious or superstitious beliefs and western rationality. The ghost stories mentioned earlier are clearly a variant of the virtual world couched in traditional notions. While many Filipinos firmly believe in the supernatural world (as do many Westerners), these stories are often told in a context of fun or skepticism. The spirits of the dead have entered a new world but their feelings for the mundane world persist even in the afterlife. The mobile phone and the Internet, with their mysterious powers, are logical vehicles for connecting actual lives with their virtual counterparts.

The virtual world and expanded markets

Technologically mediated relationships are a necessary feature of the digital age. A new virtual world has opened up and sex is one of its main commodities. Asian (adult) cam models are only one element of this virtualization of sexuality but it also includes on-

35 Constable, Love at First Sight? Visual Images & Virtual Encounters with Bodies.
line marriages and cyber friendships. Even religion has found a new world of virtual evangelization. An interesting aspect of digitally mediated relationships is their tendency towards ideological purity, whether it is religious fundamentalism or subaltern sexuality. Global terrorists are the digital descendants of their print-based ancestors; the assassins, *juramentados* and anarchists. When combined with the free floating signifiers mentioned earlier, images, texts and other mediated relationships are given renewed motivational powers. Death and martyrdom become meaningful practices.

Filipinos overseas increasingly maintain their relationships virtually. Mothers working abroad provide support for their families but also miss the emotional closeness with their children. Digital communication only satisfies part of this emotional need but at times it may also frustrate and even exacerbate it. Many of these relationships are pursued at two, oftentimes separate levels, the digital and the face-to-face. When parents return from long absences abroad and are obliged to reconcile their digital experiences with new face-to-face interactions, misunderstandings and disappointments inevitably occur.

The new media and spirituality

The Catholic Church in the Philippines has not been slow in using the new technology. Apart from providing religious lessons on sms (catextism), several text services provide an array of prayers, devotions and advise. There is even a service known as Text God. The texter receives biblical quotations appropriate for the day or occasion. Apart from personal greetings, religious messages are undoubtedly the most popular sms messages. Filipinos have also formed religious text brigades, bombarding God with sms requests for protection. Some claimed that this is the reason the Philippines was spared the tragedy of the 2004 Indonesian tsunami. Mobiles become conveyors of spirituality – texting, like prayers, are directed to supernatural interlocutors.

While gender differences are surprisingly muted in the use of the new communication technology, the interest in accessing religious sites is significantly higher among women, while men prefer pornographic sites. But some men (other than priests and seminarians) also express an interest in religious sites. This interest often indicates membership in subcultural groups such as gays and transsexuals. A participant in a gay Filipino spiritual site describes his interest as:

> Cyberspace broke through the spiral (of silence) and gave birth to countercultures of people motivated by the need to bring their own emancipation not only from oppressive structures of monolith religions but also from dualistic notions of the nature of human beings that influence our understanding of gender.

This is a good example of the capacity of the new media to provide a forum for hitherto unvoiced interests. It indicates that the new media can offer opportunities for authentic religious experiences not available in traditional sources.

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37 **Pertierra - Ugarde - Pingol - Hernandez - Dacanay**, *Txt-ing Selves: Cellphones and Philippine Modernity*.

Overseas employment: new contexts of communication

The new communications technologies coincide with the increasing exodus of Filipino workers abroad. Over 8 million Filipinos work abroad, sending remittances that constitute the largest and most regular source of foreign exchange for the country. Without their contribution, the Philippine economy would be in a deep state of recession. But this movement of workers, mostly parents has its social costs. Once again the mobile phone has provided some assistance for these absences. Communications between absent parents and their families in the village have helped ease the pain of separation. Ironically, the surveillance that CMICT allows absent workers has also increased the inevitable breakdown of marital relationships.

Finding Christ among muslims

Rogie is back home after 7 years working in Saudi Arabia. Adjusting to life in a foreign country was a very trying experience until he discovered the power of his Christian faith. Rogie joined a community of Christian believers in Jeddah which transformed his earlier tribulations into an evangelizing mission. Rogie was determined to live a Christian life under trying circumstances. The mobile and the Internet proved valuable and even essential means for survival. They became practical tools enabling him to overcome the barriers set by Islamic society. He remains in contact with his Filipino friends and talks about returning to Saudi Arabia as part of God’s plan.

Except for foreigners with special privileges, workers in Saudi Arabia are not allowed to practice their religion unless they are Muslims. Filipinos are encouraged to convert to Islam and are promised both financial and social advantages if they do so. Rogie knows Filipinos who converted. These are known as Balik-Islam (Return to Islam), a reference to the presence of Islam in the country even before Spanish colonization. According to Rogie, a common rationale used to convert Filipinos is to claim that the country’s original religion was Islam and that Christianity was imposed on Filipinos by their Spanish colonizers. Rogie, however, knew from his college studies that Filipinos were mostly animists (except for parts of Sulu-Mindanao) when the Spanish arrived. He realized that the people (Saudi Arabians) trying to convert him knew little about the country’s historical background. This awareness strengthened his resolve against conversion. Several attempts were made to convert Rogie but he resisted the offers. Instead he prayed that God give him strength to maintain his Christian faith. Rogie had been active in church activities in secondary school but gave them up during his days in college. He rediscovered his faith in Saudi Arabia. Rogie resolved to mend his ways. But this was difficult in a country that forbade the practice of Christianity. Fortunately, Filipinos have devised ways of circumventing these prohibitions.

While many Filipinos like Rogie live in rooms often shared with other nationals, others such as married couples have access to an apartment. If these apartments are large enough, the living room is converted into a prayer room. To ensure that services are not heard outside the apartment, great care is taken to soundproof this room. Often several layers of thick material are pasted on the walls and over them a layer of egg cartoons act as effective sound absorbent. Having ensured that no sounds escape the prayer room, the other concern is to prevent outsiders from noticing the arrival of worshippers. Lookouts are placed in case unexpected inspections are conducted, in which case the guests claim to be celebrating a birthday or other permissible event. Worshippers arrive in pairs,
carefully coordinated using their mobiles. After a certain interval, another pair arrives discreetly. This procedure continues until most people have arrived, often about 30-40, depending on the size of the room and the membership of the congregation. Thursday night is a convenient time since the streets are crowded and people move around without attracting much attention. The main service is held the following day and more people may arrive for it. The service usually lasts for several hours and consists of prayers, hymns and biblical exegetics. It is at once a religious service as well as an occasion for Filipinos to socialize in an otherwise unsupportive society. After the service people depart discreetly, in pairs and after intervals. These services are strictly segregated except for the married couple who usually own the apartment. Similar services are held separately for women.

It is in this context that the new communication media play a crucial role. The first thing a Filipino does upon arrival in Saudi Arabia is to buy a mobile phone with local and international features. A mobile is essential for obtaining even the most basic information such as directions to the shops or meeting places. Most Filipinos need to be in regular contact with friends and use their mobiles just to reassure themselves. Nagpaparamdam is the expression used to indicate this need for reassurance by sending greetings or other simple messages. These apparently banal messages provide the ontological security in stressful and unfamiliar situations. Their forms are highly ritualized and while seemingly trivial, they set the stage for further interaction. The mobile is commonly used to monitor peoples’ movements, particularly in the case of women where security becomes a primary concern. Filipinos routinely call when leaving a place, update their location enroute and when approaching their destination. This is particularly important when organizing meetings such as prayer services to ensure that arrivals and departures do not attract undue attention from the religious authorities. This need for micro-coordination would be much more difficult without the aid of the new communication media.

We become the technology

Technologies are techniques that not only relate us to the world but also map that world onto us. Tools connect us directly to the natural world while machines amplify and extend our natural capacities. Both link us to the external world of nature as well as the internal world of culture. The technology of writing allows us to represent the world as well as explore aspects of our inner selves. Through writing we engage in a dialogue with ourselves.

The new media increasingly mimic and often replace face-to-face relationships. Digital relationships enable symbolic, ideological and normative aspects to dominate over more pragmatic, instrumental and contingent elements usually encountered in face-to-face relationships. Lived experience is unpredictable, pre-reflective, blurry, contextual and tacit whereas digital relationships tend towards order and predictability; they are less contextual, more explicit and artefactual. This is why al Qaeda and other fundamentalists are able to insist on the primacy of the image or the text over lived-experience. The former is self-contained while the latter is open to ambiguity and uncertainty. To complicate matters, quotidian life now routinely includes virtual as well as lived-experiences.

Human relationships have always been complex, multilayered, conflictive and ambiguous. But in the past, certain constraints such as physical separation have limited
our choices in continuing them as part of everyday life. The telephone made long distance relationships approximate quotidian ones. The new technology facilitates such ‘real time’ relationships as well as making possible hitherto unlikely ones involving strangers. Absent and often unknown others presently constitute many of our close relationships. This is best illustrated among celebrity fans. Culture is no longer limited to immediate experience but now includes the mediated, the virtual and the postcorporeal.

**The mediatisation of everyday life**

CMICT has facilitated communication greatly. As a consequence, the orientation of relationships has shifted from a practical quotidian basis, with its inevitable adjustments, to a mainly discursive context. A consequence of this increasing role of communication is the mediatisation of everyday life. Most of our information about the world (including ourselves) is derived from the media, including their interpretation and significance. Leisure activities and entertainment are media driven and practices of consumption are influenced by media representations. This conflation of information about ourselves, our interests and our patterns of consumption generate who we are. While the old media have been influencing our lives since the days of print, visual, electronic and digital media are even more pervasive.

No event, however, trivial or in the most remote parts of the planet fails to get quickly circulated either by the mainstream media or citizen journalists using their mobiles or video cams. An unexpected consequence of this information deluge is the increasing difficulty in sorting reliable from unreliable sources. The traditional gatekeepers are gone and the frenzy of circulation ensures that impressions, gossip and hearsay are quickly accepted as facts. We live in the age of the sound clip, the live telecast, YouTube and blogs, all of these often disregard and have little time for a detailed and critical scrutiny. A paradox of our times is that there is so much information to absorb that we have little time to comprehend their significance. For example, the mediatisation of war allows us to witness atrocities in Iraq, Afghanistan or Mindanao. The media itself becomes a weapon of war, as images and representations clash with their counterparts, overwhelming the viewers and inducing a state of numbed acquiescence. Embedded journalists present their images as natural portrayals rather than ideological perspectives.

Baudrillard has predicted some of these possibilities, such as the centrality of the virtual and its replacement of the hitherto actual. Newspeak and other political pronouncements telling us that the lives of Filipinos have greatly improved fails to convince many people whose experience of everyday life is otherwise. This increasing divergence between public pronouncements and individual experiences lessens the legitimacy of governments and encourages more strident demands for political change.

**Conclusion**

Mobile phones and the Internet have transformed the communicational landscape for most Filipinos. What was until recently primarily an oral, local and consociational cul-

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ture has been significantly transformed. Many Filipinos now routinely interact with family, friends and even the dead across previously insuperable barriers. These barriers were spatial, in the case of overseas workers and sensorial or postcorporeal in the case of the deceased. 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. The early literature on CMICT stressed these emancipatory potentials, 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.

Some overly enthusiastic and even millenarian claims that the new media represent an evolutionary break equivalent to the discovery of fire are now more soberly evaluated. While new media are truly transformative, they are more properly seen as a continuation, if at a faster pace, of the industrial revolution. It is too early to predict their long-term consequences but it is unlikely that we are entering a fully post-corporeal world. The body remains firmly in place even if its position has been decentered.

A recent news item pointed out that many funeral homes in Manila now provide a broadband service that allows relatives abroad to access 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 then this ability to connect with the dead from abroad. This example should also remind us that a major function of the new media is not only to transmit information but also to instill and share sentiments. Connectivity involves more than information. It also provides structures of sentiments, values and power. In this sense the new media makes a new world order possible. We are daily witnesses to these possibilities, from the shock of September 11, 2001 to the victory of Barack Obama.

The new media have expanded the possibilities both for connecting with others and connecting with aspects of ourselves. As a consequence, we are thus ‘in the world’ differently, opening up new possibilities of being and becoming. Only the future will show us what is possible.

RÉSUMÉ

En mettant l’accent sur le contexte philippin, et avec une approche anthropologique, les auteurs explorent les effets culturels de ces technologies qui étendent les processus de communication au-delà de la coprésence physique, tels que le téléphone mobile et l’Internet. Au même temps, il montre comment le contexte culturel particulier adressé contribue à façonner les pratiques de communication ‘post-corporelles’ permises par les nouveaux médias. En particulier, et d’une manière qui peut paraître étrange aux yeux des occidentaux, l’article décrit comment la communication ‘post-corporelles’ arrivent à inclure des formes de contact avec la transcendance (la religion) et aussi avec le royaume de la magie, comme dans les cas liés à la communication avec les morts.

SUMMARY

Focusing on the Philippino context, and with an Anthropological approach, the paper explores the cultural effects of those technologies that extend communicative processes beyond physical co-presence, such as the mobile phone and the Internet. At the same time, it shows how the peculiar cultural context addressed contributes to shape the ‘postcorporeal’ communicative practices allowed by new media. In particular, and in a way that may seem unusual to western eyes, the paper describes how ‘postcorporeal’ communication come to include forms of contact with the transcendental (religion) and also with the realms of magic, like in the cases related to communication with the dead.